

**5. Social Equity**

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Introduction

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Social equity is a core value of King County government. County policy requires that Metro intentionally consider equity and integrate it into our decisions and policies, our practices, and our methods for engaging communities—creating more opportunities for all county residents. The Regional Transit Task Force also emphasized social equity in the policy direction it recommended in 2010, which is reflected in Metro’s strategic plan and service guidelines. Underpinning these policies are federal laws that require nondiscriminatory delivery of transit services.

This section provides information about the meaning of social equity and how the service guidelines help Metro incorporate social equity into transit allocation decisions. It also includes maps showing concentrations of historically disadvantaged populations in King County.

Links to Information

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- 1. King County Title VI Policy: [http://bit.ly/sgtf5\\_1](http://bit.ly/sgtf5_1)
- 2. Metro Title VI Program Report: [http://bit.ly/sgtf5\\_2](http://bit.ly/sgtf5_2)
- 3. 2014 Determinants of Equity Report: [http://bit.ly/sgtf5\\_3](http://bit.ly/sgtf5_3)
- 4. 2014 King County Equity and Social Justice Report: <http://1.usa.gov/1BcBI9L>
- 5. Service Guidelines Task Force Website: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/sgtaskforce>



## Overview

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**Regional Transit Task Force (2010).** The first Regional Transit Task Force (RTTF) had recommended that one overarching statement of policy direction and the use of guidelines and performance measures should guide all Metro service allocation decisions, including service reductions, service growth, service restoration, and the ongoing maintenance of transit services in response to changes in system demand or route performance.

The Task Force included the principle of social equity in its recommended policy direction (Recommendation 3):

“The policy guidance for making service reduction and service growth decisions should be based on the following priorities:

1. Emphasize productivity due to its linkage to economic development, land use, financial sustainability, and environmental sustainability
2. Ensure social equity
3. Provide geographic value throughout the county.”

The Task Force report stated that the intent of this recommended policy framework is to optimize efficiency of transit services; deliver people to employment, activity and residential centers; meet the needs of those that are most dependent on transit; and create a system that is a fair distribution of service throughout the county.

To further clarify the RTTF’s intent, the report included the following explanation of “ensure social equity”:

“The task force felt that it is imperative for any future allocation of service to provide transit services to those who have no, or limited, transportation options. They defined Social Equity and Environmental Justice to mean using transit service to address gaps in mobility, and to avoid or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse social, economic or human health impacts for populations that have limited transportation options, including youth, students, elderly, disabled, people of color, those with limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged communities. In addition to considering trip origins for people with limited transportation options, consideration should be given to destinations for employment, education, healthcare, social services and other civic engagement activities.”

**King County Metro Transit Strategic Plan for Public Transportation, 2011-2021.** Metro is guided by its Strategic Plan for Public Transportation 2011-2021, adopted by the County Council in July 2011. Metro’s strategic plan parallels the countywide strategic plan and also incorporates the recommendations of the Regional Transit Task Force.

Metro incorporated this policy direction in our strategic plan Goal 2: Human Potential: “provide equitable opportunities for people from all areas of King County to access the public transportation system.” One of the plan’s strategies for achieving this goal is, “Provide travel opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations, such as low-income people, students, youth, seniors, people of color, people with disabilities, and others with limited transportation options.”

**King County Metro Service Guidelines.** Metro’s strategic plan also includes the service guidelines recommended by the RTTF. The guidelines incorporate social equity into the management of the transit system.

A central piece of the service guidelines is the analysis of the All-Day and Peak Network, which establishes target service levels for transit corridors throughout King County. Productivity, social equity and geographic value are prioritized in a three-step process.

Metro determines low-income and minority census tracts in each corridor using the most recent and best available census data. Then a social equity score is assigned based on the percentage of people who board buses in those areas compared to the county average. The social equity score is combined with scores for productivity (50 percent of the total) and geographic value (25 percent) to determine a preliminary target service level.

Metro assigns social equity points as follows:

Measure	Threshold	Points
Percent of boardings in low-income census tracts	Above system average	5
	Below system average	0
Percent of boardings in minority census tracts	Above system average	5
	Below system average	0

Social equity is also addressed in the next step of this analysis, which is to increase the service level if necessary to serve the actual number of current riders. This step helps Metro make sure that in areas where many people have few transportation options and rely on Metro to get around, a target service level is set that will accommodate them.

A number of laws and policies guide Metro in providing services that promote social equity.

**Federal law.** Metro follows the requirements and guidance of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Federal Highway Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Collectively, these laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, and disability.

Whenever Metro makes a change of more than 25 percent of service hours within the system or on a route, or shifts a bus stop more than one-half mile, we conduct a Title VI analysis to determine whether the changes have a disparate impact on minority populations or disproportionate burdens on low-income populations. This practice is adopted in Metro’s strategic plan.

**King County Strategic Plan and Ordinance 16948.** At the county level, Metro is guided by the King County Strategic Plan and by Ordinance 16948, concerning equity and social justice. A core element of the countywide strategic plan is the “fair and just” principle. Ordinance 16948 establishes definitions and approaches for implementing this fair and just principle and achieving equitable opportunities for all people and communities in King County.

**The ordinance defines “equity” as all people having full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to attain their full potential. “Social justice” means all aspects of justice, including legal, political and economic, and requires the fair distribution of public goods, institutional resources and life opportunities for all people.**

Ordinance 16948 also defines 14 determinants of equity—the conditions that lead to a fair and just society. Inequities are created when barriers prevent people from accessing these conditions. The determinant that most directly applies to Metro is #14: transportation that provides everyone with safe, efficient, affordable, convenient and reliable mobility options including public transit, walking, carpooling and biking.

The King County Strategic Plan’s “Economic Growth and Built Environment” goal includes this strategy for transportation services: “Meet the transportation needs of low-income and other underserved populations.”

**Service planning, community engagement, and analysis of impacts.** In addition to applying the service guidelines, Metro service planners routinely use data about low-income and minority populations when developing plans to revise or restructure service. Throughout the service reductions process of 2014, for

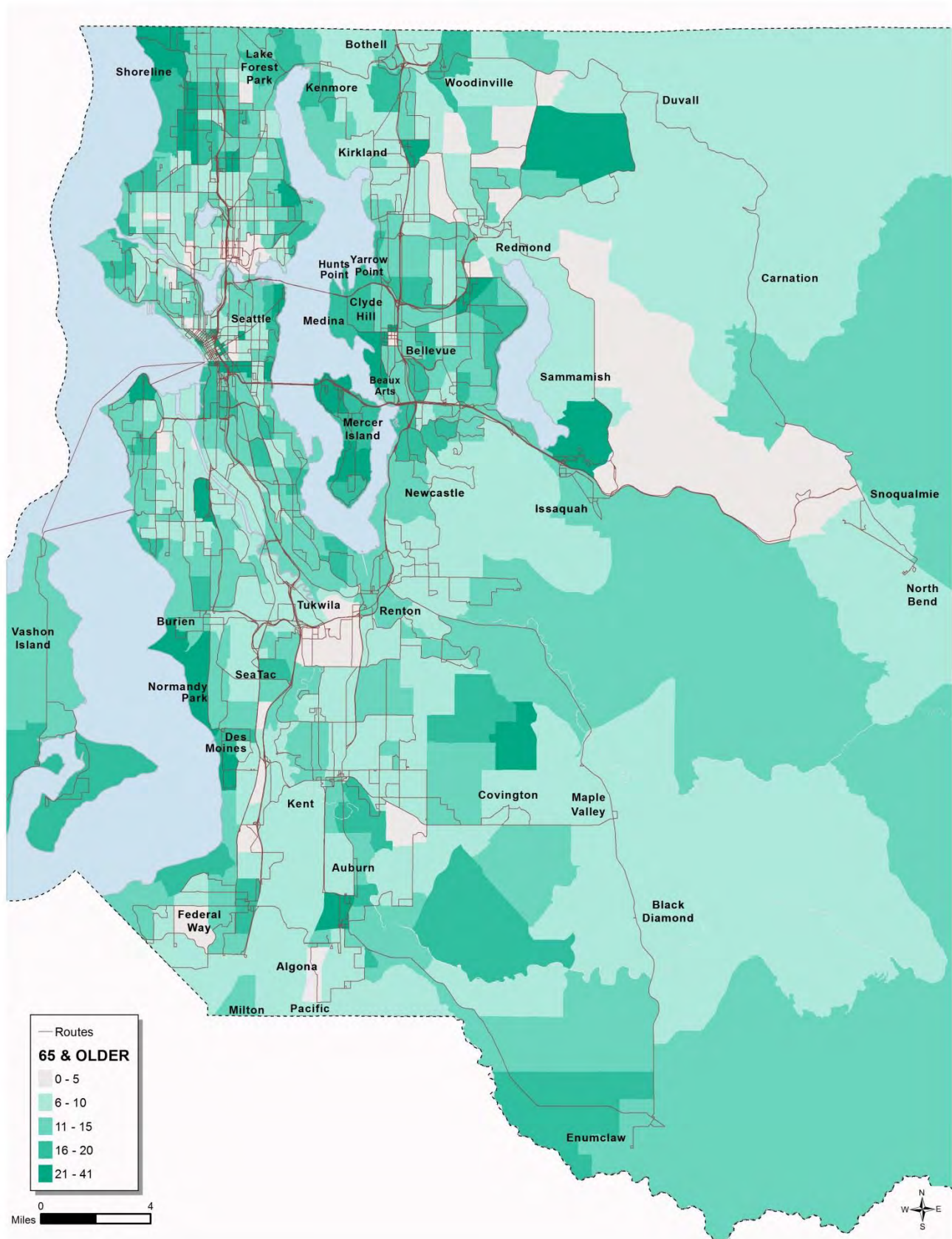
example, Metro continuously communicated with riders, local organizations, and elected officials to learn how they could minimize or mitigate the impacts to historically disadvantaged populations, such as low-income and minority groups.

Metro uses a number of outreach methods to provide opportunities for and meaningful engagement of everyone who will be affected by potential changes to Metro service. Engagement tools are designed to reach people who have limited English proficiency, youth, elderly, people with limited access to technology, people with disabilities, and immigrant and refugee populations. These tools include face-to-face meetings, translated materials, language phone lines, and targeted outreach to social service agencies, low-income housing communities and senior centers. This outreach is summarized in a public engagement report when a service change is transmitted to the King County Council.

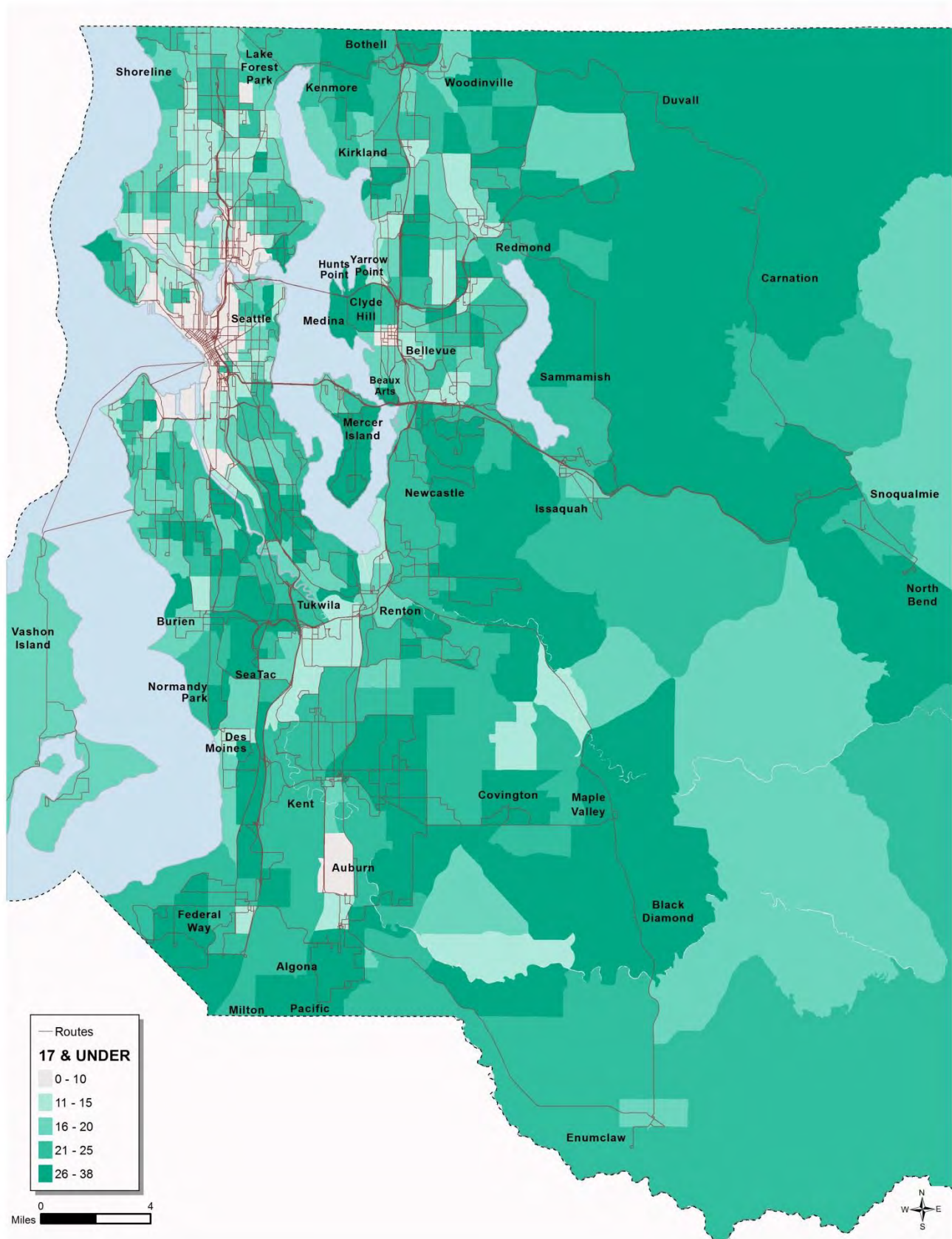
***King County demographics.*** Maps on the following pages illustrate concentrations of different demographic groups in King County: elderly, youth, foreign-born, non-English speaking, minority, low-income, and households without a car.



### Map: Elderly Population

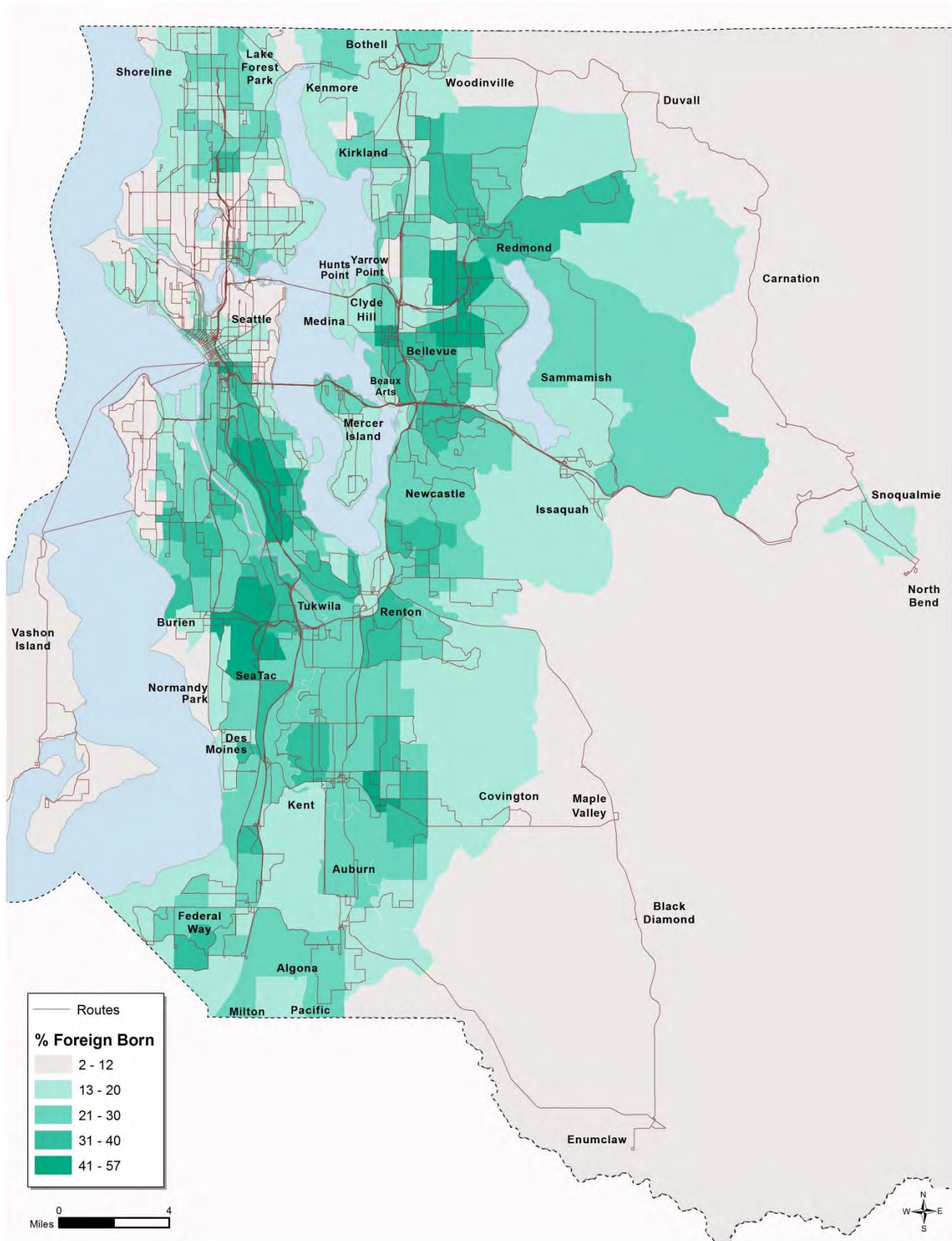


### Map: Youth Population

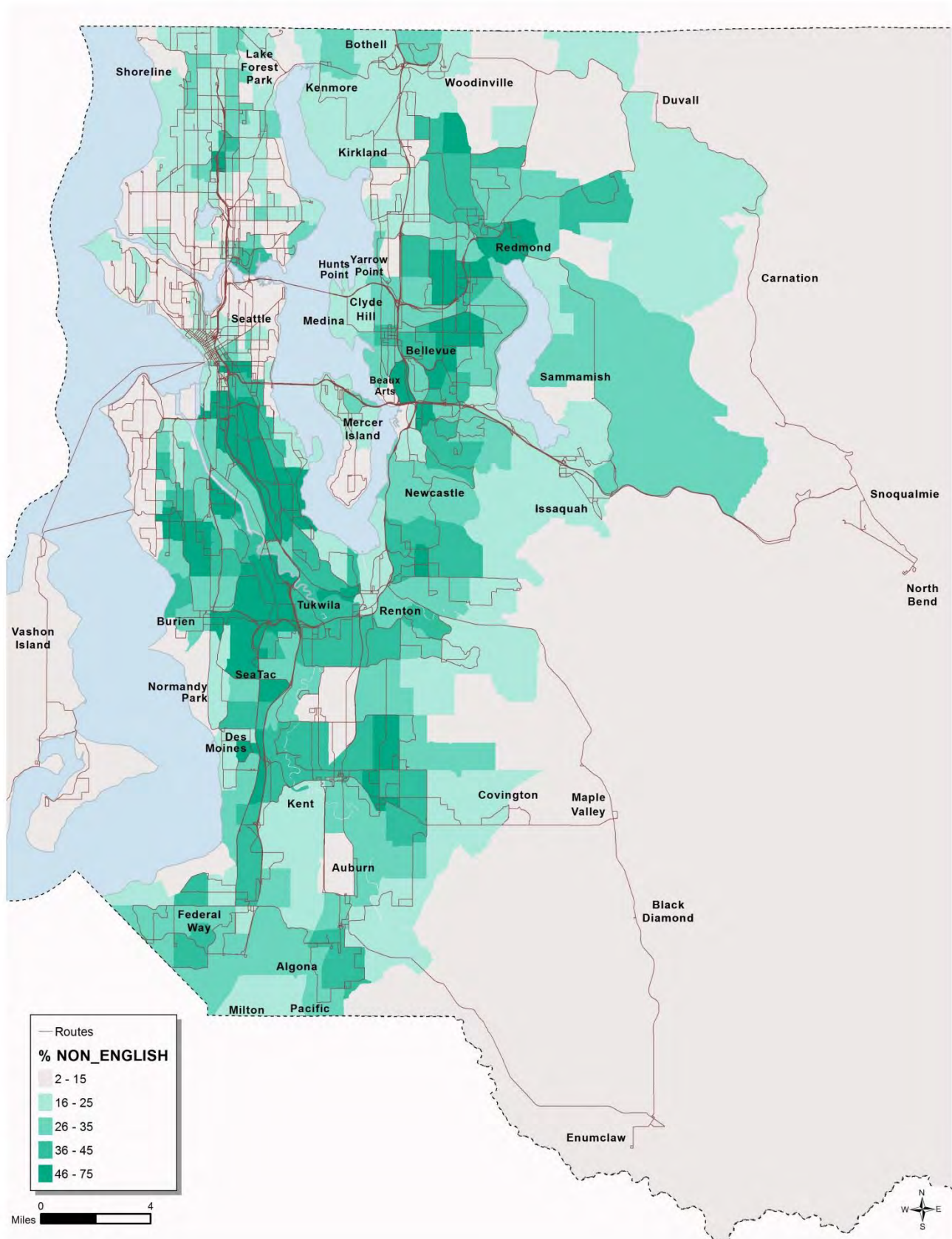




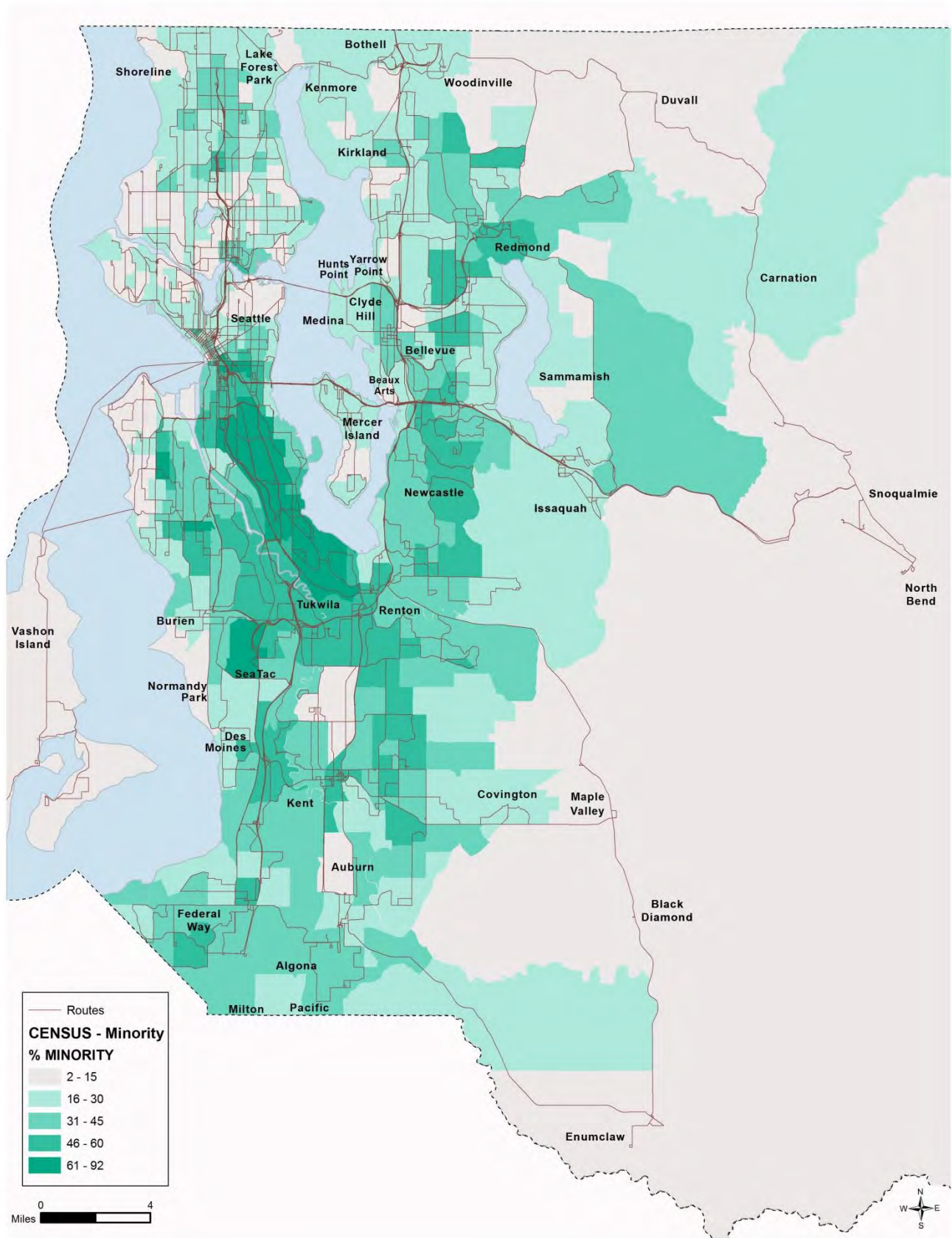
### Map: Foreign-Born Population



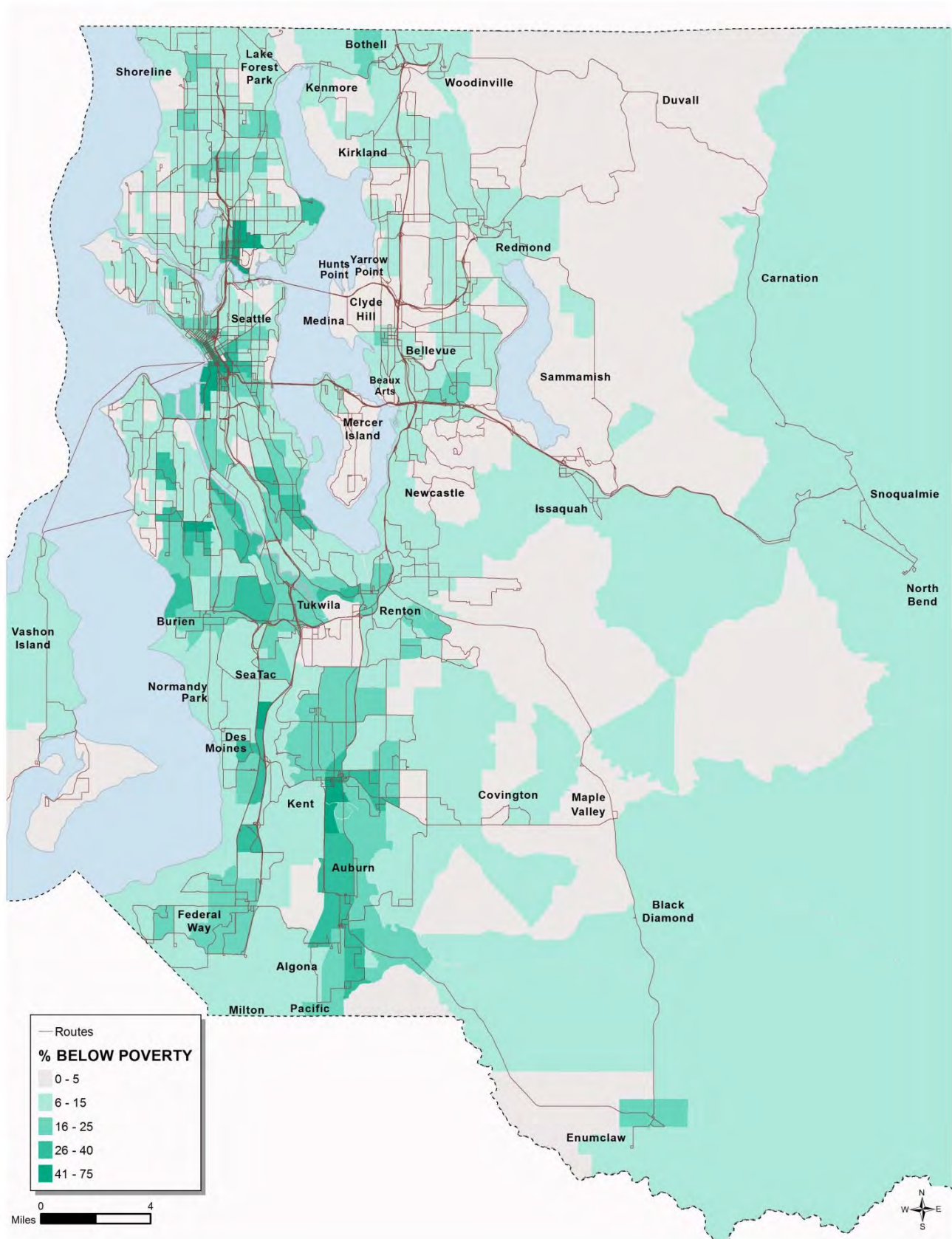
### Map: Non-English Speaking Population



### Map: Minority Population



### Map: Low-Income Population



### Map: Households without a Car

