

# Regional Transportation Coordinator: Brigida Gonzalez

## Coastal Bend Rural Transportation Services

Five years after leaving the transportation industry, Corpus Christi native Brigida Gonzalez has returned as the first regional transportation coordinator for the 12-county Coastal Bend region. Gonzalez, who works under supervision of the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) transportation planning director, began working in the transportation industry in 1986 with the Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority (RTA).

As regional transportation coordinator, Gonzalez will work with transportation operators in Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio, and San Patricio counties. Her job will be to help transportation providers reduce or eliminate duplicative services, seek transportation funds, plan services, and keep the planning process alive. Gonzalez also will work toward future revisions and service improvements using a variety of funding sources.

"Coordination of public transportation services is now required by both federal and state funding agencies," said Tom Niskala, MPO transportation planning director. "We are pleased and fortunate to have an individual with Brigida's experience and talent to carry that program forward."

Gonzalez began her career in transportation at the RTA's Information Center by assisting callers with route information. She then progressed into planning, marketing, and, eventually, became the purchase transportation coordinator overseeing the RTA's outsourced services. In 2000, she accepted a position with First Transit, which at that time held the contract for several fixed routes, paratransit services for the disabled, and seasonal services.

Gonzalez began as First Transit's operations manager, later became assistant general manager and, for a time, served as interim general manager overseeing nearly 50 operators and the administrative staff. Her job included working with a union representing some of First Transit's employees, an experience she found challenging and, because it introduced her to human resources, professionally rewarding.

After First Transit's contract expired, Gonzalez left the company rather than move to Houston or Dallas-Fort Worth and began looking



for work outside the transportation field. She accepted a job offer from the Corpus Christi engineering firm, Shiner Moseley and Associates, in 2003 as an administrative manager. She left there in 2005 to join Unique Staffing, a professional employer organization, as human resources manager and later became benefits manager.

She assumed the position as regional transportation coordinator on October 1st. Although it falls under the supervision of the MPO's transportation planning director and is officed at MPO headquarters, the lead agency for the

Regional Service Planning for the Coastal Bend is the Coastal Bend Council of Governments. Gonzalez is classified as a county employee, but the money to fund her position comes through the Texas Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration funds.

The goal of the regional transportation coordinator will be to identify areas where people live and want to go, to review existing services, to analyze transportation needs, and to develop service and possible alternatives. It's all part of a state mandate to fill service gaps and eliminate overlaps in service. Another goal is to meet federal requirements that transportation services for the disabled, elderly, and low income, be optimized for efficiency, effectiveness, and coordination.

Gonzalez, who has begun visiting transportation providers in the area, says one of her goals is to avoid the tendency toward service territorialism and instead instill a sense of trust in a regional-thinking-mindset in which everyone is aware of and shares resources available.

Benefits to this process include helping transportation companies make better use of increasingly shrinking transportation funding, decreasing traffic, reducing pollution, and improving trips for passengers. "If you can shave off 30 minutes or an hour from someone's round trip, that's wonderful," she says.

Gonzalez adds that it's important for transportation providers to understand that her efforts represent an opportunity to make the best possible use out of dwindling transportation funds. "We have to work together to maximize the benefits from the funds we receive," she says. "This will make things better for providers and transit consumers."