3 UNDERSTANDING ESSEX COUNTY TODAY

Understanding what has been built since 2012 and changes to the County's demographic profile since the 2012 Master Plan.

CHAPTER 3 | UNDERSTANDING ESSEX COUNTY TODAY

In addition to evolving policies and guidelines for active transportation, the County of Essex has also experienced growth and change since 2012 that has impacted the demographics, infrastructure and public opinion of the County's residents. The following sections provide an overview of these topics summarized as part of the County's profile.

3.1 INFRASTRUCTURE BUILT TO DATE

Since the County of Essex's Council approved the CWATS Master Plan in 2012, there has been significant progress on the implementation of the proposed active transportation network. As of 2022, the County has constructed approximately 556 kilometres of the originally proposed CWATS network.

The County has implemented many different facility types and design treatments as part of the CWATS network which have resulted in the completion of premier cycling and walking facilities across its local municipalities. The graphics in **Figure 24** highlights a few of these transformations.

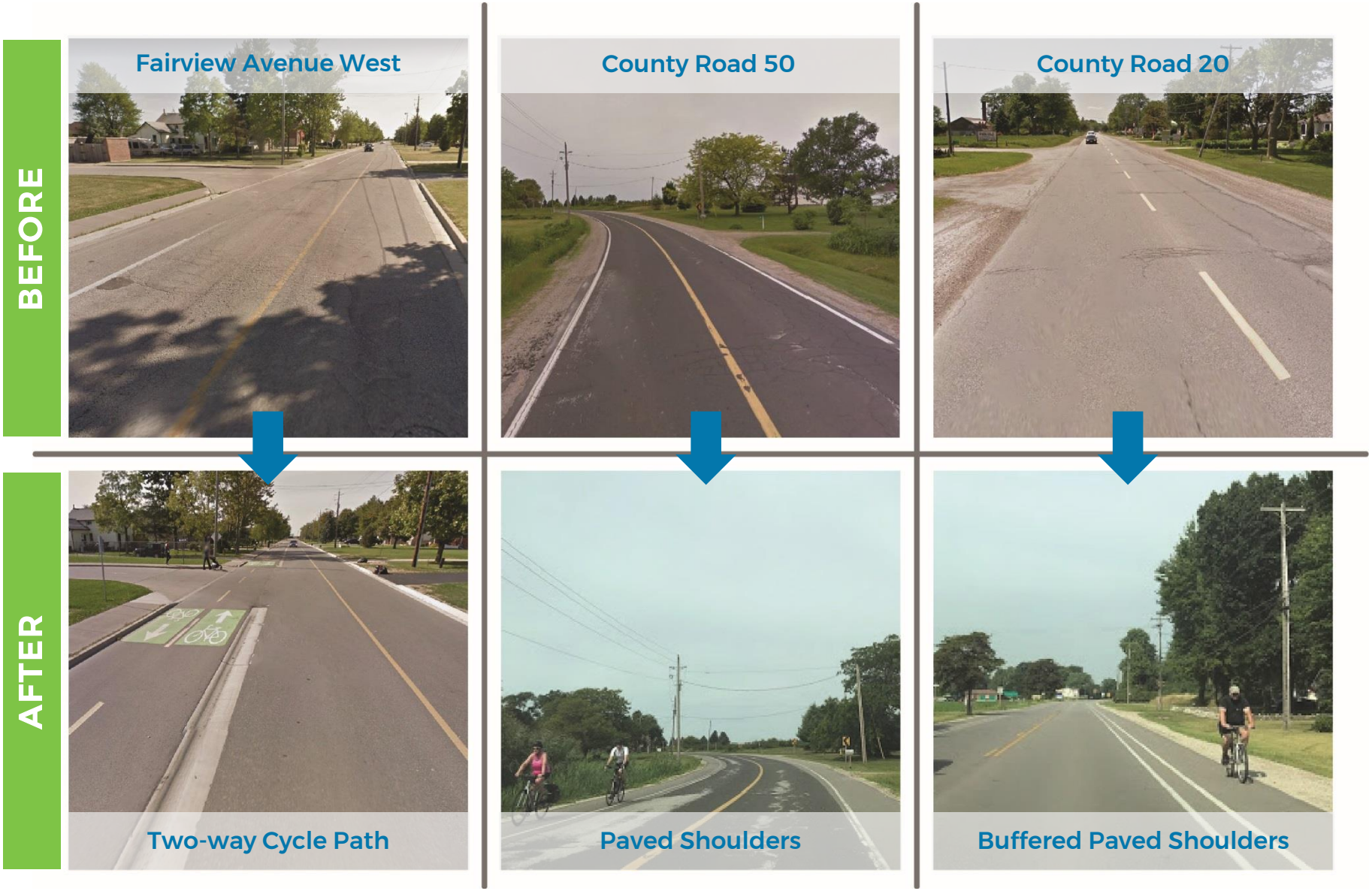


Figure 24: Examples of Cycling Facility Implementation since the 2012 CWATS Master Plan
Source: WSP Photos

3.2 PROFILING THE COUNTY

It is important to establish an understanding of the local context including demographic and transportation characteristics that have emerged since 2012, to ensure the recommendations and strategies contained in this plan are specific to the County and its residents.

A scan of socio-demographic and transportation data was completed for the County to create a "community profile". The following section outlines these findings and demographic trends that have occurred since 2012. These trends are illustrated using a series of indicator maps that are based on various datasets using the Statistics Canada Census Data from 2006 through to 2016.

The trends that were assessed to develop the "community profile" for Essex County are illustrated on the following pages and organized into the categories below:

- Population and Growth Trends
- Economic Snapshot
- Transportation Patterns
- Youth Trends
- Equity and Access

The data illustrated in this section was collected from Statistics Canada, specifically the 2006, 2011 and 2016 census programs. The mapping has been organised and displayed using census dissemination areas, which is a unit of geography that contains the census information for the residents within that area. Dissemination areas generally have an average population of 400 to 700 and can vary in size depending on the urban or rural context of the area. **Figure 25** below illustrates all dissemination areas located within the County of Essex.

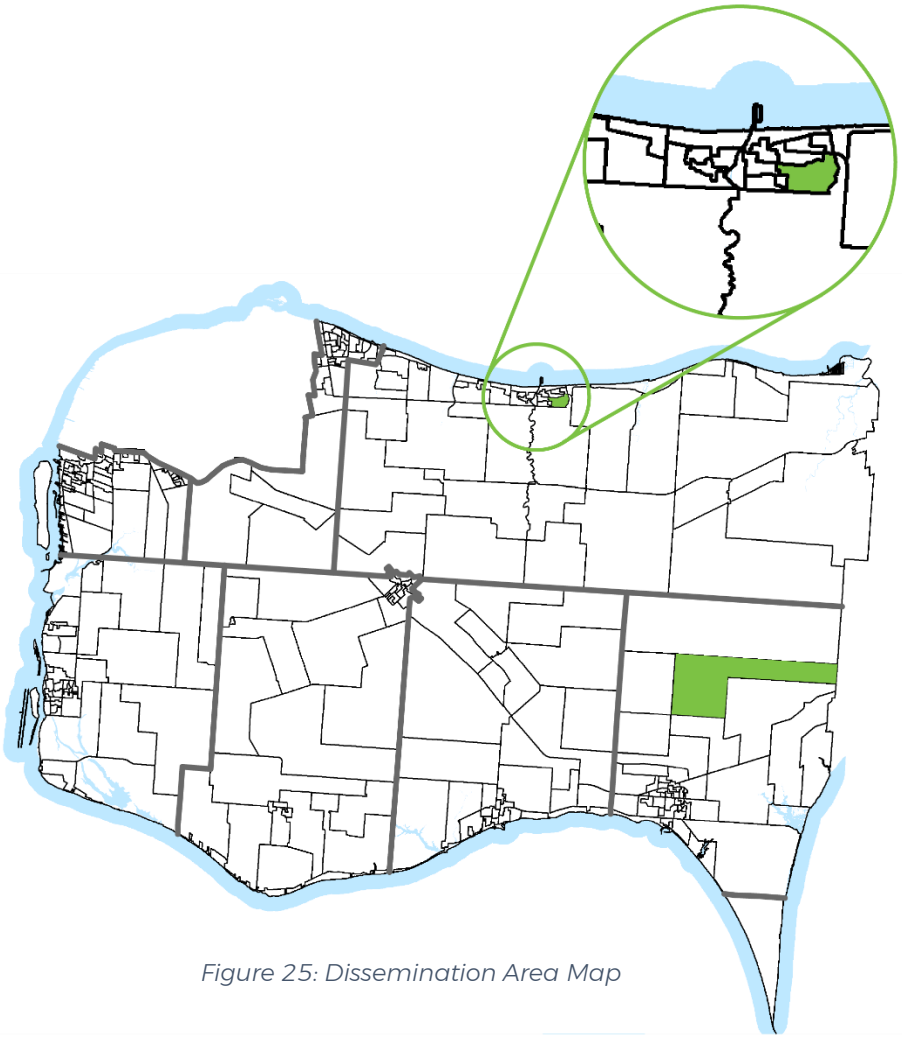


Figure 25: Dissemination Area Map

Statistics Canada Definition:

A dissemination area is a small, relatively stable geographic unit composed of one or more adjacent dissemination blocks. It is the smallest standard geographic area for which all census data are disseminated. These dissemination areas cover all of Canada.

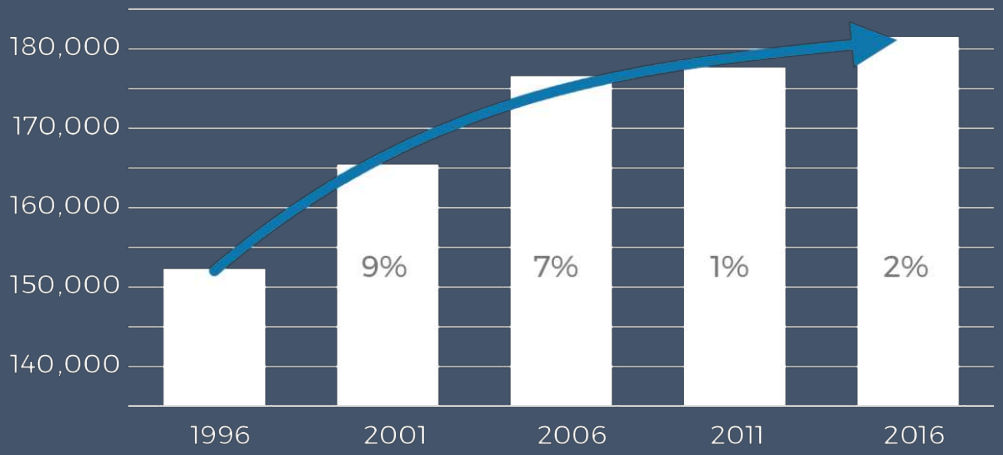
Similar Dissemination Areas:

The two dissemination areas illustrated above are similar in population, but are vastly different in land area, which can produce a false equivalency in terms of averages (e.g. average income). However, it is important to realize these units are the most detailed census geography available for analysis.

POPULATION AND GROWTH TRENDS

Understanding population and growth trends is an important consideration when assessing both the existing conditions and the future potential of active transportation in the County of Essex. The information below highlights some key characteristics of growth in the County, including the spatial distribution of data that is presented as indicator mapping. The trends illustrated below can also help to justify the decision to update the CWATS Master Plan.

Figure 26: Population Growth in the County



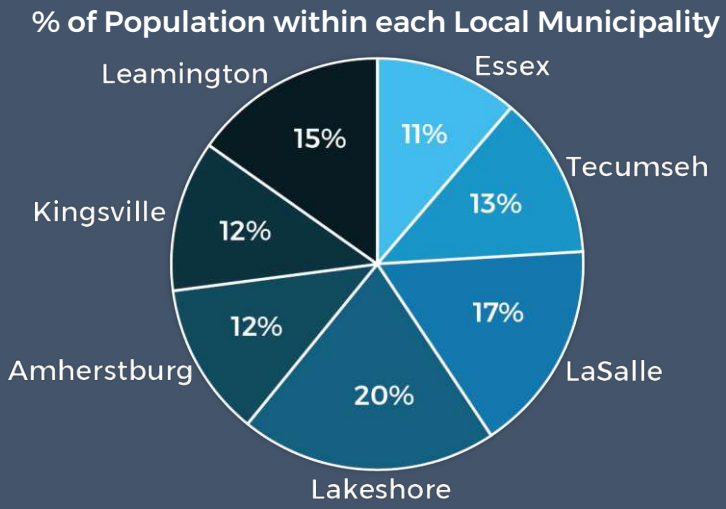
The County of Essex has a total population of approximately **181,500** according to the 2016 census and is still growing. Since the development of the CWATS Master Plan in 2012, the population of the County has grown by 2% and is expected to increase to **212,500** by 2031 according to the County's Official Plan.

Earlier census years saw the population grow 9% from 1996 to 2001 and 7% from 2001 to 2006 while recent years have seen smaller growth. However, this trend is similar to that of Windsor, which saw a 3% growth between 2011 and 2016.

Figure 27: Population in the Local Municipalities

The County is made up of seven different municipalities with Lakeshore and LaSalle being the most populated at approximately 36,500 and 30,200 respectively. The Town of Essex currently has the lowest percentage of the County's population at 20,500 residents.

The population of these municipalities is mostly clustered in urban centres, which are surrounded by rural areas with low population density. The spatial distribution of the County's population is presented in **Figure 28** on the following page.



Population Density Indicator Map

Figure 28: Population Density Indicator Map

Impact on Active Transportation and CWATS Policy

The County as a whole is experiencing growth. If provincial trends in migration towards urban centres continue, it can be expected that the County of Essex will experience the highest proportion of its expected **31,000 new residents** to settle in one of the County's seven (7) urban centres. Facilitating connections between these urban centres can improve access to services, employment opportunities, and recreational activities. Going forward, investments in active transportation can provide new and existing residents with options as to how they make trips within and between urban centres.

ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

The economic landscape within the County of Essex provides insight on the stability of residents. The following section will highlight income, education levels, employment and housing security of County residents using the 2016 Statistics Canada Census Data. Comparisons are made where appropriate to Canada, Ontario or adjacent municipalities.

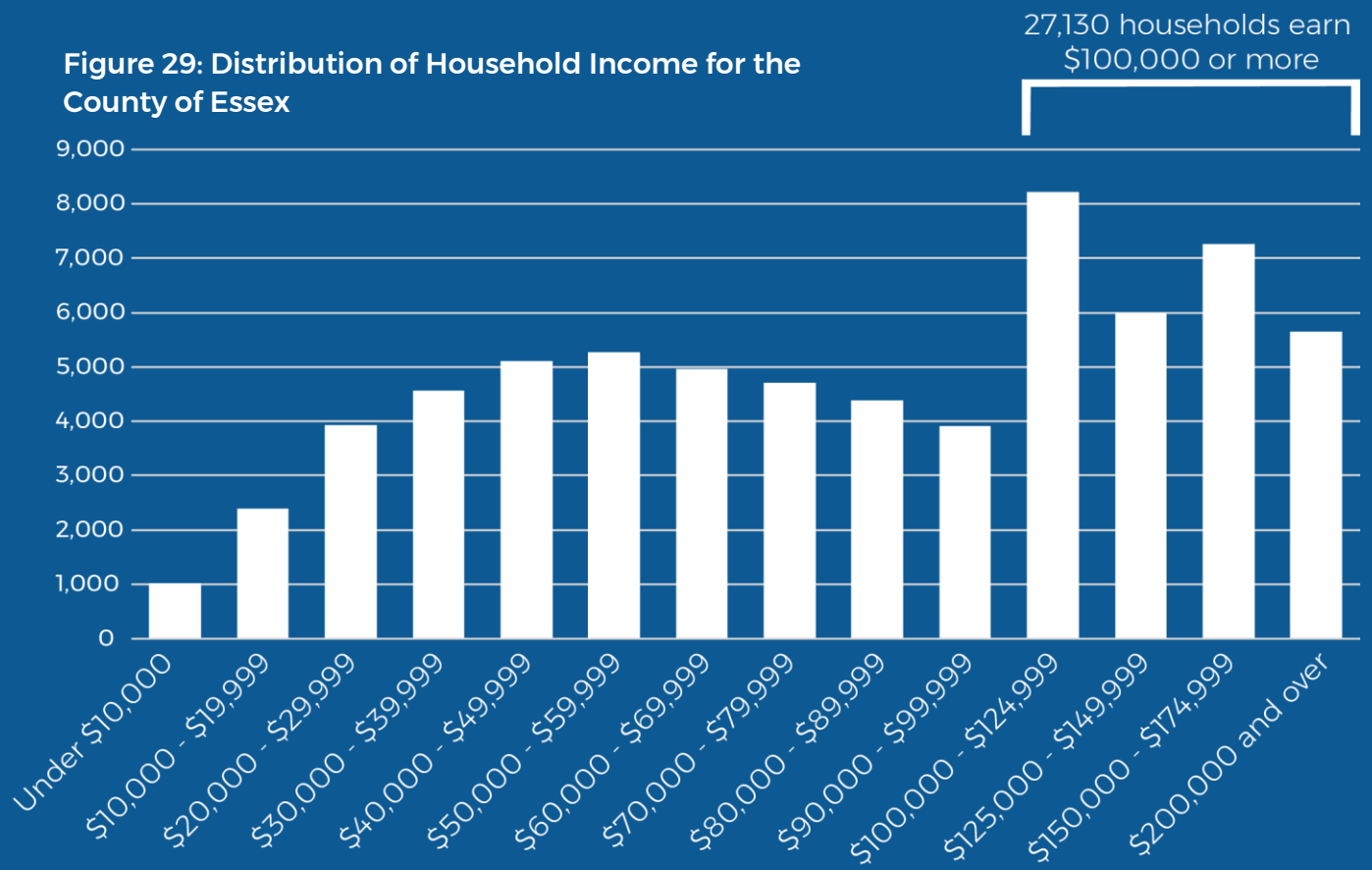
Household Income Comparison

According the household income statistics from the 2016 census, households in the County of Essex earn an average of **$85,824** which is 12.3% lower than the Ontario household average of $97,856. However, this does not provide the full picture of the economic vitality in the County.

Approximately **40%** of all households in the County of Essex have incomes above $100,000 a year compared to the province at 35% of households. On average, the County is performing better than the province with 8.4% of the population considered to be low income compared to the Ontario's percentage of 14.4%.

Figure 30 illustrates the median household income for dissemination areas in the County.

Figure 29: Distribution of Household Income for the County of Essex



Household income alone does not provide the full picture of the County's economic vitality. Other economic indicators such as education level, employment and housing security must also be considered to better understand the economic conditions of the County and its residents. These factors were assessed and illustrated on the following pages.

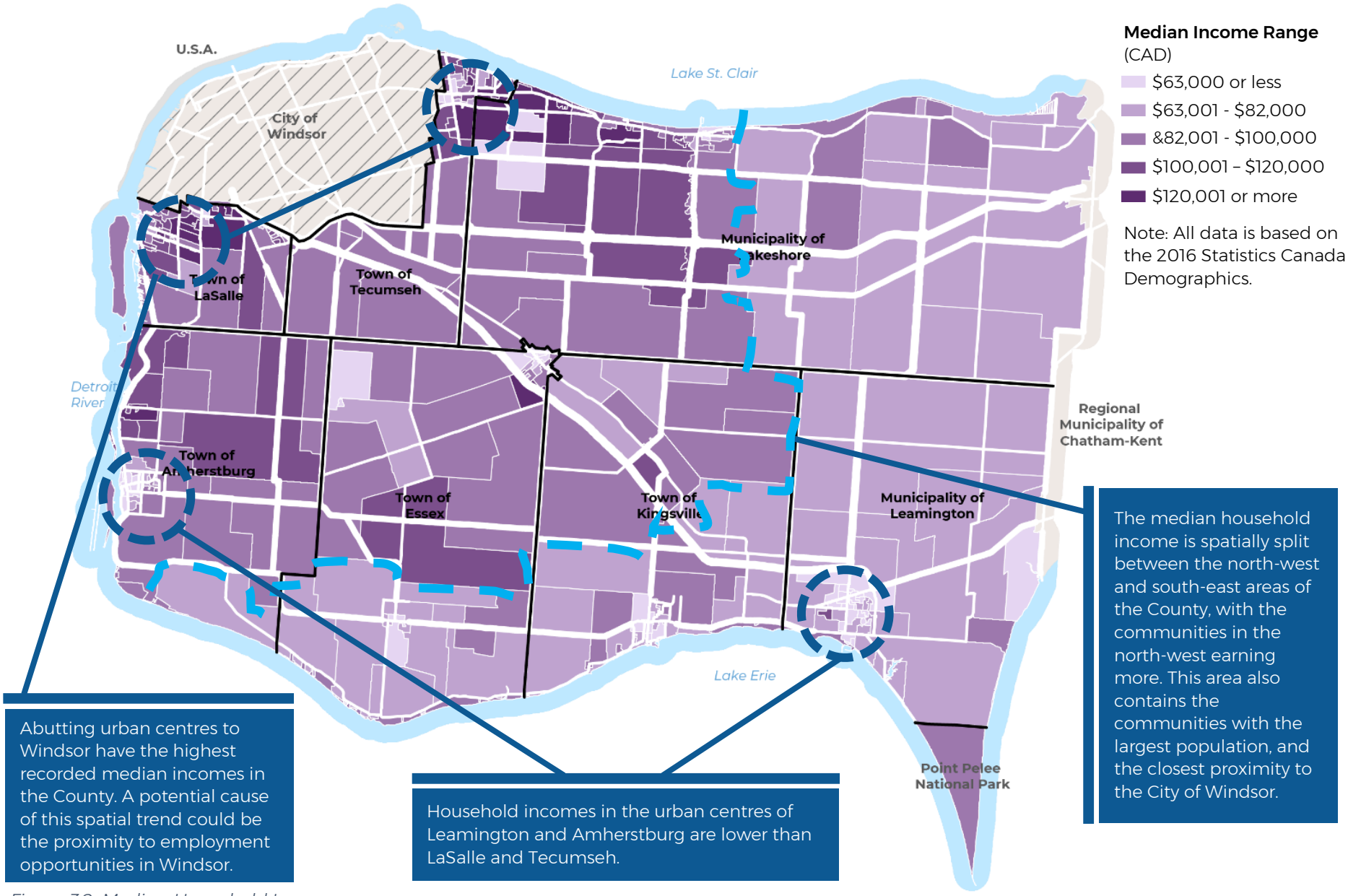
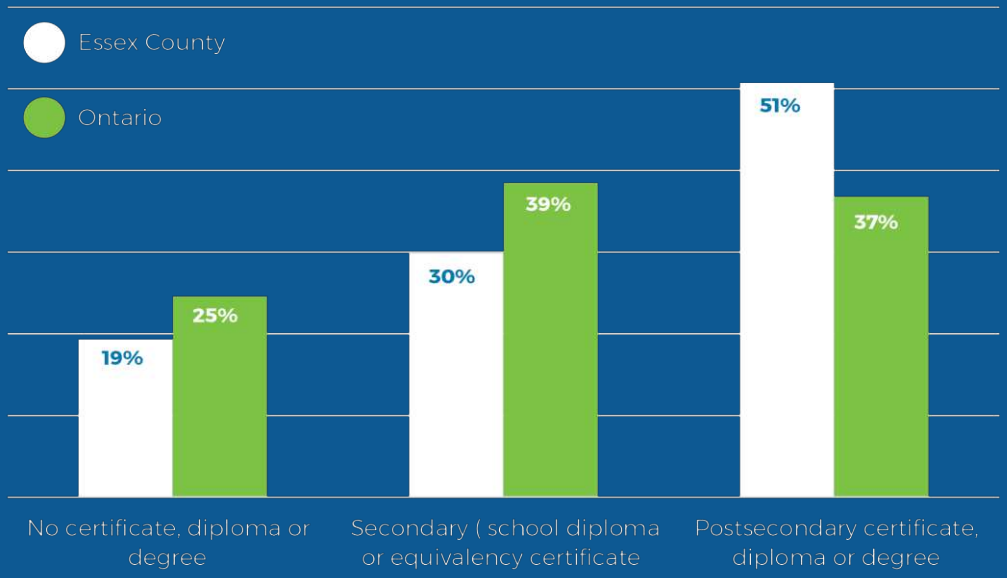


Figure 30: Median Household Income

Education

The County is well educated, with a greater proportion of residents achieving higher education than that of the Province. **51%** of the County's population has a post secondary education which is significantly higher than the provincial average of 37%.

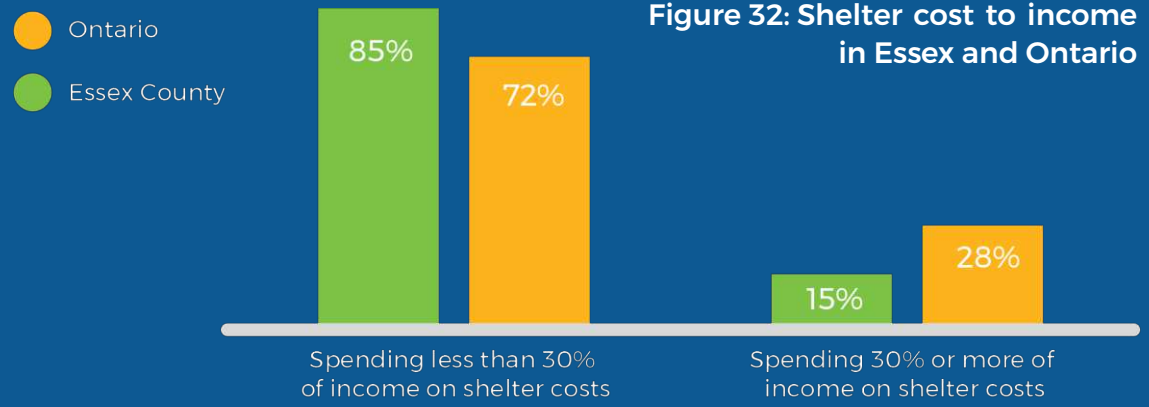
Figure 31: Population with Higher Education in Essex and Ontario



Housing Security

Residents in the County of Essex are also faring well in shelter cost to income when compared to provincial rates.

Figure 32: Shelter cost to income in Essex and Ontario



Employment

The County is also performing well in labour statistics when compared to provincial and federal unemployment rates. Unemployment rates are presented below for comparison and are also shown on **Figure 34** on the following page.

Canada
7.7%

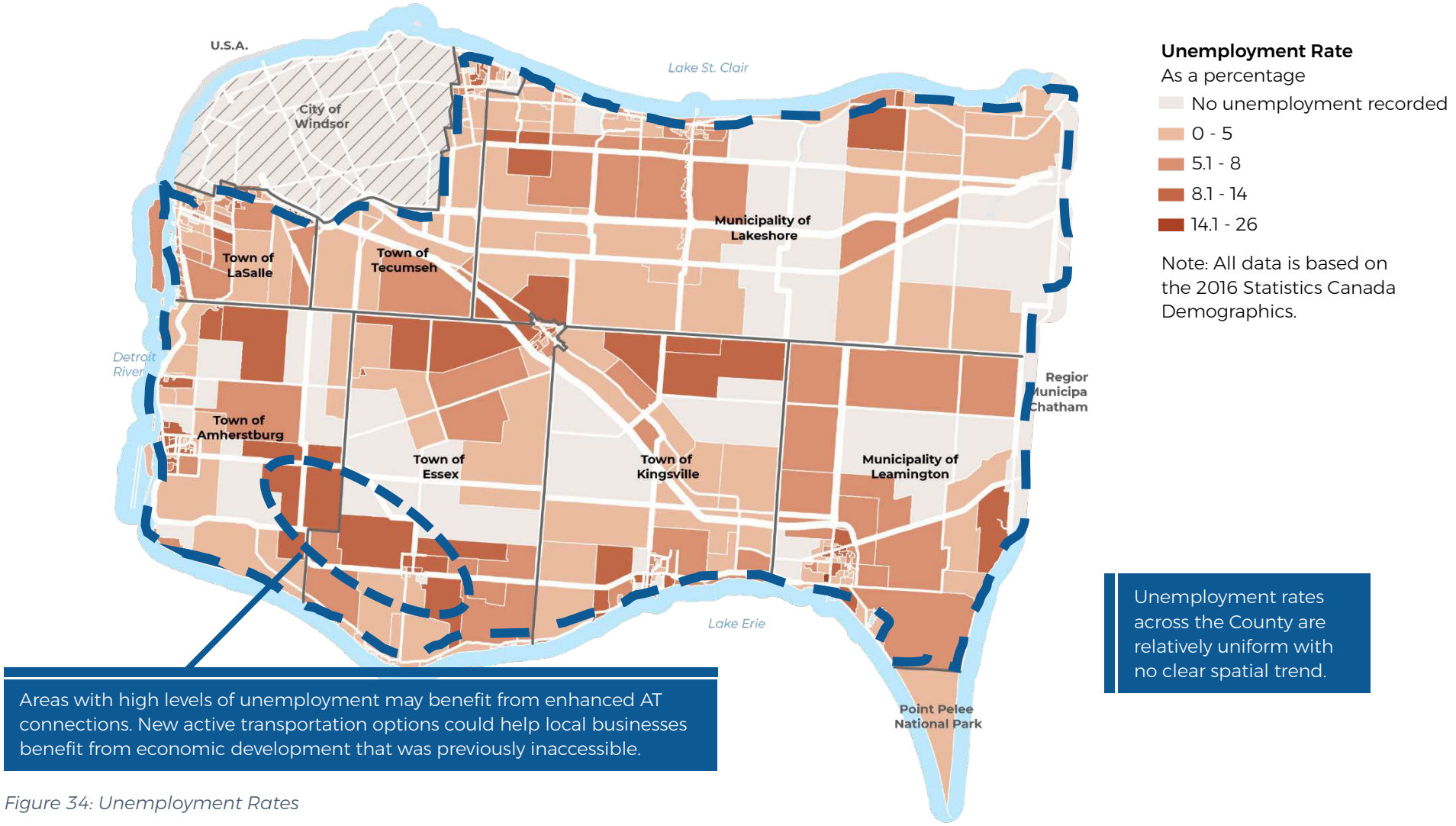
Ontario
7.4%

Chatham-Kent
7.5%

Essex County
5.3%

Figure 33: Employment Rate in Essex, Ontario, and Canada

Unemployment Rates Across the County



Areas with high levels of unemployment may benefit from enhanced AT connections. New active transportation options could help local businesses benefit from economic development that was previously inaccessible.

Unemployment rates across the County are relatively uniform with no clear spatial trend.

Figure 34: Unemployment Rates

Economic impacts on Active Transportation across the County

The County is thriving economically and is comparing favorably to provincial and national averages regarding income, employment rates and education levels. It is important to harness this positive economic outlook and improve residents' access to employment and recreation by enhancing active transportation connections across the County and to improve active transportation as a viable travel mode. In addition, by investing in AT connections potential new employers are more likely to attract talent and staff. An increased investment in AT and recreation opportunities can help to promote an enhanced work-life balance and also drive local economic development.

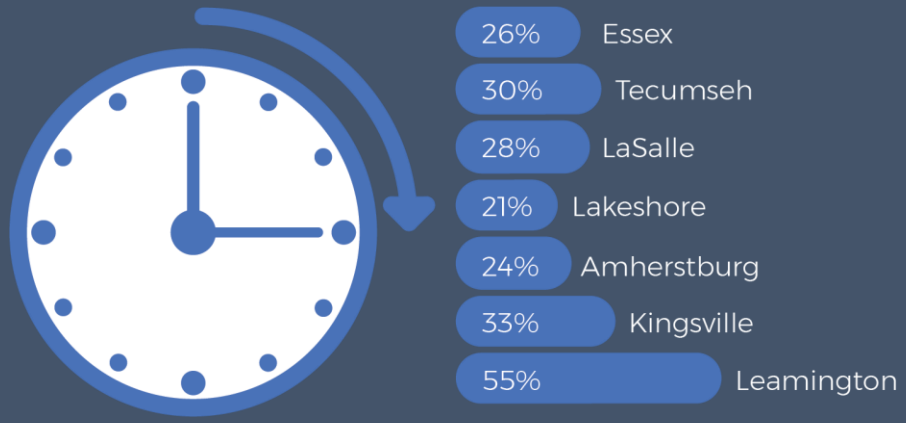
Understanding the transportation habits of residents in the County of Essex is critical to establish a community profile. The following section summarizes data that has been collected from the 2016 Statistics Canada Census Data – Journey to Work section of the Canadian census. The information that was analyzed includes commute times and modal splits for the County, including a map of the spatial distribution of modal share in the County.

Commute Times

Average commute times for residents is an important statistic to better understand the potential for improving active transportation usage. The rationale being that a commute under 15 minutes, could be a trip that is realistic and possible by bike or foot.

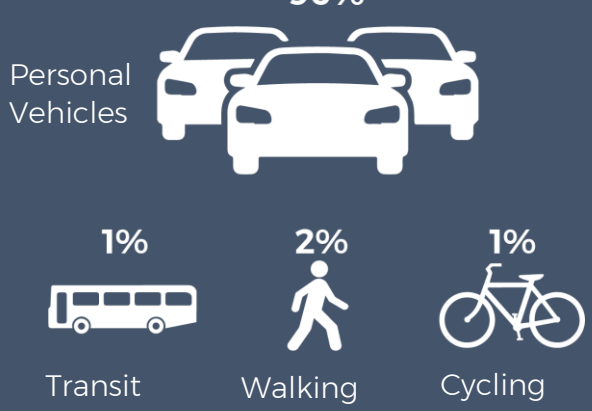
Through an analysis of average commute times for residents in the County's seven municipalities, it was found that residents living in Leamington have the shortest commute times compared to the other municipalities. **55%** or approximately **6,000 residents** in Leamington indicated that their average commute time was 15 minutes or less. Following Leamington, Tecumseh and Kingsville have the highest number of residents with commute times 15 minutes or less.

Figure 35: Commute Time in Essex
% of Commuters with a Commute time of 15 minutes or less



Modal Split

Figure 36: Modal Spit in Essex



According to the 2016 Statistics Canada Census Data for the County of Essex, modal share is comparable to surrounding municipalities with similar population, geography and land area. Most commuters indicated using a personal vehicle or being a passenger in a personal vehicle as their main mode of commuting.

3% of commuters indicated active transportation as their main mode of commuting, which is similar to other municipalities of comparable size and population. The local municipality with the highest amount of active transportation commuters was Leamington with **6.4%.** This could be attributed to a dense network of existing facilities within the urban area as well as a high number of migrant workers who typically cycle to / from work as their main mode of transportation. **Figure 37** illustrates the AT mode share in the County by dissemination area.

It should be noted that these numbers represent a user's main mode of commuting, which does not account for multi-modal trips (such as a commute using both transit and cycling).

Active Transportation Mode Share

Figure 37: Active Transportation Mode Share

Active Transportation Rate
By number of commuters

- No AT commuters
- Low (1 – 15)
- Low to moderate (15 to 26)
- Moderate (27 – 40)
- Moderate to high (41 – 55)

Note: All data is based on the 2016 Statistics Canada Demographics.

These numbers do not include any type of activity that could include recreational trips, utilitarian trips, or other trips that may be part of a multi-modal commute (e.g. a cycle trip to transit and then transit the rest of the trip). As such, it does not indicate the full scope of AT in the County, only the number of commuters that consider cycling or walking as their main mode of commuting.

Summary of Active Transportation Across the County

Active transportation for the purposes of commuting represents a comparatively small percentage of all commuters in the County when compared to residents who use a car to travel to work. However, the municipalities of Leamington, LaSalle, Tecumseh and Kingsville all have a high percentage of residents with an average commute time of below 15 minutes. Focusing on improving commuter connections within these urban areas may improve active transportation mode share by giving residents an alternative method to complete their commute.

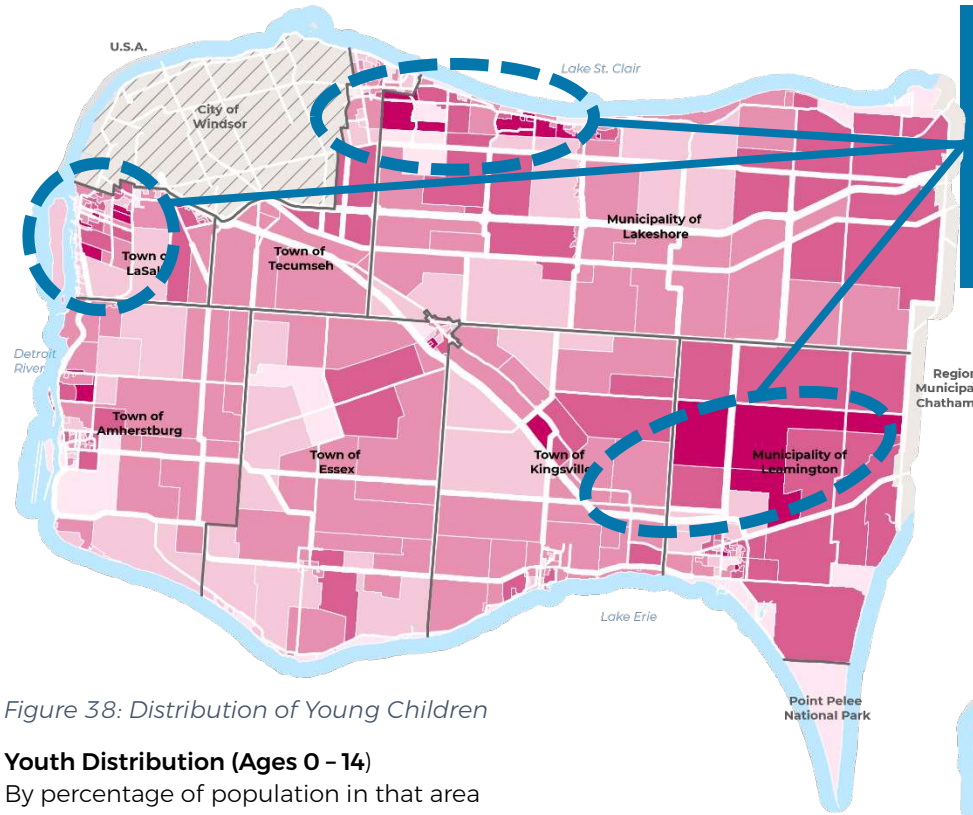


Figure 38: Distribution of Young Children

Youth Distribution (Ages 0 – 14)
By percentage of population in that area

- 3 - 11
- 11.1 - 15
- 15.1 - 19
- 19.1 – 23
- 23.1 - 30

Note: All data is based on the 2016 Statistics Canada Demographics.

Percentage numbers are the total percentage of youth in each dissemination area. (e.g. a dissemination area that is coloured a deep shade indicates a dissemination area where 30% of the population in that dissemination area are between 0 and 14 years of age).

The greatest concentration of youth (children aged 14 years and younger) are located in the County's urban areas. The data indicates that the majority of families with young children that are attending schools are within urban centres.

Access range for Schools
In kilometres

- School
- 1 km access distance
- 2 km access distance
- 3 km access distance

Note: All data is based on the 2016 Statistics Canada Demographics.

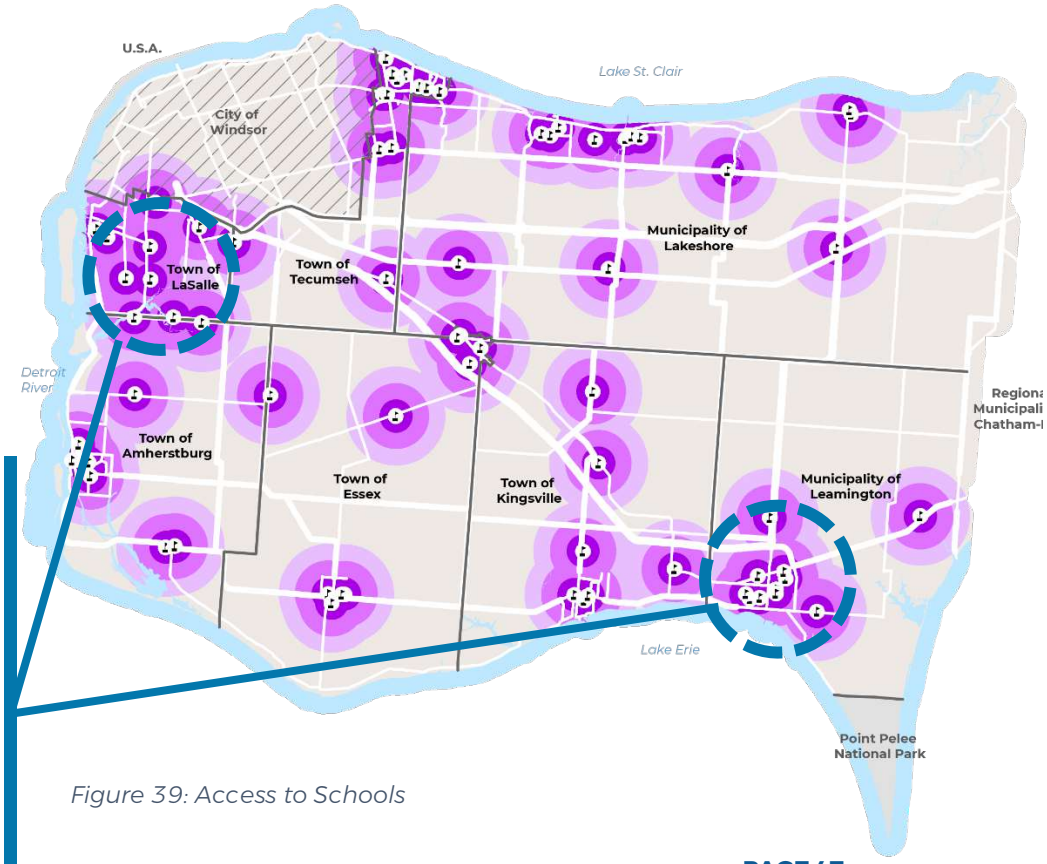
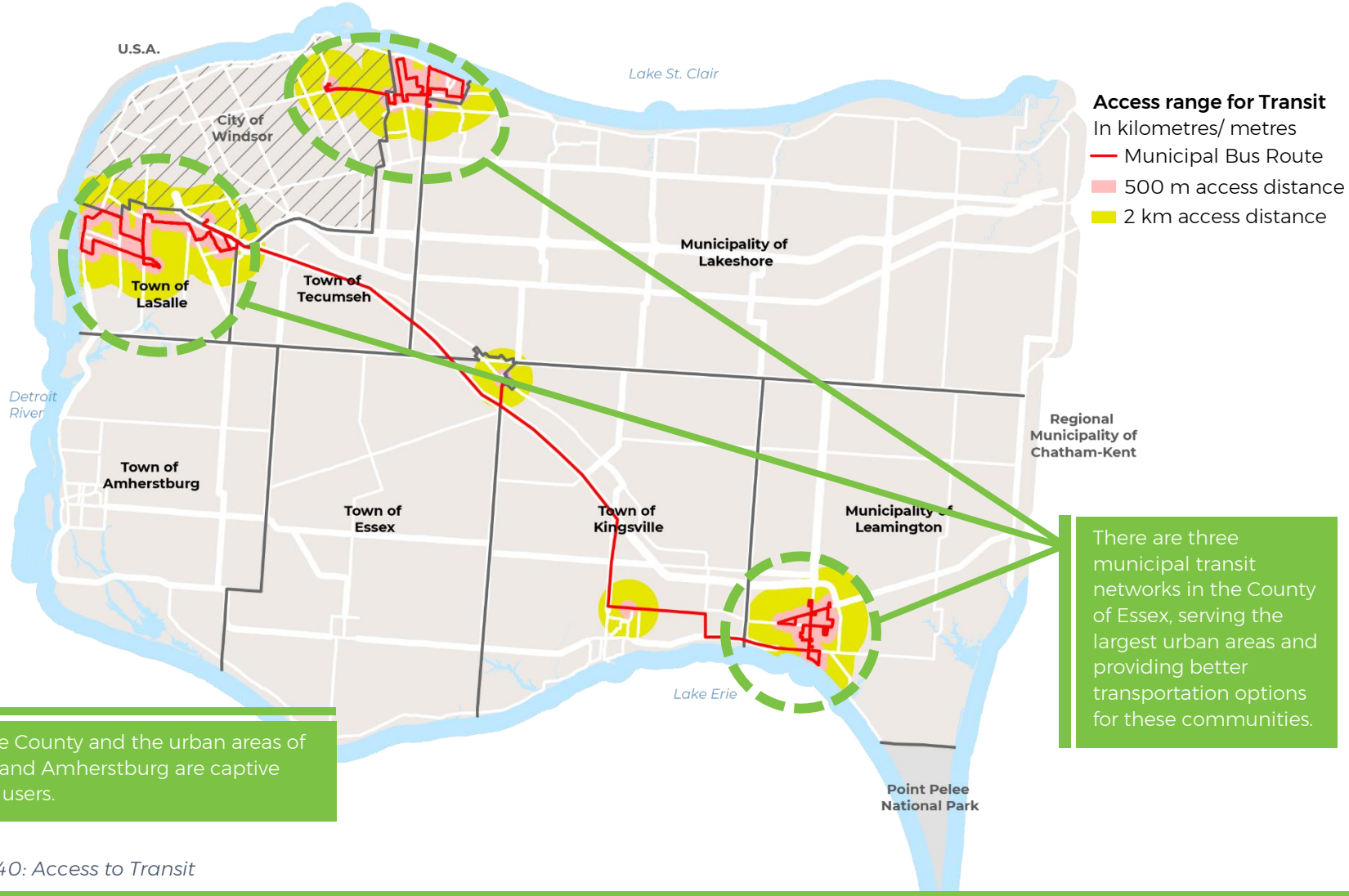


Figure 39: Access to Schools

The majority of urban areas in the County are within a 2 kilometre radius of a school. Improving active transportation options in areas immediately surrounding a school provides youth with viable alternatives for getting to and from school.



There are three municipal transit networks in the County of Essex, serving the largest urban areas and providing better transportation options for these communities.

Rural areas of the County and the urban areas of Essex, Kingsville and Amherstburg are captive personal vehicle users.

Figure 40: Access to Transit

Summary of Equity and Access

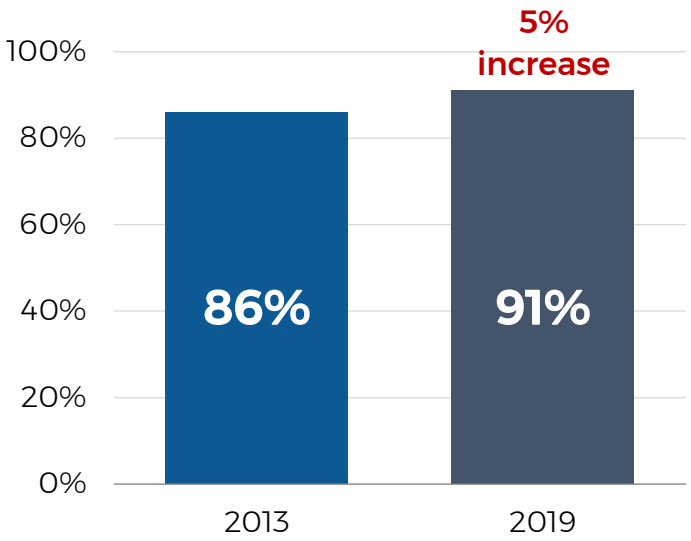
Providing access to the County's economic centres is a key aspect of transportation equity. In areas of the County that may be underserved by transit, there could be an opportunity to build out active transportation infrastructure to help residents of the County access employment opportunities. Additionally, an enhanced AT network in rural areas may provide residents that do not have access to a personal vehicle with the opportunity to travel to and from their residence and to the nearest urban area for utilitarian and leisure trips.

3.3 UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion surveys were conducted in 2013, 2017 and in 2019 (as part of the update to the CWATS Master Plan) to collect user input on active transportation and how it could be improved throughout the County and its local municipalities. The following graphics illustrate key findings from similar questions that were asked in each year / survey, to demonstrate how public opinion for CWATS and active transportation has evolved over time.

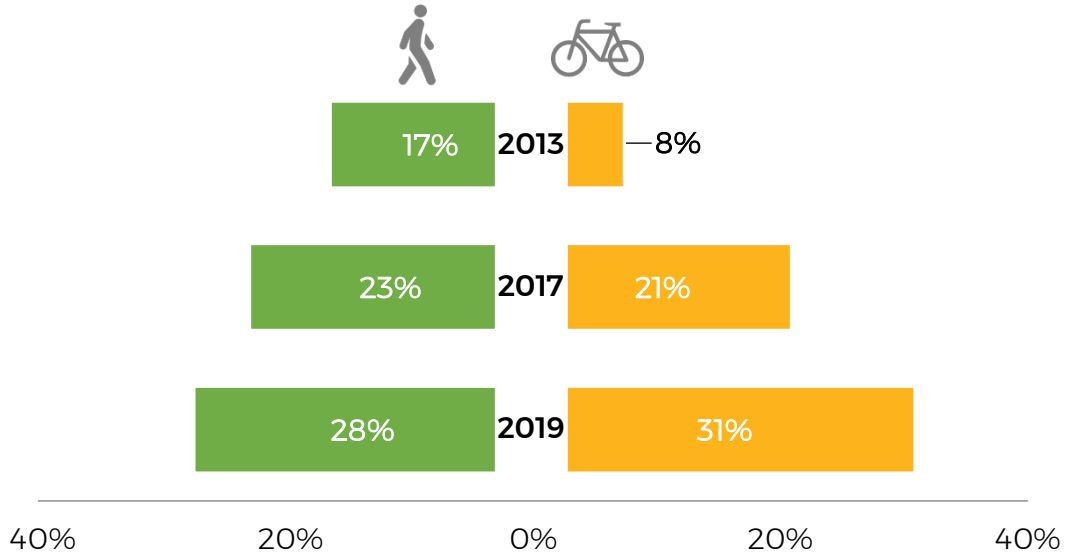
Additional details on public engagement and consultation tactics, as well as input received over the course of the study are provided in **Chapter 4**. Details from each survey are contained in **Technical Appendix C**.

Figure 41: Investing in AT



91% of respondents agree that the County and its local municipalities should continue to invest in active transportation improvements. Support for investment has increased 5% from 2013 to 2019 among survey participants.

Figure 42: Walking and Cycling Frequency



The frequency of those walking and cycling frequently and somewhat frequently has increased between 2013 and 2019:

- Walking frequency has increased by 11% between 2013 and 2019
- Cycling frequency has increased 23% between 2013 and 2019

Improving active transportation in the County

All three surveys asked respondents to provide input on what could be done to improve active transportation in the County. A majority of responses include:


Increase separation between cyclists and motor vehicles


Provide more rest areas, benches and bathrooms


Improve access to facilities for people of all abilities


Provide more connections to other routes and municipalities


Increase the number of paved trails and crosswalks


Provide consistent facility types throughout all municipalities


Improve directional signage and wayfinding


Improve options for short and long-distance trips

In February 2022, Hackforge, a registered non-profit focused on technology, launched C3Tech in partnership with The City of Windsor Bicycle Committee, the County Wide Active Transportation System, and Parallel 42 Systems. C3Tech is short for City-County Cycling Technology and aims to "leverage open-source software to create digital tools that will make navigating Windsor and Essex County by bike safer, easier, and more fulfilling" (Hackforge, 2022). A survey was conducted online between February 7th and March 25th, 2022 to understand cycling behaviour and possible technologies are used while cycling. The following is a summary of the survey findings from the 152 responses:

- 64% of respondents reported that they cycle more than once a week;
- 76% of respondents reported that their primary reason to cycle is for recreation, while 22% use cycling as their main form of transportation;
- 80% of respondents indicated that they use some sort of technology or application on mobile devices to plan and track their routes; and
- The top three desirable features in a local cycling app are: route suggestions based on safety, identification of points of interest, and route suggestions based on bike type.

The sections within this chapter present a detailed overview of the changing infrastructure and demographics of the County and its residents' shifting transportation behaviour and opinions. The County has changed and grown since the development of the 2012 CWATS Master Plan and there is no doubt that the previous plan has advanced and improved the narrative surrounding active transportation in the County. The residents have more access to active transportation infrastructure than what was available in 2012, and there are more people in the County to utilize and harness that increased access to transportation options.

The community profile established in this chapter collectively with feedback received throughout the course of this study was used to inform and refine recommendations for the updated CWATS Master Plan. The next chapter provides additional detail on the public and stakeholder engagement activities that were undertaken during the study process, key input received and an explanation of how this input was used to inform the update to CWATS.