

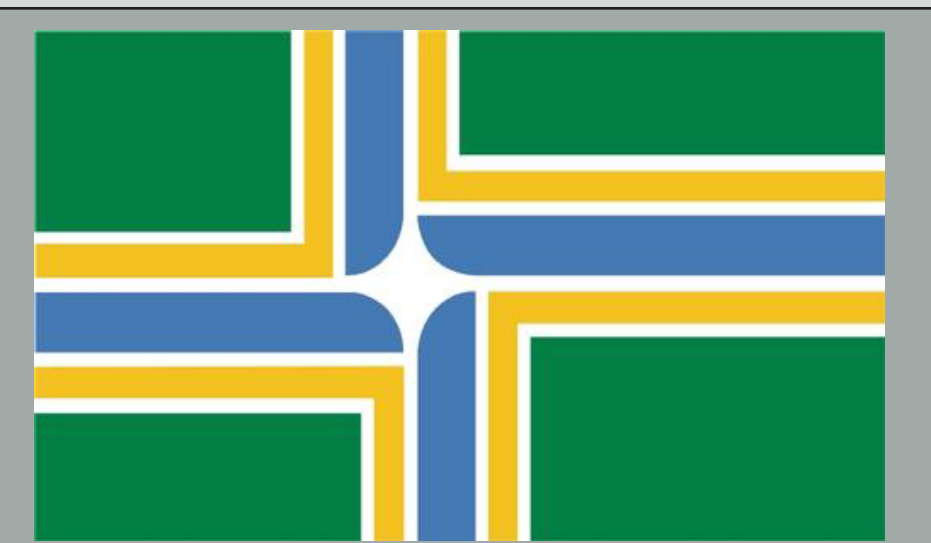


# GENTRIFICATION AND LOW-INCOME RESOURCE ACCESS IN THE PORTLAND NEIGHBORHOODS OF ALBINA AND ROCKWOOD

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## ABSTRACT

The city of Portland, Oregon has been lauded within the planning community for efforts that have led to its consideration as one of America's most livable cities. However, negative externalities have accompanied gentrification and redevelopment efforts in the inner city. The past five decades have seen the displacement of low-income residents from high-access neighborhoods to the outskirts of the city into neighborhoods with comparatively reduced access. This study seeks to compare access to resources specifically developed for low-income residents using the Albina and Rockwood neighborhoods as types of gentrification and displacement by analyzing quantitative data such as straight-line distance and estimated public transit travel time. Further analysis identifies resource categories that are less accessible than others for the Rockwood neighborhood in order to inform the placement of future resources by agencies working to meet the needs of Portland's transitioning low-income population.

## INTRODUCTION

The city of Portland, Oregon is noted for the progressive nature of its planning including a groundbreaking Urban Growth Boundary, ultimately leading it to be considered one of the nation's most livable cities. However, the question posed by Karen Gibson in *Bleeding Albina* remains, 'livable for whom?' While the urban growth boundary was put into effect to alleviate the stress placed upon surrounding hinterlands due to urban sprawl, it also produced negative externalities. Rising property values within the urban growth boundary have inevitably exerted pressure through gentrification and urban redevelopment resulting in the displacement of low-income residents from the central city to the fringes of the Portland metropolitan statistical area. This process is exemplified by the displacement of many Albina neighborhood residents to the neighborhood of Rockwood.

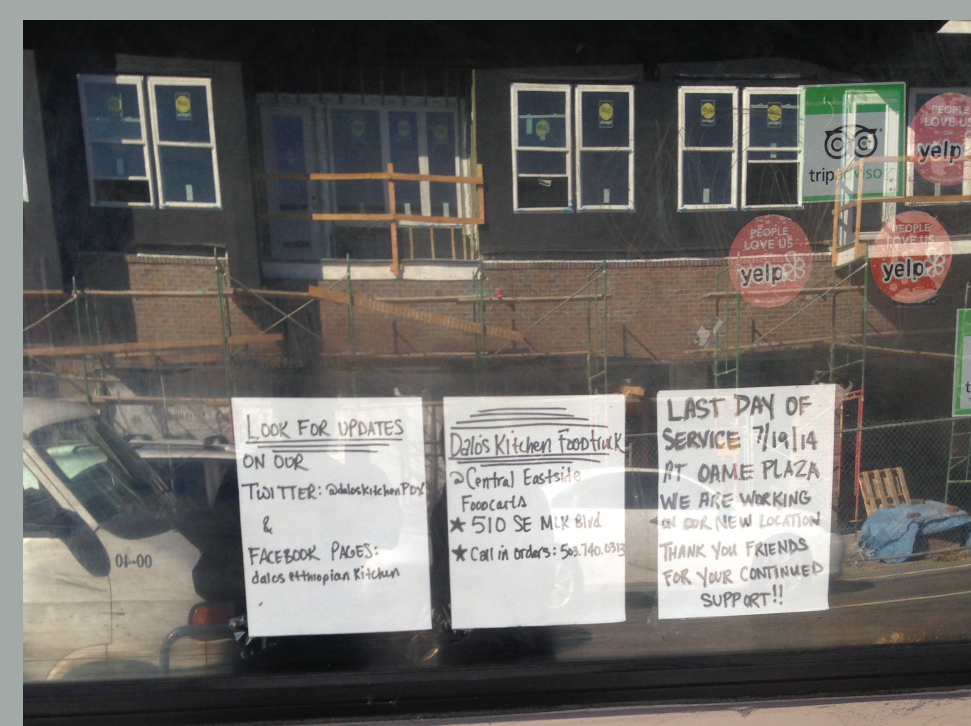


Figure 1: Hand-made signs broadcast the closing of Dalos's Ethiopian Kitchen - forced to move when their rented building was slated to be torn down to make way for a new 268-apartment development similar to the one going in across the street from Dalos's (see the reflection in the window).

Many factors including segregation and neighborhood disinvestment beginning in the 1940s led to the development of a "black ghetto" in Albina, which was subsequently noted for high rates of crime and poverty. As a result, public and private resources to combat these negative trends were developed in and around Albina. Beginning in the 1970s, the gentrification process began to displace a significant portion of the low-income population in Albina with many residents, over time, relocating to the Rockwood neighborhood. This displacement placed residents in Rockwood much further away from the network of resources developed in and around Albina.



Figure 2: Abandoned building (sans graffiti) on NE Fargo Street serves as a remnant of the pre-gentrification Albina neighborhood while a new development takes shape across from the nearby New Seasons Market, a symbol of gentrification to many long-time members around Williams Avenue.

This study seeks to answer the question, 'how have gentrification and displacement impacted the access to resources specifically developed for low-income residents' through a comparison of the Albina and Rockwood neighborhoods. Additionally, which types of resources are more or less accessible in these neighborhoods, and 'how does public transit impact access?' With significant public investment to develop a different standard of living and a sustainable lifestyle through planning efforts, it is important to consider how Portland is addressing issues of equality by analyzing city-wide response to the movement of its low-income population.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Spatial segregation patterns have ultimately paved the way for gentrification and displacement in the Albina neighborhood and the subsequent influx of low-income residents in the Rockwood neighborhood, and others. Gibson (2008) describes how Albina grew into a "black ghetto" in the 1940s developed and enforced through practices and policies such as redlining and denying access to conventional mortgage loans in the real estate industry and government housing. In "1919, the Portland Realty Board adopted a rule declaring it unethical for an agent to sell property to either Negro or Chinese people in a White neighborhood." In coordination with this rule, realtors decided it wise to "declare a section of the city for them" in order to contain the projected decrease in property values assumed to accompany minorities. Gibson (2008) further explains how this led to widespread, systemic "private sector disinvestment and public sector neglect" and thus, plummeting property values (at the expense of black residents) in Albina. This opened the door for the urban real estate phenomenon involving gentrification and urban real development that began in the 1970s with the establishment of the Portland Urban Growth Boundary and continued with an economic boom in the 1990s, making inner city property more desirable.



Figure 3: Refugees of the Vanport flood (pictured) who remained in Portland were effectively forced into the Albina neighborhood - the "final phase of ghetto building in the Central City" (Gibson, 2008). Source: Oregon Historical Society, Neg.Or.Hi.901633



Figure 4: A sign in NE Alberta calls attention to the history of redlining in northeast Portland that coupled with disinvestment leaving the Albina neighborhood ripe for redevelopment in the decades to follow. Source: Walida.com - Why Aren't There More Black People in Oregon?

In her undergraduate honors thesis, Hebert (2013) outlines how this gentrification process pushed vulnerable Albina residents to the outskirts of the city into suburban neighborhoods like Rockwood. It has unaffectionately been deemed "Rockwood" and struggled underneath a reputation as crime-infested slum in recent years. These perceptions have resulted in similar disinvestment to what was seen in Albina in past decades, most notable the closing of the central Fred Meyer grocery store. Hebert points out that Rockwood is highlighted by limited resources and long commute times both for employment and food access.

Further work by McKenzie (2013) examines "access to public transportation for neighborhoods with high concentrations of populations that rely heavily transit." He points out that planning achievements such as the urban growth boundary, a vibrant urban core, and relatively high transit usage have, through gentrification and displacement of low-income residents, produced the unintended negative byproduct of declining transit access for population groups traditionally upon it. McKenzie describes how transit-rich areas typically inhabited by black and Latino populations (e.g. Albina) have declined in their respective populations. Lastly, he concludes that race and ethnicity are central to "residential sorting and continue to shape spatial differences in access to the most desirable public resources."

All told, transit and resource access remain central concerns when dealing with the outcomes produced by gentrification and displacement. This is especially true as they pertain to low-income residents, such as those in transitioning neighborhoods like Albina and Rockwood in Portland, Oregon.

## METHODOLOGY

- Obtain census tract data from the U.S. Census Bureau and create feature classes for Albina and Rockwood neighborhoods in Arc Map
- Obtain, combine, and normalize low-income resource databases provided by the Rose City Resource Guide and the Oregon Food Bank
- Classify low income resources into 12 distinct categories with their related subcategories for further analysis
- Geocode 778 low-income resource locations in the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area using ArcMap
- Obtain Public Transit Bus and Light Rail Line shapefiles from Civic Apps to enhance spatial analysis of transit impact on access
- Calculate the mean center of the Rockwood and Albina neighborhoods using the mean center tool in ArcMap
- Calculate estimated travel time from Albina and Rockwood mean centers to 778 low-income resource locations; add to database
- Build public-transit travel time buffers around the mean centers of the Albina and Rockwood neighborhoods

## RESULTS

### Population Below the Poverty Level

The rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Albina no longer contains the highest population of people in poverty in Portland. No census tract in Albina remains among even the top 25 for population below the poverty level. Displaced residents have been pushed east to areas in and southwest of Rockwood (see Map 1). All but one census tract in Rockwood are estimated to contain approximately 1,000 - 3,000 residents below the poverty level.

### Spatial Distribution of Low-Income Resources

The spatial distribution of low-income residents in Portland has shifted east, the same cannot necessarily be said for low-income resource locations. The greatest concentration of resources can be seen in downtown Portland, just southeast of the Albina neighborhood (see Map 4). Comparing resources located within the two study-area neighborhoods show there are nearly 50 resources located within Albina while there are fewer than 20 in Rockwood.

### Public-Transit Travel Time to Low-Income Resources

As noted by McKenzie (2013) low-income population in transit-rich neighborhoods has declined. Using estimated travel times from the mean center of the Albina and Rockwood to compare access shows that, in Albina, sixteen resource locations are within recommended walking distance from the mean center. An additional 40 locations are located within fifteen minutes estimated public transit time (see Map 3). The shape of the zero-to-fifteen minute polygon for Albina indicates the system is set up to funnel people from this area (and beyond) into downtown Portland, providing Albina citizens with excellent access to resources located there.

In the Rockwood neighborhood, only six resources are located within recommended walking distance from the mean center (see Map 4). An additional twenty locations are within fifteen minutes public transit travel time. While the fifteen minute polygon (as well as subsequent polygons) extends toward downtown Portland while also extending toward downtown Portland along the main MAX line, the distance to downtown is simply too great to cover in that amount of time while Gresham has not built up a significant concentration of low-income resources at this point and time.

### Public-Transit Travel Time to Professional Services

While an evident disparity of access exists in Rockwood compared to Albina, some types are less accessible than others in Rockwood, including professional services, (e.g. medical and legal). Two locations for legal services are located within the boundaries of Albina while all others are located just outside of the fifteen minute travel time buffer from the mean center (see Map 5.) For medical services, thirteen locations, at least one representing each of the various medical categories are located within fifteen minutes travel time of the mean center. Meanwhile in Rockwood, there is no access to legal services within even thirty minutes travel time while there are six locations offering medical services providing only health care and dental (see Map 6).

A comparison of public transit travel time polygons for Albina and Rockwood show that access to more public transit lines (along with a central location) in Albina allow residents there to reach far more options at every time interval, providing a far larger radius within which to access resources (see Maps 3 and 4).

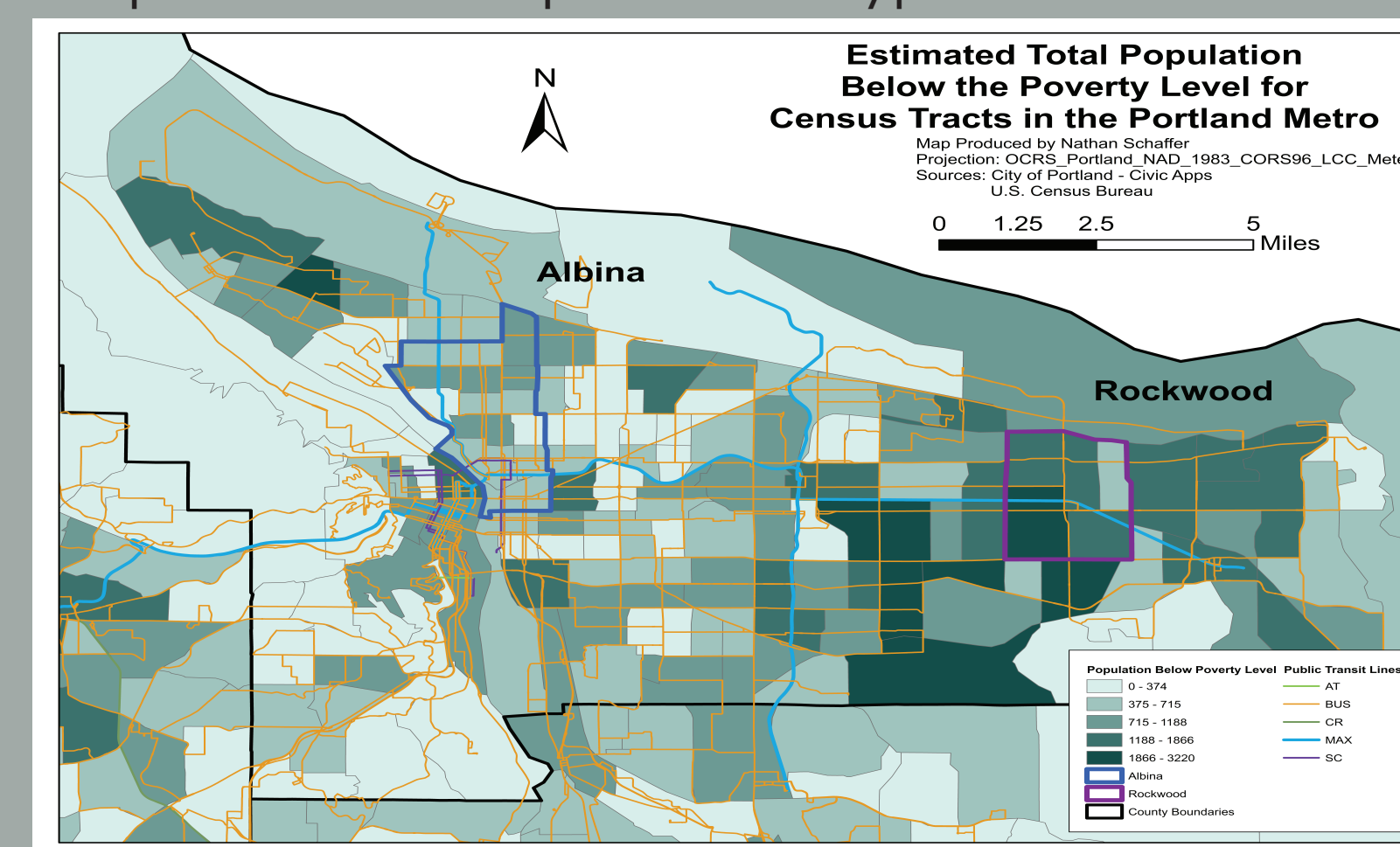
### Public-Transit Travel Time to Youth Resources

Perhaps even more concerning is the disparity in access to youth services in Rockwood. According to U.S. Census 5-year estimates, the large population of Rockwood residents below the poverty level contains a significant population of youth under 18. This age demographic is considered especially vulnerable to involvement in crime, a growing concern in Rockwood. On the other hand, the population of youth under 18 in poverty in the Albina neighborhood is decreasing even more rapidly than the total population. While these youth-in-poverty populations continue to move in opposite directions, the disparity in youth resources remains the same. The Albina neighborhood has five locations offering youth services within fifteen minutes travel time of the mean center. Another twenty-two are located within 30 minutes travel time (see Map 7). In stark contrast, there are no youth services locations within fifteen minutes travel time of the Rockwood mean center while five locations are located within thirty minutes travel time (see Map 8).

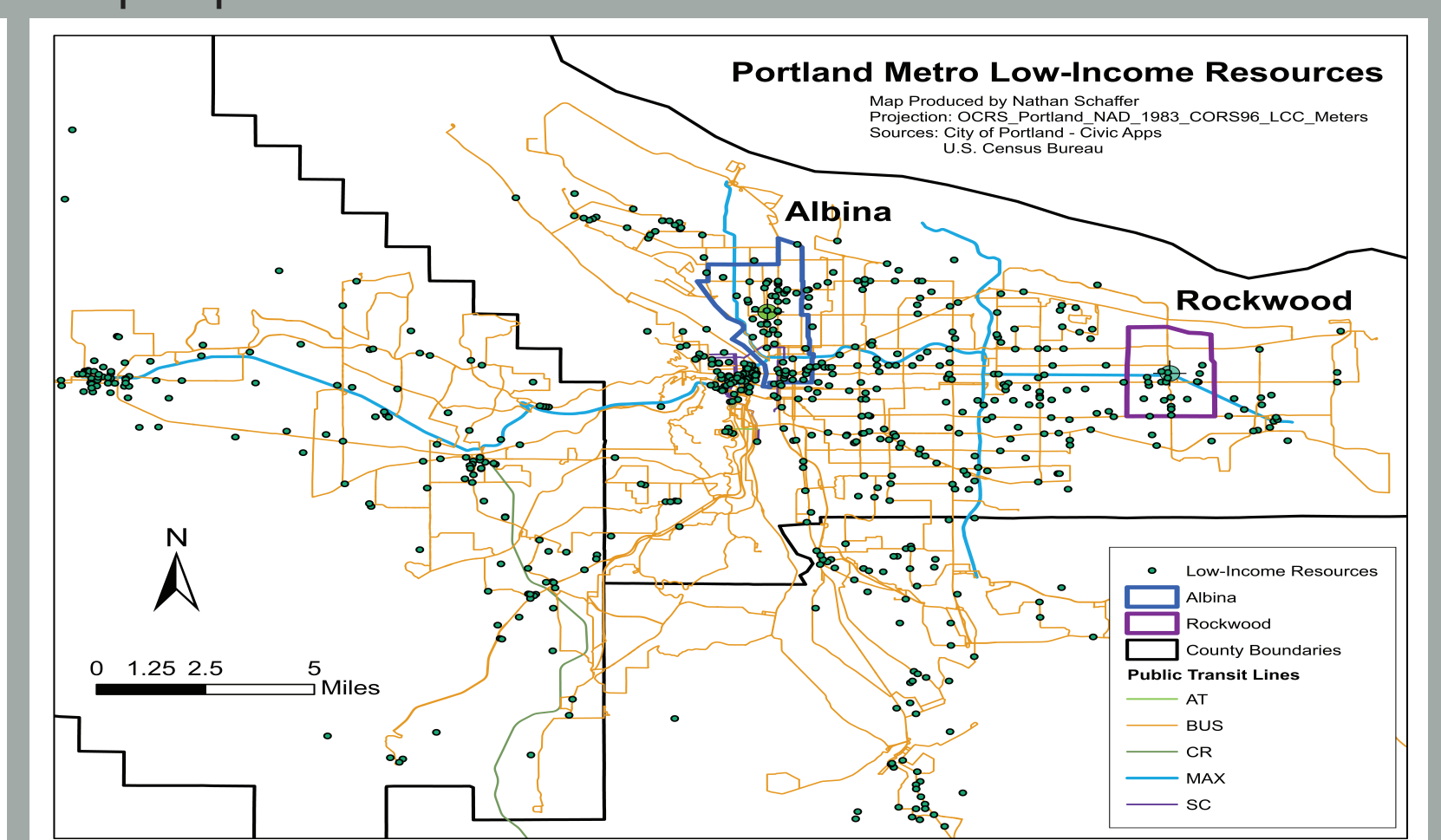
## CONCLUSION

- Access to resources for low income residents in Rockwood is significantly reduced in comparison to Albina.
- Youth and Medical Resources lag behind other resource categories in their response to an out-migrating low-income population in Portland.
- Providing assistance to resource agencies (during redevelopment) to relocate their facilities along the MAX lines should improve access for the greatest number of Portland citizens.

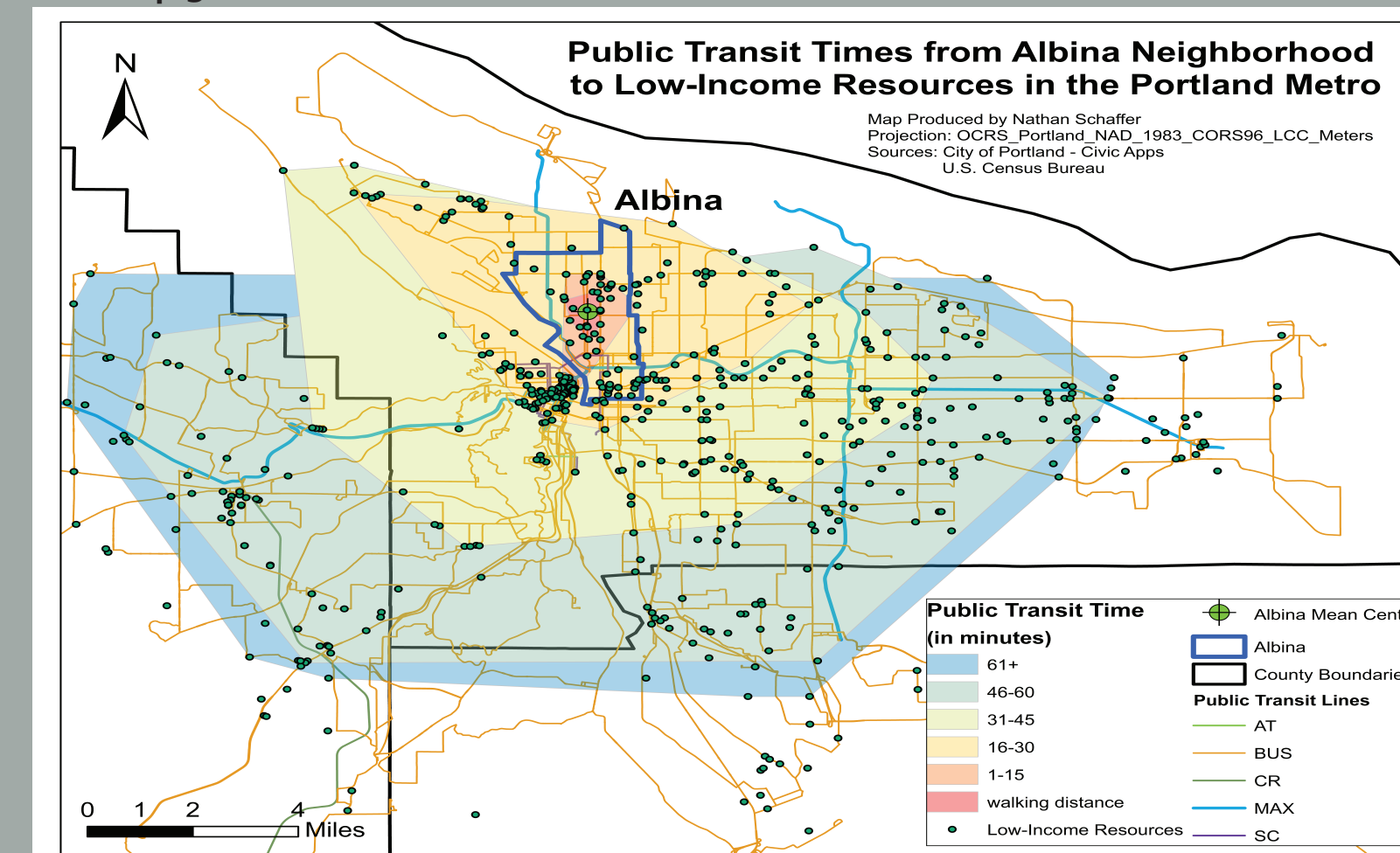
Map 1: Estimated Total Population in Poverty per Census Tract in Portland



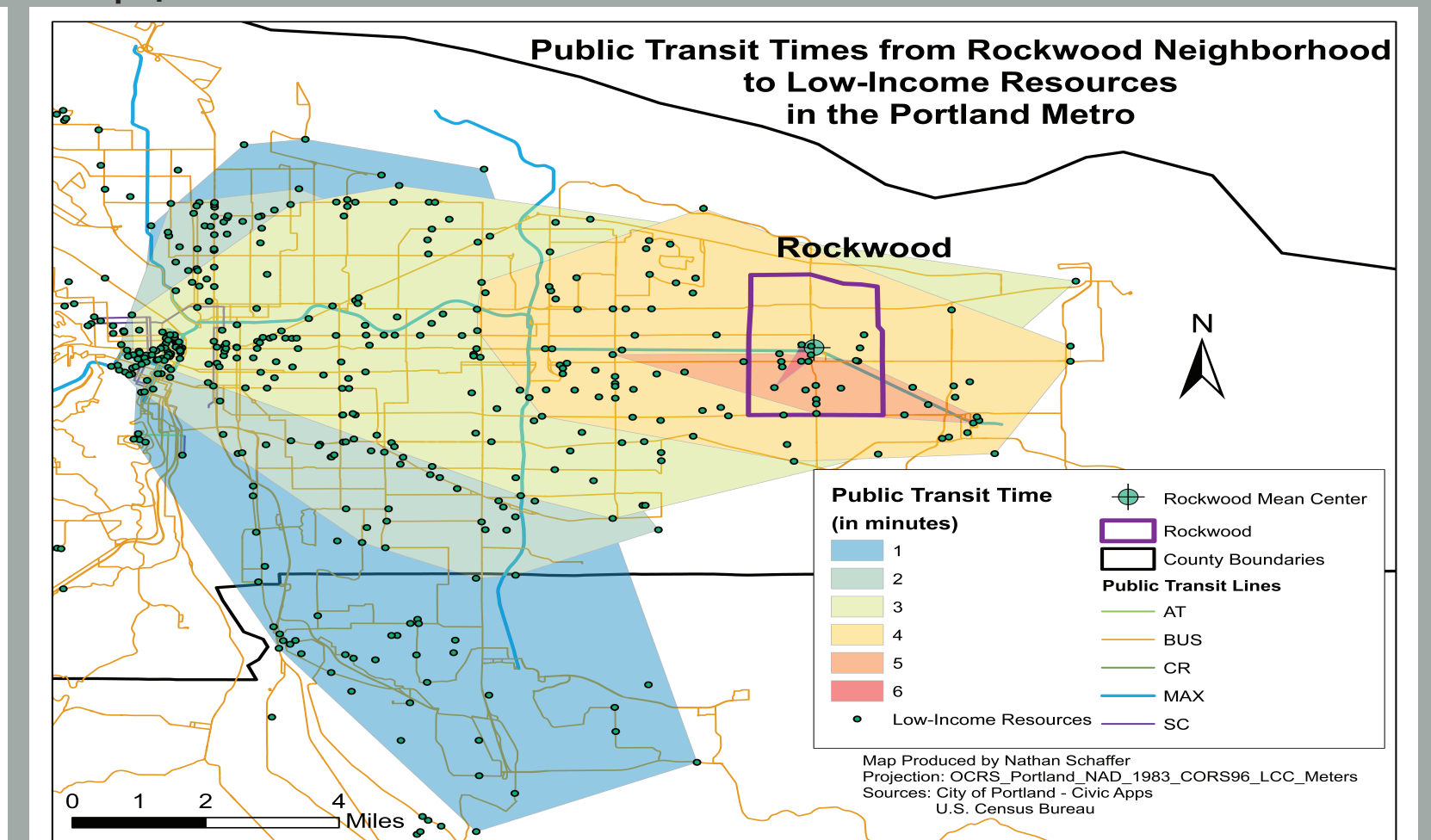
Map 2: Spatial Distribution of Low-Income Resources in the Portland Metro



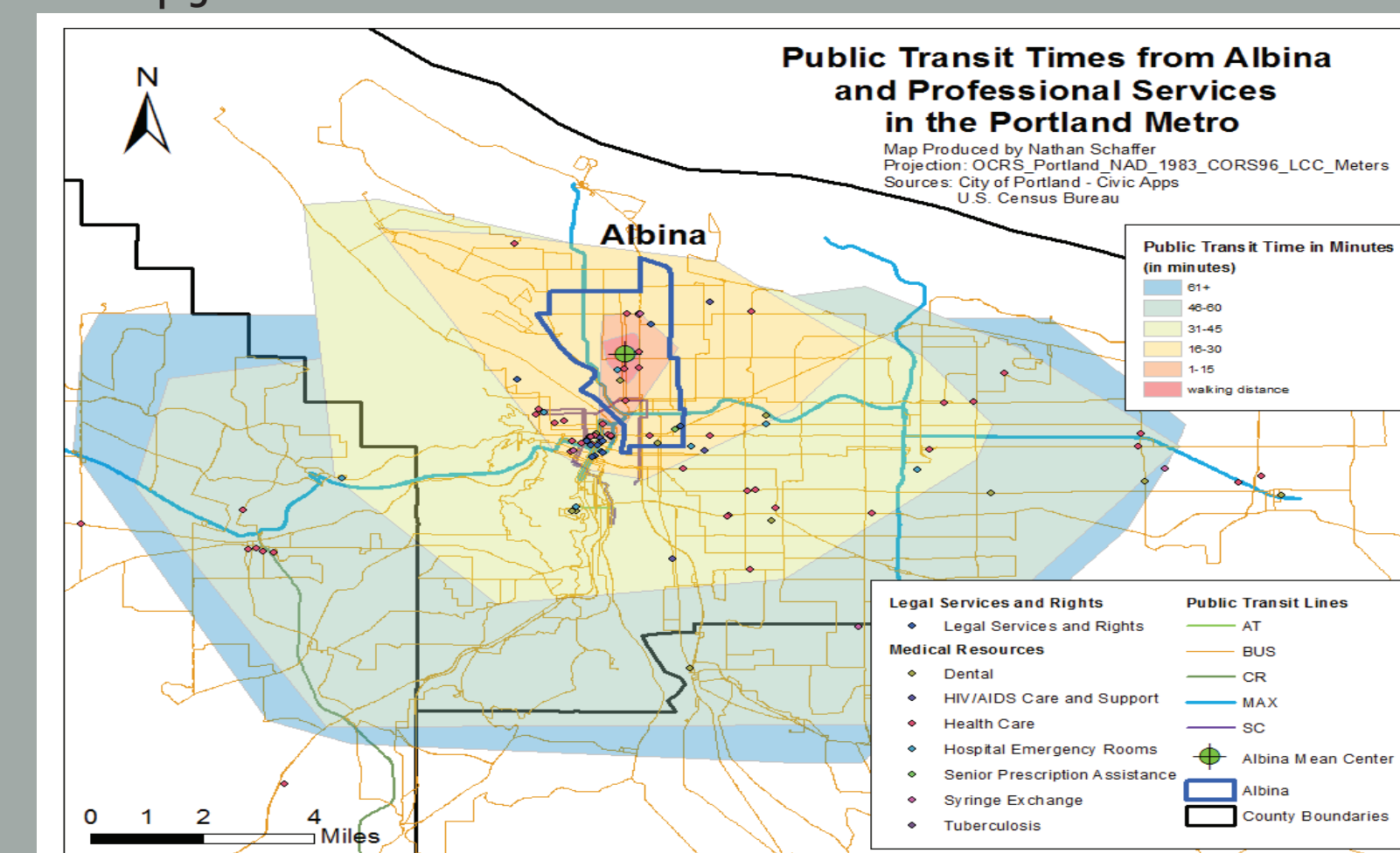
Map 3: Public-Transit Travel Time from Albina to Low-Income Resources



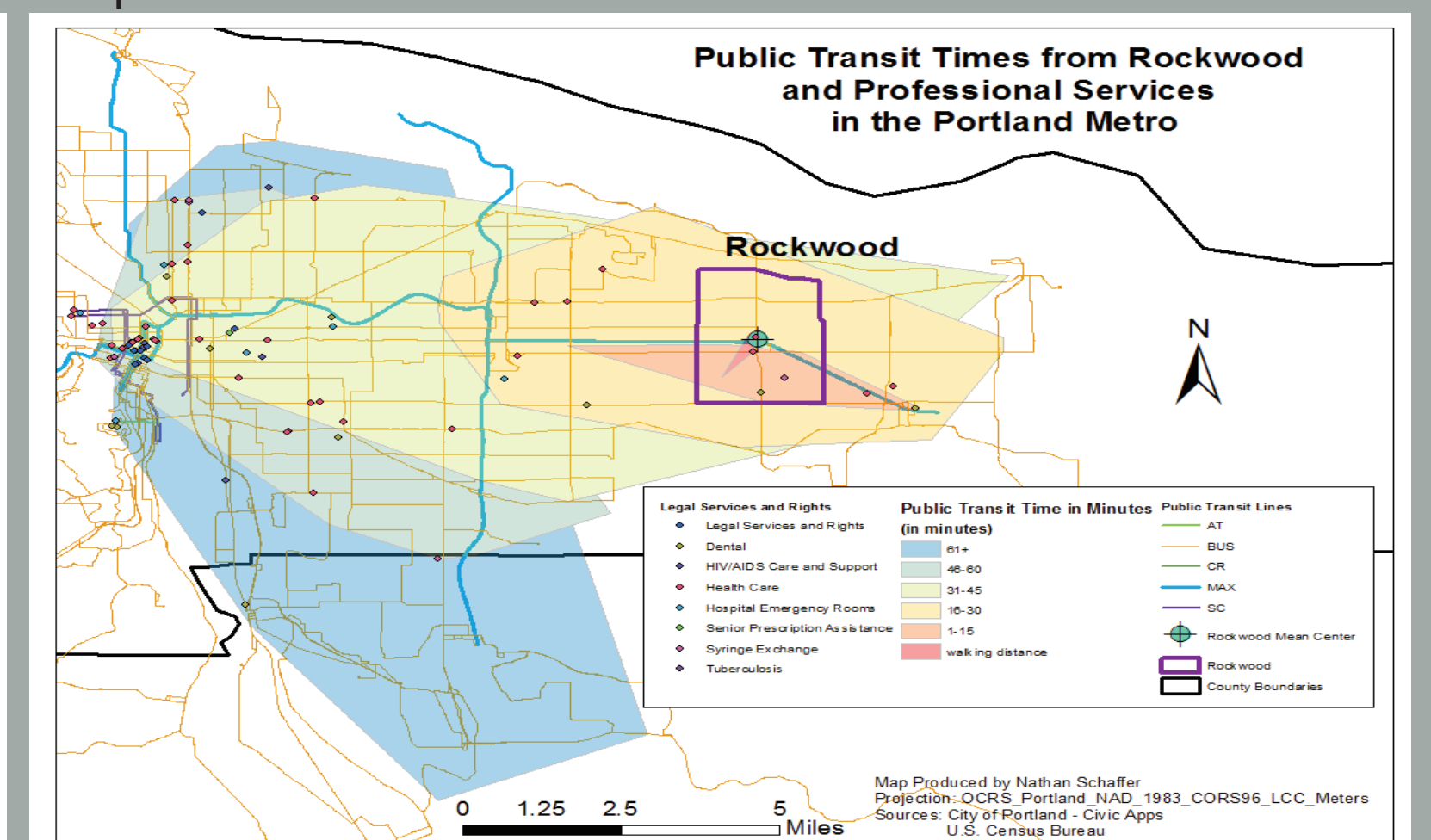
Map 4: Public-Transit Travel Time from Rockwood to Low-Income Resources



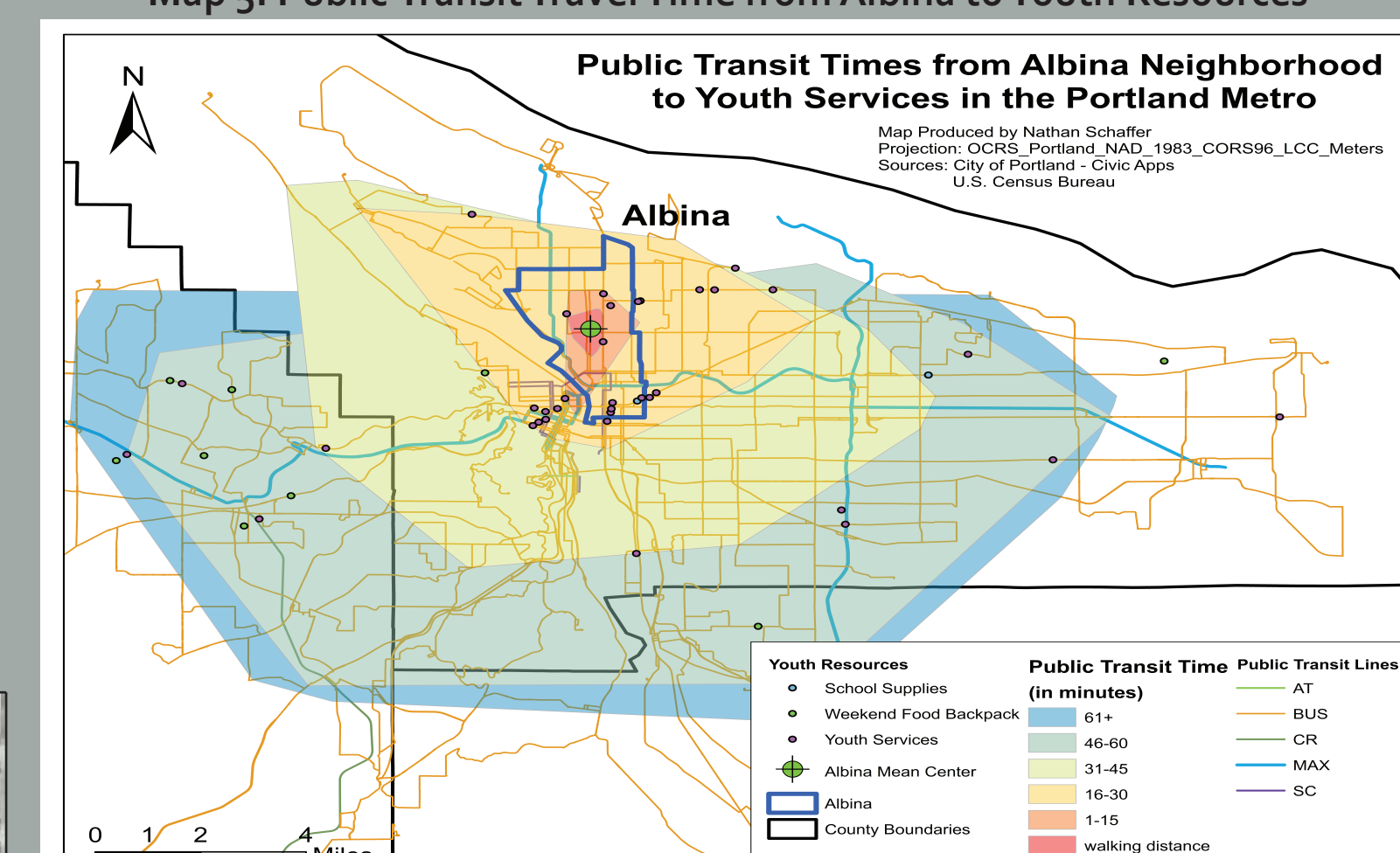
Map 5: Public-Transit Travel Time from Albina to Professional Resources



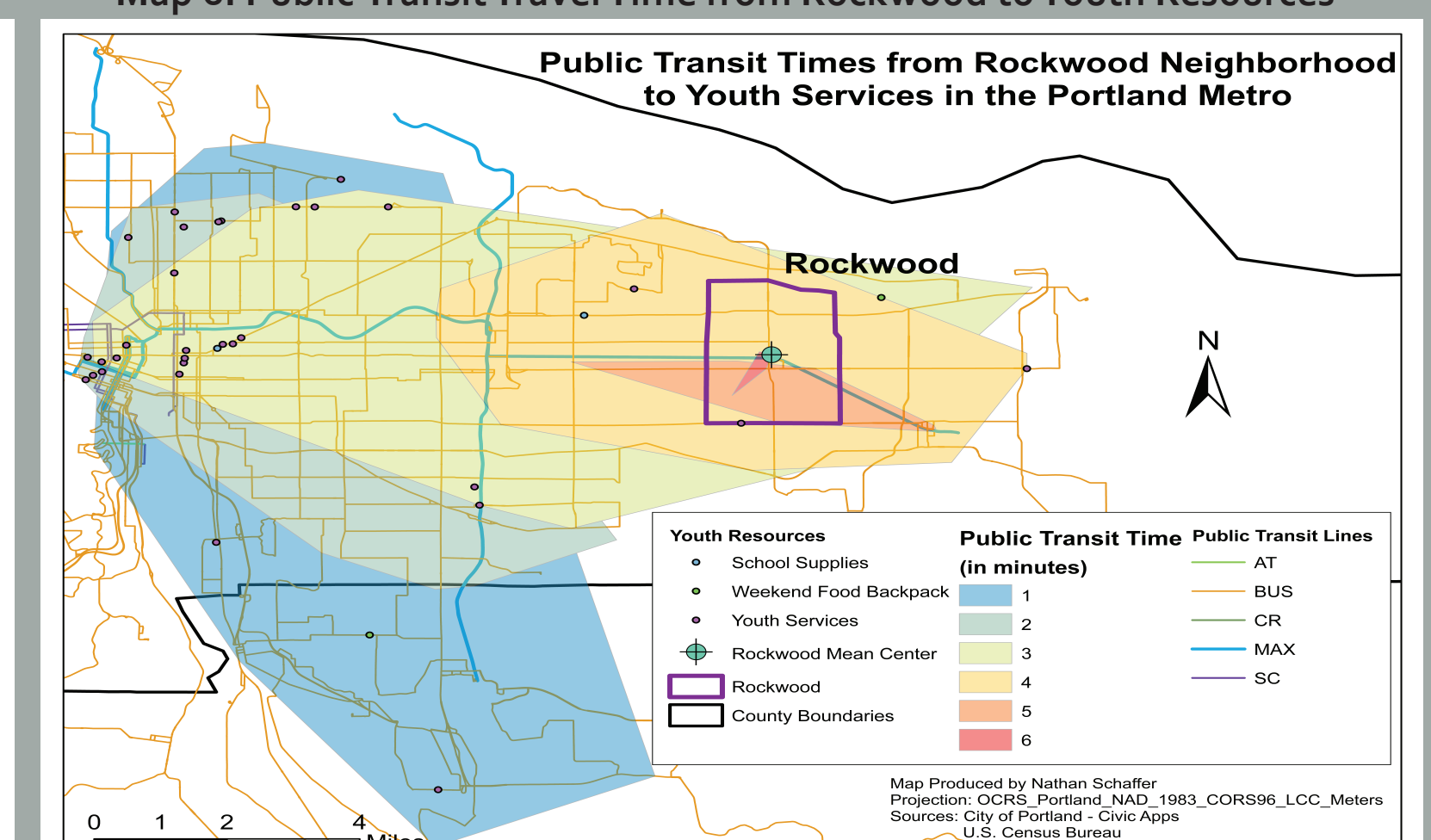
Map 6: Public-Transit Travel Time from Rockwood to Professional Resources



Map 7: Public-Transit Travel Time from Albina to Youth Resources



Map 8: Public-Transit Travel Time from Rockwood to Youth Resources



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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