



## **A Strategy for a Coordinated Regional Public Transportation Plan**

Texas House Bill 3588 amended the Texas Transportation Code with the stated purpose to: (1) eliminate waste in the provision of public transportation services; (2) to generate efficiencies that will permit increased levels of service; and (3) to further the state's efforts to reduce air pollution. The Regional Planning and Public Transportation Study Group concluded that the preferred method for developing the service plans was to use council of governments boundaries as the service area and allow each area to develop its own plan. By October 2005 each region is to have: (1) identified a lead agency; (2) mapped out its general strategy for preparing the plan; and (3) estimated the financial assistance required for the planning process. In addition to Texas House Bill 3588, the transportation reauthorization bill, SAFETEA-LU, signed by President Bush on August 10, 2005 calls for improvement in the coordination of transportation services. This proposal contains background information on the need for coordination, the benefits of coordination, a strategy for developing a coordinated plan, and the qualifications of the Brazos Valley Council of Governments (BVCOG) to be the lead agency for this region.

### **Need for a Coordinated Transportation Plan**

Nearly all transportation providers, including public transit agencies, private operators, and human service programs, are facing constrained resources. At the same time, the demand for transportation services has never been greater. Our population is aging. Health care demands are soaring. Urban sprawl is resulting in greater distances between home and employment, medical, or recreation destinations. A minimum quality of life standard is expected for all, regardless of mental or physical capability. Transportation is the common link among these varying needs.

### **Benefits of a Coordinated Transportation Plan**

Coordinating transportation services has been called "the best way to stretch scarce resources and improve mobility for everyone." Coordination can improve service quality (more on-time services, drivers with better training, better vehicles), make transportation services available to more people, expand service to larger service areas, and centralize oversight and management. In short, coordination is technique for better resource management.



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Coordination not only improves service, but also can have great economic benefits. Providers have found that coordinated systems are better able to effectively compete for grants and contributions. Other benefits include increased efficiency, productivity, and enhanced mobility. This increase in access to jobs can lead to increased levels of economic development in the community.

## **A Strategy for Developing a Coordinated Plan**

BVCOG acted as a facilitator in organizing the effort for regional coordination. This effort included outreaching to other local agencies such as The District (formerly Brazos Transit District), the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization, health and human service agencies, and others as could be found. BVCOG took on this role as per Chapter 391 of the Texas Local Government Code that specifies Council of Governments, "... are to make studies and plans to guide the unified, far-reaching development of a region, eliminate duplication, and promote economy and efficiency in the coordinated development of a region." BVCOG is the designated by the state as the regional planning commission for the counties of Brazos, Burleson, Grimes, Leon, Madison, Robertson, and Washington.

The first step in developing a strategy is to organize and identify stakeholders who are vital to the planning process. Invitations to the initial July 13<sup>th</sup> coordination meeting were sent to transit providers, human service agencies, local officials, and others in the region. Well over 500 invitations were sent out for the follow up meeting that took place on August 8<sup>th</sup>. Representatives from school districts, taxi cab companies, daycare providers, hospitals, and countless other types of agencies were also invited to attend.

These two meetings started the local conversation on regional public transportation coordination for this area. Attendees began to think of goals and objectives and discussed what a coordinated transportation in the region might look like. The majority of people in attendance agreed that the best agency to lead the effort in developing a regional coordinated plan was the Brazos Valley Council of Governments (BVCOG).

## **Work Plan Schedule**

Table 1 below shows the outline of a work plan for the next year. A successful coordinated transportation plan will require many steps and involve many people throughout a traditional planning process. The outline below includes major tasks that will be undertaken and gives a timeframe in which they are to be completed. Some of the tasks are already underway or will begin shortly.



Table 1. Work Plan Outline

<b>Task 1: Develop Goals and Objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Write Mission Statement</li> <li>■ Achieve Consensus on Goals and Objectives</li> </ul>	<b>Fall 2005</b>
<b>Task 2: Data Collection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Current Providers</li> <li>■ Customers</li> <li>■ Service Gaps</li> <li>■ Unmet Need</li> <li>■ Existing Coordination</li> </ul>	<b>Fall / Winter 2005</b>
<b>Task 3: Public Involvement and Input</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Providers</li> <li>■ Customers</li> <li>■ Health and Human Service Agencies</li> <li>■ Advocacy Groups</li> <li>■ Workforce Boards</li> <li>■ TxDOT</li> </ul>	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>Task 4. Identify Constraints</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Legislative</li> <li>■ Bureaucratic</li> <li>■ Perceived</li> </ul>	<b>Winter 2006</b>
<b>Task 5. Develop and Choose Coordination Strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Brokerage</li> <li>■ Lead Agency</li> <li>■ Provider</li> </ul>	<b>Winter / Spring 2006</b>
<b>Task 6. Refine Regional Coordination Strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Finalize Regional Strategy</li> <li>■ Submit Plan</li> </ul>	<b>Spring thru Fall 2006</b>
<b>Task 7. Implementation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Implement Strategy at Regional Level</li> </ul>	<b>Fall 2006</b>

### Costs Involved in Creating a Coordinated Plan

It is BVCOG's intention to conduct the planning and coordination study in-house. There are sufficient staff resources to complete the planning effort and plans to augment current staffing levels. Mr. Michael Parks, AICP the BVCOG Assistant Executive Director, will oversee the planning effort with the management assistance of Weldon Peters, and technical assistance of Tony Topping, Dawn Killian and Jennifer Opon. To ensure a



timely completion of this project, one full-time transportation planner will also be brought on staff to conduct the day-to-day work under the supervision of Mr. Parks and Mr. Peters. The planning process will also receive support assistance from the BVCOG's Economic Development and Geographic Information Services (GIS) departments. The BVCOG will provide office space and support for operations throughout the study. The District will also provide support and is included in Table 2 (proposed budget) below:

Table 2 Proposed Budget

<b>Transportation Coordination Plan</b>	<b><u>Proposed Budget</u></b>	
<b>Direct Personnel</b>		
Direct Salaries		
Asst. Executive Director	\$6,250	
Transportation Planner	\$40,000	
Economic Development Manager	\$4,800	
Economic Development Staff	\$5,000	
Economic Development Staff	\$5,000	
GIS Staff	\$5,000	
Real Time & Benefits	<u>\$16,512.50</u>	
<b>Total Direct Personnel</b>	<b>\$82,562.50</b>	
<b>Other Direct</b>		
Travel	\$5,000	
Equipment	\$5,000	
Direct Supplies	\$1,000	
Direct Space	0	
Direct Phone	\$1,200	
Consultants	\$10,500	
- The District	\$27,000	
Other Direct	\$9,500	
Postage Printing & Training	<u>\$7,000</u>	
<b>Total Other Direct</b>	<b>\$66,200</b>	
<b>TOTAL DIRECT</b>		<b>\$148,762.50</b>
<b>Internal Service Funds (ISF)</b>		
Accounting	\$2,000	
System Admin.	\$2,500	
Copy Fax	\$660	
Human Resource	\$2,600	
Space	\$1,200	
Reception Internet Phone	\$1,980	
<u>Core Supplies</u>	<u>\$1,320</u>	
<b>Total ISF</b>	<b>\$12,260</b>	
<b>TOTAL DIRECT &amp; ISF</b>		<b>\$161,022.50</b>
<b>Indirect</b>	\$3,639	
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>\$164,661.50</b>