

Transitional Living In A Rural State: The Geographic Challenge of Getting Started

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Maps Courtesy of Barbara MacLennan, PhD, Department of Behavioral Sciences and the College of Liberal Arts, Geospatial Lab and Frank Lafone, both from Fairmont State University

Background

- The Regional Transition Navigator Services (RTNS) is a statewide program serving individuals aged 14-25 throughout West Virginia.
- Individuals can be referred to the program for many reasons including histories of mental health diagnosis, substance use, or homelessness.
- The program's broader age range, the most common age for referrals is individuals aged 17, 18, or 19. These are frequently individuals leaving their version of home on their way toward living independent lives.

Assumed Challenge

- Many individuals referred to RTNS lack appropriate identification
- Missing identification includes Social Security and photo identification cards.
- One is almost always required to get the other.
- RTNS has worked to figure out how to overcome the barrier not having identification while pursuing transitional independence, but operated under the assumption that identification was available.

Discovered Challenge

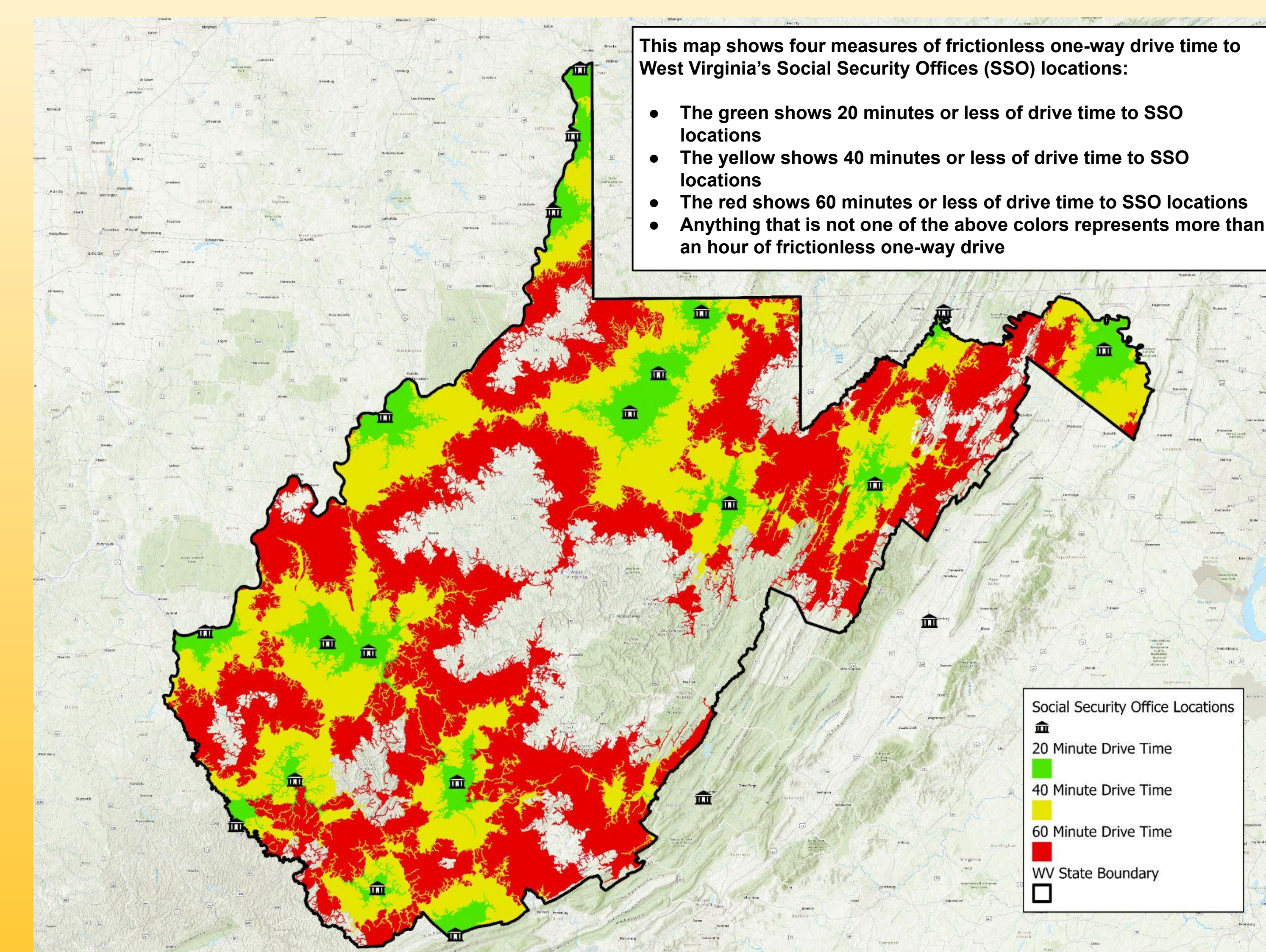
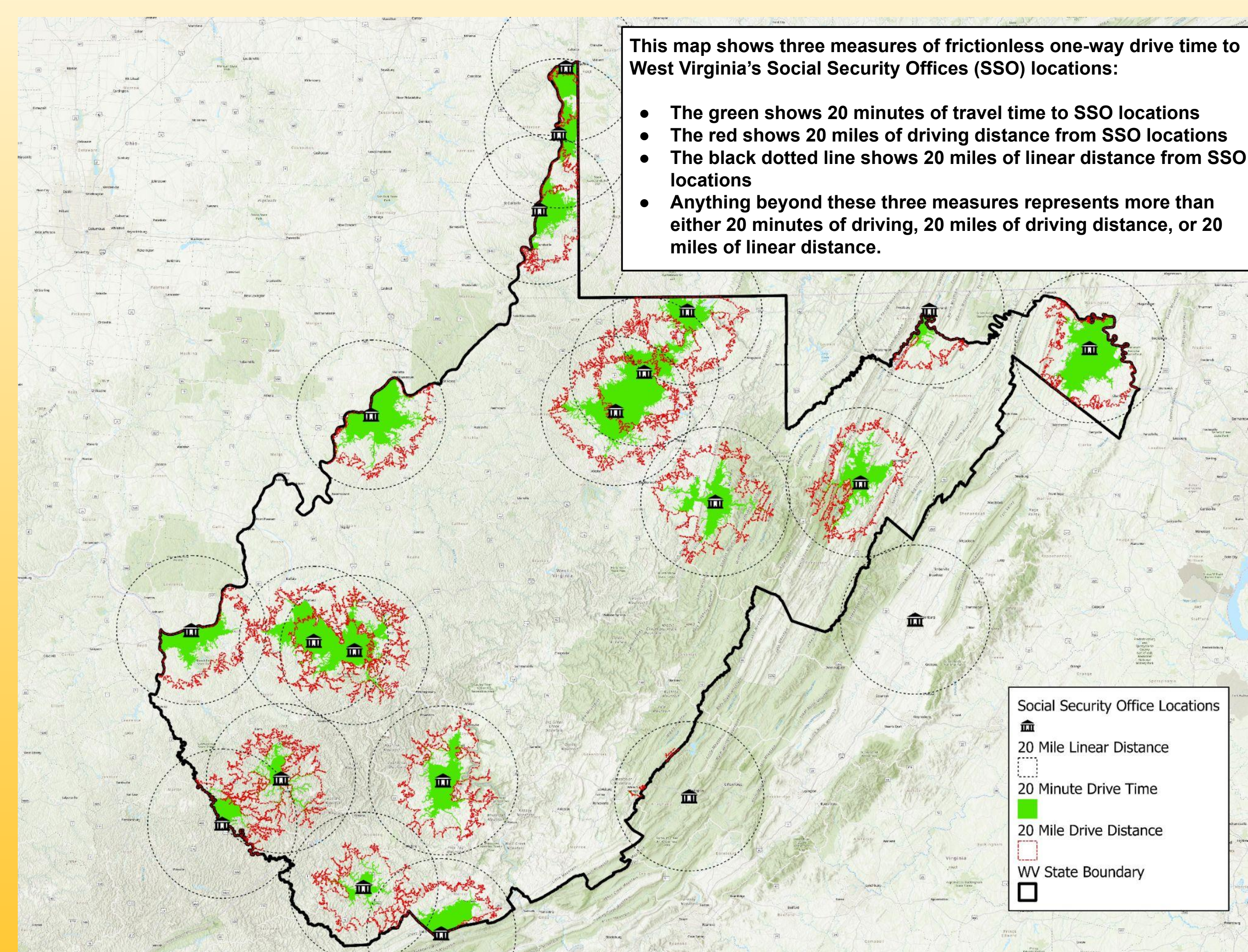
- West Virginia is a rural state of roughly 1,783,000 residents spread across 24,230 square miles¹. Because of its mountainous terrain and often limited infrastructure resources, travel between locations - even locations in relative proximity to one another - can be arduous.
- RTNS explored the distribution of Social Security offices and Divisions of Motor Vehicles locations. West Virginia has 16 Social Security Offices within its borders, as well as an additional five in surrounding states (one in Maryland and two each in Virginia and Ohio) designated as service locations for West Virginia residents. West Virginia has 26 Divisions of Motor Vehicles locations.
- West Virginia was compared with its bordering states: Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

1. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/WV/BZA115221>

Conclusions

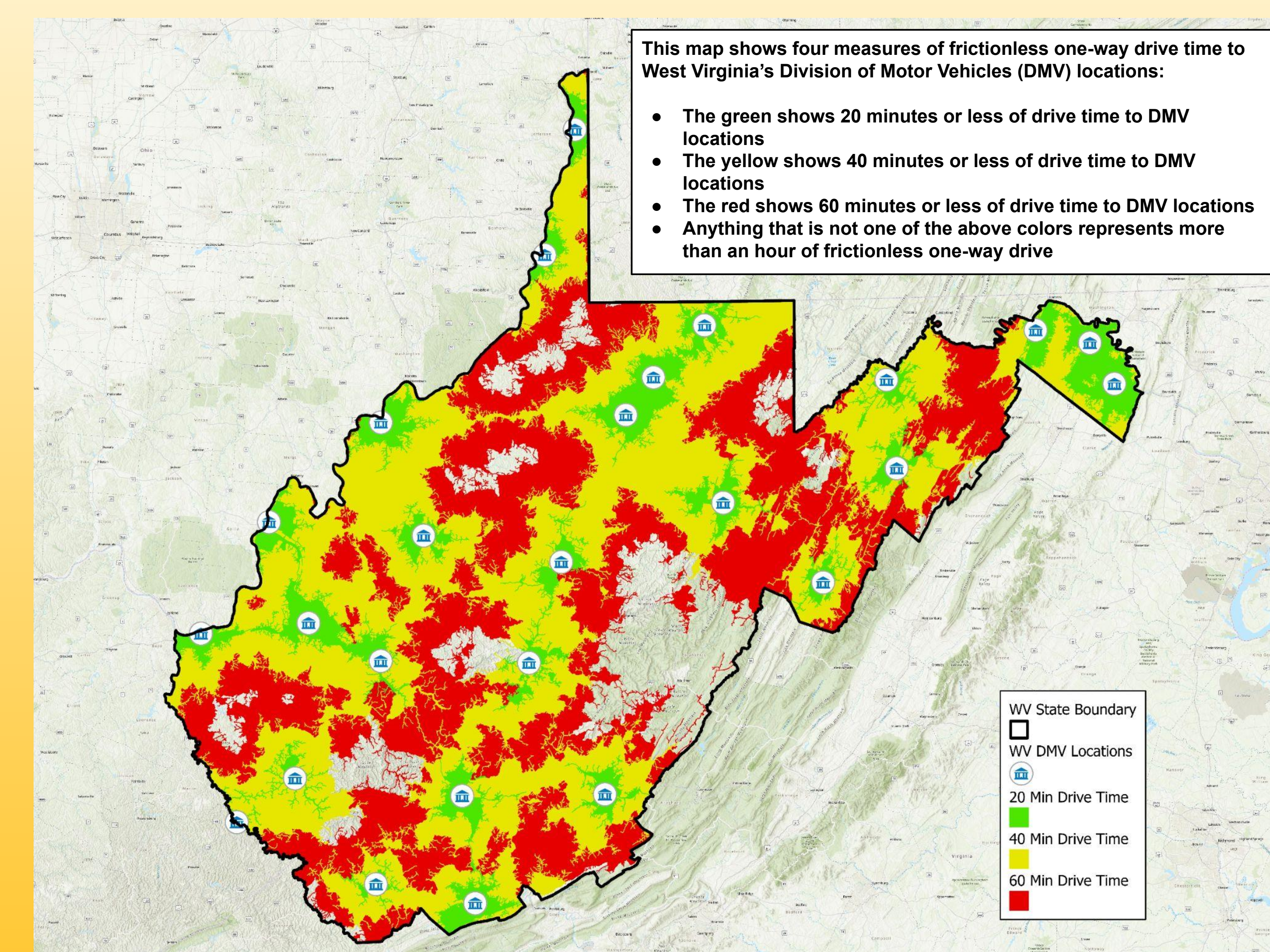
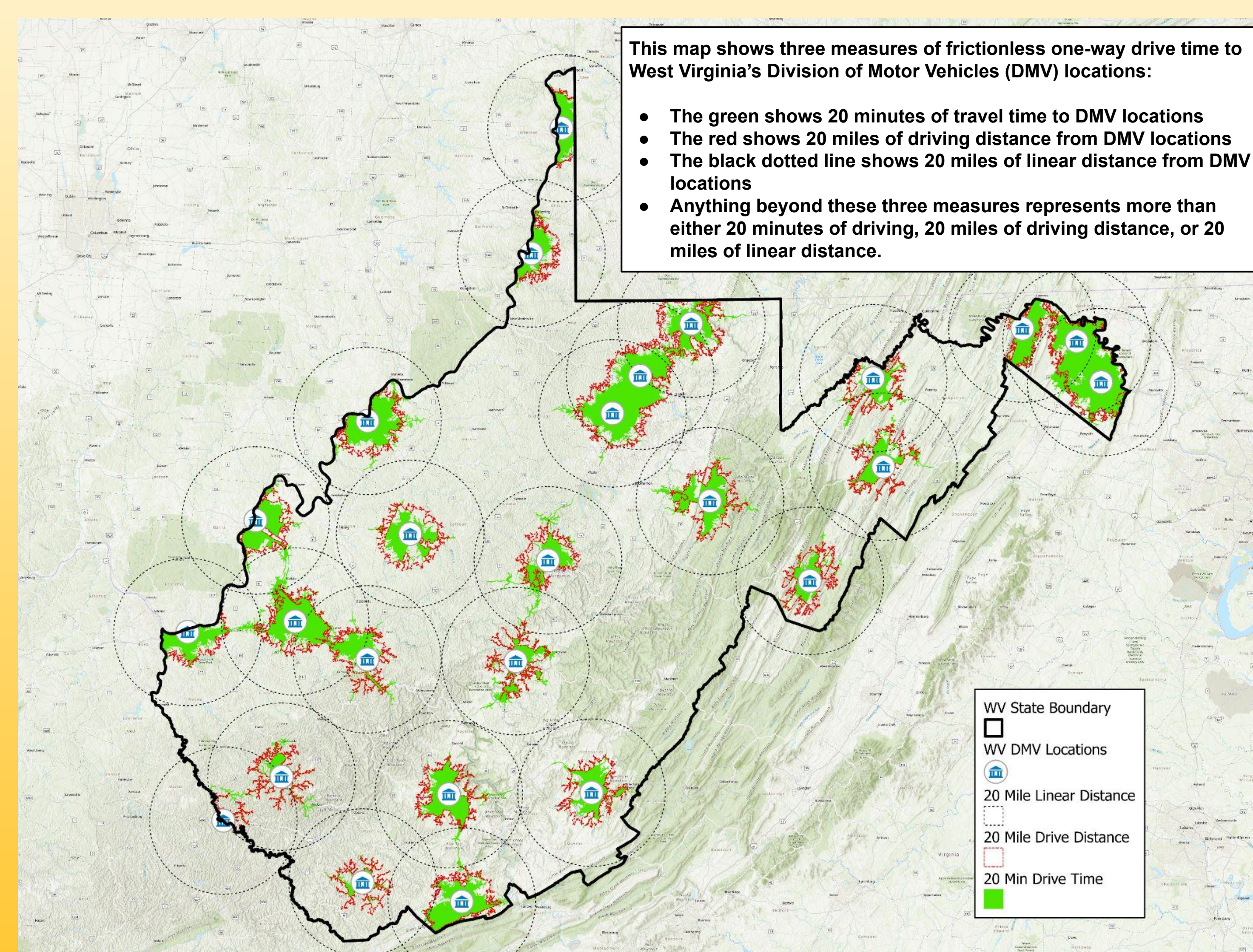
- West Virginia differs significantly neighboring in its distribution of Social Security and Division of Motor Vehicles. RTNS's transitional-aged clients likely have farther and longer to travel than do similarly aged youth in bordering states.
- See the accompanying maps for a visual explanation of what these distances mean in practice. These maps all assume frictionless drive times and sufficient resources to travel.
- However, assuming frictionless travel time and sufficient resources are both ideals. The real world that transitional aged youth encounter is rarely frictionless or sufficiently resourced.
- RTNS's understanding of its tasking and the delivery of services has changed as a result of this project. These realities have been shared with project partners in partner institutions. These results have helped us to better understand the structural challenge our clients often face and have forced us to think about ways to overcome them.
- These results have been shared with partner agencies and institutions in an attempt to communicate the importance of prioritizing the acquisition of identification.

Time and Distance Measures for SSO Locations



West Virginia's distribution of SSO locations differs considerably from neighboring states. West Virginia has one Social Security Office location for every 1502 square miles, while bordering states average a location every 1092 square miles, a 37% difference.

Time and Distance Measures for DMV Locations



West Virginia's distribution of DMV offices differs considerably from neighboring states. West Virginia has one DMV for every 925 square miles, while bordering states average a DMV every 512 square miles, an 80% difference.