

Houston-Galveston Region Public Transportation Coordination Plan



METRO | *Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas*



METRO Solutions Transit System Plan – a long-term plan designed with more choices, to take you more places and make it easier to get there.

Submitted to the Texas Transportation Commission by the Houston-Galveston Area Council and Local Partners for the Citizens of the Texas Gulf Coast Planning Region

Revised November 17, 2005



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Houston–Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) as Lead Agency

Many organizations and transportation service providers are grappling with declining resources to meet the growing number of citizens who need a range of transportation options. In coordination with the leadership provided by the Texas Transportation Commission and other Councils of Governments in Texas, the Houston-Galveston Area Council has been asked to serve as the lead agency to improve travel options for the elderly, disabled and low income residents of this region through improved coordination between existing service providers.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council is the region-wide voluntary association of 132 local governments and local elected officials in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning region of Texas. Its service area is 12,500 square miles and contains almost 5,400,000 people.

H-GAC's mission is to serve as the instrument of local government cooperation, promoting the region's orderly development and the safety and welfare of its citizens. H-GAC is the regional organization through which local governments consider issues and cooperate in solving area-wide problems. It is the designated

Metropolitan Planning Organization supporting transportation and air quality planning in the eight county metropolitan area. H-GAC also serves as the Area Agency on Aging for 12 of its 13 counties and administers the workforce training program for the 13 county Gulf Coast Workforce Board.

H-GAC is governed by a Board of Directors composed of local elected officials, who serve on the governing bodies of member local governments. There are 35 members on the H-GAC Board at this time. The map below shows the 13 county Gulf Coast Planning Region with the 8 counties highlighted that comprise the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) boundaries.

The Houston region has been working to improve the coordination between local transportation providers and relevant agencies for several years. Efforts began in the 1990's with the start-up of two sub-regional transportation coordinating councils: one in Harris County and one which includes Galveston and Brazoria Counties. In Harris County a comprehensive transportation coordination study led to the development of a pilot project streamlining the delivery of transportation services to qualifying persons unable to rely on a personal car for critical trip-making. However, a regional assessment of the transportation needs of persons unable to travel by a personal vehicle or access existing public transit services is needed. Similarly, the opportunities for cooperative, coordinated service delivery have not been regionally explored.

TEXAS GULF COAST PLANNING REGION



In August 2005 a kickoff meeting was held at H-GAC for the regional public transportation coordination project. Approximately 120 stakeholders attended representing various organizations and concerned persons from around the region. There was tremendous enthusiasm for the ideas on how agencies can work together more effectively. To date, H-GAC has received nineteen (19) letters of support from agency representatives and local elected officials indicating their desire for H-GAC to be designated as the lead agency for this project. A listing of the supporting agencies is included in Appendix D. Copies of the support letters are available in a separate document.

Preliminary Scope of Work

Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan

Objectives

The purpose of this plan is to cooperatively develop a plan of action that starts to improve the coordination aspects of the public transportation system. This plan addresses potential partnerships with stakeholders such as transportation providers, local governments, public agencies, and others to achieve the following objectives:

- To improve the delivery of transportation services
- To generate efficiencies in operations that can lead to increased levels of service
- To encourage cooperation and coordination
- To improve customer service

The plan would be developed over a one-year period (October 2005 – September 2006)

Task 1: Regional Assessment – Identify assets, expenditures, service provided, specific mobility needs of various population groups, and opportunities for improvements by coordinating services.

- a) Review current public transportation plans and related recommendations.
- b) Involve stakeholders to identify all entities in the region that provide, buy, or sell transportation services (include volunteer services and other not-for-profit services, private services).
- c) Conduct interviews with (or a survey of) “other” transportation stakeholders that may not be directly involved in providing transportation services. Those other stakeholders include but are not limited to social workers, medical care coordinators, senior program directors, and representatives from agencies that serve MHMR customers, the Homeless Coalition, Centers for Independent Living.
- d) Conduct a regional assessment of existing infrastructure and improvements needed to support the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. (Such as inventory of sidewalks and other amenities to meet the current design standards).
- e) Identify potential applications using new technology such as computer or web-based tools.

PRODUCT: Prepare a summary report on the Regional Needs Assessment.

Task 2: Establish Plan Goals and Objectives

- a) Review successful coordination and other public transportation planning models
- b) Draft goals/objectives for the H-GAC region with performance measures.

Task 3: Develop a Public Involvement Plan

- a) Identify needed public outreach activities including meetings, focus groups, surveys and other venues to enhance ongoing public participation in the planning process.

Task 4: Planning For Coordination

- a) Identify existing coordination practices
- b) Identify possible service & operations improvements
- c) Identify opportunities for coordination using Pilot Projects (cooperative agreements, consolidation of services, etc.)
- d) Identify barriers (such as: lack of access, jurisdiction, safety & security, and technology application) and opportunities to overcome potential obstacles
- e) Develop implementation strategies.

PRODUCT: Summary report on Regional Coordination and other implementation activities

Task 5: Develop Financial Plan

- a) Identify existing regional public and private transportation service costs and associated funding sources. Project regional public transportation costs based on continuation of the current operations. Estimate regional public transportation needs in excess of available and anticipated resources.
- b) Estimate the costs to implement the Pilot Projects identified in Task 4 to take advantage of better coordinated services. Develop 5 year financial plans that describe optional operating scenarios and potential funding sources for each option. Estimate the projected administrative, capital, operating and facility cost- saving potential by coordinating the services utilizing the Pilot Projects.
- c) Identify additional resources needed and potential funding sources.

PRODUCT: Draft recommended Financial Plan including a methodology for regional funding allocations and a development strategy for additional funding.

Task 6: Develop Draft Plan Report

- a) Compile draft plan report with Task Summary reports, recommended projects for early implementation, associated budgets, and project schedules for implementation.
- b) Include a communications strategy to make sure that there is broad stakeholder involvement.

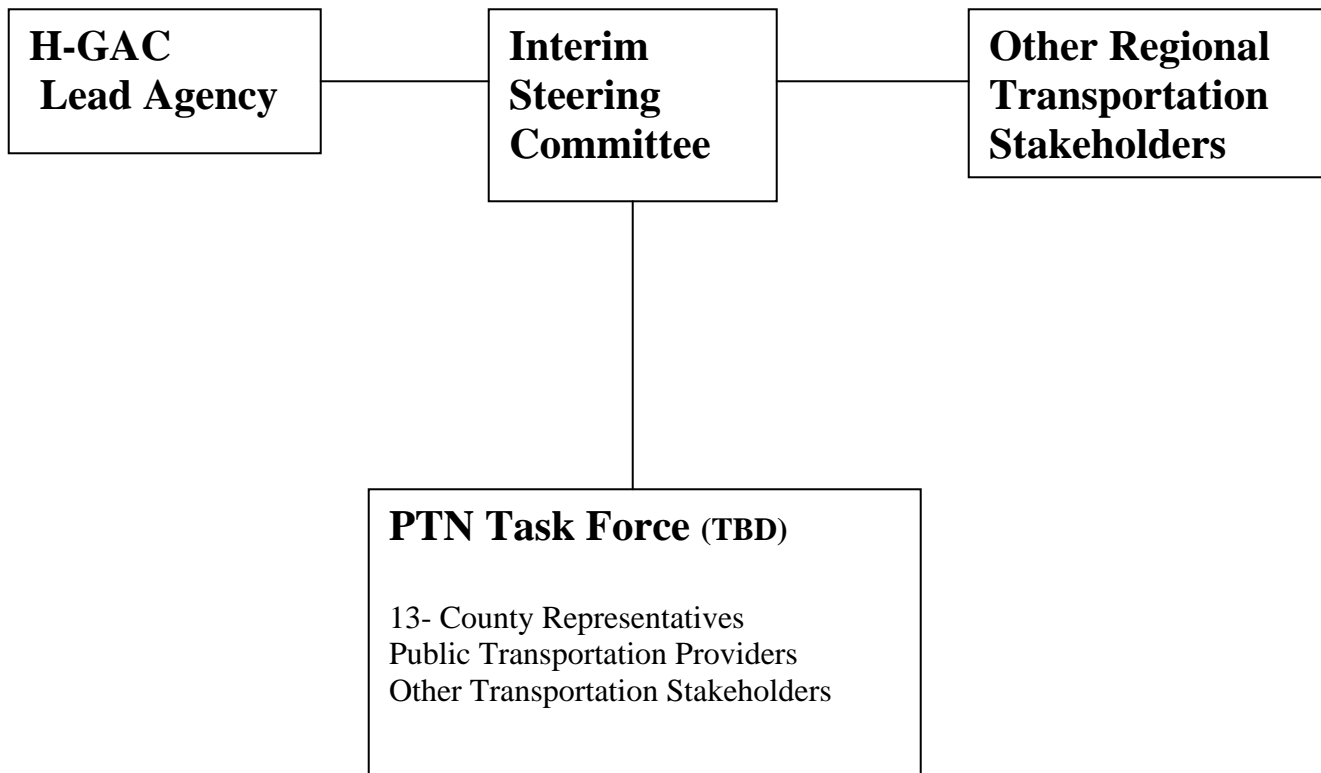
Task 7: Finalize and Submit Plan to Texas Transportation Commission (September, 2006)**Preliminary Budget Estimates (*)**

Task Description	Cost Estimates (\$)	Comments
Refine Scope of Work & Budget	1,000	TTI's Assistance TBD
1. Regional Assessment	20,000	(13 counties)
2. Goals and Objectives	2,000	With Performance Measures
3 Public Involvement Plan	10,000	
4. Coordination Planning	20,000	
5. Financial Plan Development	25,000	
6,7 Draft/Final Report	5,000	
Sub-total	83,000	Un-funded activities.
Related H-GAC Planning Activities		
Fort Bend County- Phase 2	50,000	TBD
Transit Feasibility/Mobility Plans	100,000	Galveston, Brazoria, Tri-County
Transportation Coordination Plan	50,000	Montgomery County
Transportation Provider Inventory	25,000	Web-based application.
Sub-total	225,000	Funded FY 2005-06 UPWP (PL-Funds)
Total Budget	308,000	

* These estimates will be refined as the tasks are defined more clearly in relation to the level of assistance that TTI staff will be able to provide.

The total request for new funding is \$ 83,000.

**Houston-Galveston Region
Public Transportation (PTN) Coordination
Recommended Organizational Structure¹**



¹ The Public Transportation (PTN) Coordination Task Force will be established later in the process. It is anticipated that this will be a short term Task Force with specific goals, bylaws and a sunset provision. The proposed Interim Steering Committee members are included in Appendix A.

Barriers to Coordination

Federal Barriers

At the national-level, identification of the factors that make coordination difficult to achieve has been a subject of interest for many years. Since the 1970s, a host of agencies and organizations including the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Transportation Research Board (TRB), United We Ride, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and others have published reports on the benefits and barriers of coordination. Through review of the published and online coordination literature some of the following institutional, legal and program barriers have been identified.

- Rule differences set by federal law, can legally prevent regional providers from coordination.
- Most agencies are reluctant to mix different vulnerable populations in one coordinated system due to stigma that might be attached to use.
- Adequate resources may not be available to ensure effective coordination.
- Differing matching requirements among federal programs.
- Lack of financial incentives. In small communities, transportation-disadvantaged populations may have no or partial access to specialized transportation services, and coordination of these limited services provides little or no benefit.
- Overlapping programs can mean poor overall service.
- Programs often are duplicated causing inconsistent service across the community.
- Multiple programs may result in customer inconvenience as they attempt to navigate the array of programs available.
- Reluctance to share vehicles and resources. Programs that provide specialized human service transportation have distinct requirements, such as eligibility standards, vehicle needs and insurance.

At the local and regional level, barriers have also been identified through surveys, stakeholders and community meetings. In addition, excerpts from the TxDOT Houston District Section 5310 Grant Program and other transportation programs are summarized below.

Policy/ Regulatory/ Organizational/Structural

- Differing eligibility criteria. Some programs might provide transportation exclusively for employment, not emergency health care, childcare, recreation, education or shopping.
- Limited federal and state guidance.
- Taxi Providers are governed by jurisdictions.
- Extensive monitoring and reporting requirements without administrative dollars (Section 5310 Federal Funds).
- American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance is needed relative to access to public transportation, (sidewalks, bus stops, shelters).
- Agencies feel that they can assure service quality if they “control” transportation services.
- Seamless fare medium and rates needed across region to allow coordination to work.
- Insurance and liability issues. There are no insurance standards for transporting passengers. The standards are set by participating organizations.
- Insurance Carrier restrictions against vehicle sharing.
- Inability to integrate information systems across programs.
- Lack of state leadership.
- Lack of local support and participation.
- Absence of centralized structure.

Funding

- Lack of long term sustainable funding sources to facilitate operation.

- Inadequate operational and administrative funding for transportation. There are a significant number of trip denials in both urban and rural areas due to lack of resources.
- Lack of local match.
- Need of start-up funding.
- Federal assistance is categorical or designated for specific purpose.
- Complex report requirements depending upon funding source.
- Subsidized cab fares are expensive for very low-income individuals.
- Uncertainty about cost allocation between participants and funding agencies.

Operations

- Vehicle replacements are needed for small non-profit agencies that are providing client based transportation
- Lack of coordination among current transportation providers because of different service standards, labor arrangements or other factors.
- Service not open to the public -incompatibility of client needs and characteristics.
- Demand is high for non-emergency medical trips, especially for patients who are frail, on kidney dialysis, severely impaired MHMRA patients, or clients with other forms of dementia requiring “specialty” services.
- Large geographic areas to cover.
- Cost of providing service is too expensive compared to the fare charged.
- Conflict with scheduling of riders - can’t anticipate when they will be done at the doctor office.
- No single reliable source of information about all programs available.
- Client based vehicles are not used to capacity.
- Incompatible communications equipment.
- Not enough accessible service within Harris County, especially taxis.
- Efficiency limited by de-centralized trip scheduling.
- Demand Response service does not work well for Job access or students.
- Job Access and non-work trip opportunities need to be expanded.
- Medicaid trip scheduling guidelines should be improved. It pays only for transportation to the doctors’ appointments – but not to grocery shopping.
- Operational and maintenance challenges. (Alternative fuel requirement for new vehicles).

Education

- Training needed for those transporting ADA clients.
- Education of customers to transfer and interface with MetroLIFT for longer trips. (those that have the ability to transfer)
- Uncertainty of customer eligibility/ intake process. (related to Medicaid transportation)
- Lack of information about matching fund requirements. Some federal funds can not be used as match.
- Lack of understanding about DHHS vs. TxDOT roles in transportation.
- Lack of trust. (Some organizations feel their clients would not get the same level of customer service if transportation service is provided by other organizations).

Other

- Clients/customers want a variety of benefits
- Clients/customers want to choose their own benefit whenever possible.
- Competition between agencies for available funds.

Action Items- Next Steps

Action	Summary Description	Schedule
1	Finalize Regional Inventory of Service Providers and Stakeholders	Nov.-Dec. 2005
2	Formalize Interim Steering Committee- Roles and Responsibilities	Dec. 05- Jan.06
3	Initiate development of Regional PTN Task Force	Jan.- Feb. 2006
4	Draft RFP for Consultant Assistance, coordinated with TTI staff for revised Scope and Budget-	Jan. 2006
5	Consultant Procurement Process	Feb.-Mar. 2006
6	Regional Coordination Plan Development/Refinement	Apr. -July 2006
7	Local Coordination, review, final plan forwarded to TxDOT Commission.	Sept. 2006

Appendix A- Recommended Interim Steering Committee

Houston-Galveston Regional Public Transportation Coordination Interim Planning Steering Committee

Name	Agency	E-mail	Phone
Lyle Nelson	The District	lnbrazos@livingston.net	979-822-0797
Russell Armstrong	TxDOT, Medical Transportation		956-661-5376
Darla Walton	TxDOT- Bryan District	dwalton@dot.state.tx.us	979- 778-9668
Shea Donna	TxDOT- Medical Transportation		713-514-8425
Mike Worthy	Galveston Transit	worthymik@cityofgalveston.org	
Chamane Barrow	Center of Independent Living	cbarrow@cbfl.cc	979-849-7060
Wanda Carter	TxDOT- Yoakum District	wdyer@dot.state.tx.us	361-293-4395
Paulette Shelton	Fort Bend County`	sheltonpc@co.fort-bend.tx.us	281- 341-8609
Vastene Olier	Colorado Valley Transit	cvt@intertex.net	979- 732-6281
Lydia Abebe	H-GAC	lydia.abebe@h-gac.com	713- 993-4501
Kari Hackett	H-GAC	kari.hackett@h-gac.com	713- 993-4576
Dr.Lalita Sen	TSU	lalita.sen@excite.com	713- 313-7448
Rebecca Jasso	UW-Bay Area SC	rjasso@uwtgc.org	281- 282-6031
Vernon Chambers	Harris County-HCCTP	vchambers@ghac.org	713- 313-1765
Jane Bavineau	Care for Elders	jbavineau@shelteringarms.org	713- 956-1888
Peggy Boice	United Way	pboice@uwtgc.org	713- 685-2490
Rose Hernandez	Harris County –Judge Eckels Office	Rose-hernandez@co.harris.tx.us	713- 755-4015
Connie Elston	Bay Area Transportation	cgelston@houston.rr.com	281- 333-1813
Chris Schaefer	The Friendship Center	Cschaefer@thefriendshipcenter.com	936- 756-5828
Steve Stafford	TxDOT- The Beaumont District	sstaffo@dot.state.tx.us	
Ursula Williams	H-GAC	ursula.williams@h-gac.com	713- 993-2455
Glenn Gadbois	Just Transportation Alliances	glenn@justtransportation.org	512- 294-7446
Barbara Murphy	H-GAC- Workforce	barbra.murphy@h-gac.com	713- 993-2455
Wanda Brandon	Metro	wb02@ridemetro.org	713- 739-6026
Mary Ann Dendor	Metro	md04@ridemetro.org	713- 615-7171
James Hollis	Connect Transit/GCC	JamesH@gcmhmr.com	409- 944-4446
Alvita McKinney	City of Houston – Mayor’s Office	alvita.mckinney@cityofhouston.net	713- 837-9085
Martha Mayes	Red Cross	mmayes@ghac.org	713- 313-1762
Carol Nixon	TxDOT – Houston District	cnixon@dot.state.tx.us	713- 802-5301
Lucy Lapaglia	TxDOT – Houston District	llapgl@dot.state.tx.us	713- 802-5315

Proposed Steering Committee Representation (Preliminary- Subject to Change)

	Suggested Number of Representatives
Transportation Providers	
Public	
• Urban – METRO	1
• Small Urban - Island Transit, The District, Connect Transit	3
• Rural- Colorado Valley Transit; Fort Bend County	2
Private	
• For Profit	1
• Non-Profit	1
Texas Department of Transportation	
• Medical Transportation	1
• Houston District	1
• Beaumont District	1
• Yoakum District	1
Health and Human Service Agencies (that fund or purchase services for clients)	1
Texas Workforce Boards	1
Local Governments	
• Harris County	1
• City of Houston	1
• Rural Counties	3
Other Interested Parties	
• Advocacy Groups	1
• University	1
• Customers/ Users	2
Total	23

Appendix B- Public Transportation Stakeholders/ Partner Agencies

Several public transit agencies serve the region including the Harris County Metropolitan Transit Authority (METRO), Brazos Transit System (BTS), Island Transit, Colorado Valley Transit (CVT), Gulf Coast Center (GCC) "Connect Transportation", and Fort Bend Rural Transit District.

Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO). METRO, the largest public transit agency in the region serves about 1,285 square miles in Harris County and small portions of Fort Bend and Montgomery counties. As of August 2005, METRO carried more than 371,000 average daily transit trips. METRO provides complimentary paratransit service within a 751 square-mile service area for qualified disabled passengers who cannot ride fixed-route buses. More information is available on the METRO website (www.ridemetro.org).

The Brazos Transit District. The District provides public transit services for several counties in the H-GAC region. Below is a synopsis of the services provided and the planning activities in place.

Current Services

Walker County - Public transit has been provided by the District since 1985. Current services provided are reservation demand response services. In excess of 20,000 passenger trips annually are directly provided. All vehicles comply with ADA. The District also coordinates transportation activities with The Walker County Senior Citizens Program, Tri-County MHMR and the Methodist Retirement Center. This coordination encompasses vehicle acquisition and service coordination. Currently, the City of Huntsville provides a portion of the local share when combined with local farebox receipts comprise 20% of the total operational costs.

Liberty County - Public transit has been provided by the District since 1994 in the cities of Cleveland, Liberty, Dayton and Ames. Through a Community Circulator program, approximately 30,000 passenger trips are made annually within these communities. Current coordination activities are through the Tri County MHMR. The referenced cities provide a portion of the local share when combined with farebox receipts comprise 20% of the operational costs.

Montgomery County - Public transit has been provided by the District directly since 1987. Current services are comprised of an extensive Park& Ride Commuter Program and coordinated services with Tri County MHMR and the Friendship Center. Approximately 600,000 passenger trips are provided annually in the combined urbanized and rural programs. Currently, the local share and farebox receipts comprise approximately 50% of the operational costs.

Planning Activities

In Montgomery County, a county sanctioned planning task force was formed three years ago to explore and initiate efforts to provide greater accessibility to goods and services for the citizens of Montgomery County. This group is comprised of representatives of the local governments, advocacy groups and stakeholders. Optimum participation by local funding entities and stakeholders is anticipated. HGAC has set aside funds for a transportation coordination study

within the county. The District serves on the task force and committed its established reservation/dispatch infrastructure to the process.

Liberty County

An ad-hoc committee led by Kellie Buchanan of Coastal AHEC and comprised of governmental entities, client advocacy groups and stakeholders are currently working toward a comprehensive county wide transportation program. Liberty County and cities within the county are establishing service agreements with the District for transit services.

Concerns

Local initiatives might be compromised at regional and state levels

Uncertain and/or inadequate funding at state level creates burden on local entities

Turfism.

Island Transit

Island Transit serves as a public transit agency, providing fixed-route and demand-response service for general public and the disabled/elderly population in the city of Galveston. Island Transit also operates a fixed-route trolley serving the Historic Downtown Strand district to the Seawall. Island Transit carries over 3,100 trips per day.

Connect Transportation

The Gulf Coast Center (GCC) operates a public transportation program known as Connect Transportation, that provides transportation services to the rural and urbanized areas of Galveston and Brazoria counties. Current analysis indicates that 65 percent of GCC's trips originate in the urbanized areas, while the remaining 35 percent of trips originate in the rural areas of Galveston and Brazoria counties. Most trips provide for medical and social service needs of the elderly and disabled. Connect Transit provides approximately 400 trips per day.

Two park and ride lots should be completed before the year 2007 and will be located in Pearland in Brazoria County and in Galveston County.

Colorado Valley Transit

Colorado Valley Transit (CVT) is predominately a rural provider of curbside and door-to-door demand-response service. Service is provided for medical, shopping, nutritional, social and cultural activities in Austin, Colorado, Wharton (outside the TMA) and Waller counties (inside the TMA). CVT carries approximately 300 average trips per day for Waller County.

Other Transportation Coordination Activities in the Houston-Galveston Region

Bay Area Transportation Partnership (BATP)

The BATP is one of the original Transportation Management Organizations (TMO) in the region that was established as part of the Commute Solutions program to facilitate congestion relief and ridesharing. The BATP Transit Services committee meets monthly to discuss their needs for transportation services in their community.

Fort Bend County Transportation Committee

Fort Bend County Transportation Committee, Richmond, Texas (Fort Bend County both rural and urban). This group meets quarterly or more often if the need arises to discuss the needs for public transportation in their area especially the needs for the elderly and disabled transportation. Fort Bend County is now moving toward becoming their own transit authority. Working through the Public Transportation Division they have began the process.

Montgomery County Committee

Montgomery County Mobility Committee, Woodlands, Texas (Montgomery County rural and urbanized areas). The primary focus of this group is to discuss the road construction, but discussions are also geared toward public and mass transit issues and the needs in the South Montgomery County area. One of the major issues identified was the lack of transportation to serve all the needs of the E&D community. Montgomery County Committee on Aging is the only Transportation provider in the Montgomery County area serving the needs for the elderly and disabled general public. The local MHMRA in Conroe provides limited transportation for their clients but generally just places vehicles at their group homes. They are not providing any general disabled public transportation.

Austin/Waller Interagency Council & Coordinating Group (Waller County)

The Council/Coordinating Group meets monthly in Hempstead, Texas. Participants on this Council include representatives from the Judge's office, United Way, Churches, Texana MHMR, Waller County Courthouse, and Colorado Valley Transit (CVT). Ms. Vastene Olier with CVT attends these meetings regularly to assist in the planning for transportation of the elderly and disabled in their community. Ms. Olier is a member of TxDOT Stakeholder Committee and reports on the new developments and activities going on with this committee. Ms. Olier is charged with planning and development on transportation needs for the elderly and disabled in Waller County on behalf of the Houston District Office.

Appendix C: Public Transportation (PTN) Coordination -Stakeholders Survey: Summary of Highlights

After the PTN Coordination kick-off meeting in August 2005, local transportation stakeholders were asked to complete a comprehensive questionnaire to assist the efforts to complete the regional service provider inventory and to help identify barriers to coordination. Some relevant highlights from that survey are printed below. Complete survey results will be available under separate cover.

Section 5 – Local Coordination Efforts

32. In your community, has some organization or committee been established that has been assigned responsibility to coordinate transportation among transit providers, human service agencies, and consumers?

Total Respondents – 15	<u>Response Percent</u>	<u>Response Total</u>
Yes	53.3%	8
No	46.7%	7

33. If yes to 34, please describe below:

Total Respondents – 7

- Transportation Committee of Montgomery County (2)
- Transportation Committee of Liberty County
- Harris County Transportation Coordinating Council (2)
- American Red Cross (2)
- Intermodal Committee

34. Has your organization actively participated in the planning, development, and implementation leading up to this arrangement?

Total Respondents – 12

	<u>Response Percent</u>	<u>Response Total</u>
Yes	91.7%	11
No	8.3%	1

35. In your opinion, is there sustained support for coordinated transportation planning among elected officials, agency administrators, and other community leaders? On a scale of 1-4, with “1” representing a relatively low level of sustained support and “4” representing a high level of sustained support, please check one answer.

Total Respondents – 17

	<u>Response Percent</u>	<u>Response Total</u>
1 Low Level	11.8%	2
2	47.1%	8
3	23.5%	4
4 High Level	17.6%	3

36. In your opinion, is there growing commitment among local elected officials, transit agencies, and human service organizations to coordinating human service transportation trips and maximizing resources? On a scale of 1-4, with “1” representing a low level of commitment and “4” representing a high degree of commitment, please check your answer.

Total Respondents – 16	<u>Response Percent</u>	<u>Response Total</u>
1 Low Level	12.5%	2
2	31.2%	5
3	37.5%	6
4 High Level	18.8%	3

37. Is there an on-going process for identifying duplication of transportation services, underused assets, and service gaps in your service area? If yes, please describe the process.

Total Respondents – 11

- Multi System Study 1999-2001, Project Evaluation work with Nelson Nygard
- Yes, the Task Force is investigating
- Yes, under our Section 5310 program

38. Is there a strategic plan to provide coordinated transportation? A) Does the plan have a clear mission and goals? B) Was the plan used to develop a set of realistic actions that improve coordination?

Total Respondents – 11

- Plan needs to be reviewed. Current evaluation will outline next steps
- Being developed. Work in progress
- No written plan, however meetings have been held to see what the agency could do to help with transportation coordination.
- Yes

39. What issues, if any, have your coordination efforts encountered (e.g. billing and payment, insurance, driver qualifications, etc.)

Total Respondents – 7

- Not enough local match, much money spent on roads, not enough transit resources, not enough people at the table that actually use the services in the planning process, and implementation of an actual plan.
- Keeping qualified drivers on staff – part-time pay.
- Long term sustainability – identification of funding sources. Growth.
- Not able to meet the needs, not enough staff
- No public transportation in Fort Bend County (2)
- Not enough supplies for service

40. In your opinion, what do you see as the greatest obstacle(s) to coordination and mobility in your service area?

Total Respondents – 12

- Money, territorial issues and liabilities, not enough transit resources

- Funding (2)
- Consistent funding and rulemaking
- Size of county determines next level of expansion of brokerage system
- Transportation system resources
- Equipment
- Cooperation of local officials
- More route service systems, extended hours and 7 days service
- Distance going across boundaries
- Geographical area too large

41. In your opinion, what enhancements are most needed to improve the coordination of public transit and human service transportation in your service area?

Total Respondents – 8

- Local match monies, coordination of the few local resources that are currently used by agencies for “their programs’ only, more general public that use these services involved at the planning stages and more transit resources.
- Some sort of centralization to gain efficiency. Maintain broker system, increase the number of service providers in small municipalities.
- A system in place
- Park-n-Ride
- Funding (2)
- Central coordination of available services, ability to get low cost transportation from surrounding counties to Medical Center.
- Provide more shared rides

42. If there are any other issues, concerns, or information relevant to this issue, please feel free to address them in the spaces below.

Total Respondents – 7

- Medicaid politics need to improve. Customer service and delivery are important issues too.
- This program is the first step toward coordination in the Harris County area. The outcome of the Nelson Nygard study will determine feasibility of the program.
- The Tomball area is growing along with Magnolia to the North. The need of transportation between Tomball and Magnolia is expanding. The availability of service now is non existent.
- There is ongoing need for volunteer one-on-one drivers; for those too frail to endure the length of time required for paratransit and the emotionally challenged who cannot tolerate multiple rider environments.
- Need more work for areas not covered by METRO.
- Lack of support/participation of governmental units. Taxing authorities is the greatest obstacle.

Appendix D- List of Support Letters

1. American Red Cross
2. Area Agency on Aging
3. Bay Area Transportation Partnership
4. Brazoria County Center for Independent Living
5. Colorado Valley Transit
6. Fort Bend County Judge
7. Galveston County Judge
8. Greater Houston Transportation Company
9. The Gulf Coast Center
10. Harris County Judge
11. Harris County MHMR
12. Harris County Social Services
13. Interfaith Hospitality Network, Humble Area
14. Montgomery County Women's Center
15. Senior Guidance Directory
16. Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services
17. The WorkSource- Gulf Coast Workforce Board
18. United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast
19. Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers- Southwest

Appendix E: Summary of Related Planning Activities

The Harris County Coordinated Transportation Study ²

In 1999, H-GAC commissioned a study that revealed elderly, handicapped and low income residents in Harris County without access to METRO's METROLIFT service were unable to make over 2.5 million trips for medical care, employment or other needs. The study recommended coordinating public and social service transportation programs to maximize service to those persons. As a result, in October 2003 the Harris County Coordinated Transportation Program (HCCTP) was launched as a Pilot Project. In 2004, H-GAC approved funding to expand HCCTP transportation services. The HCCTP has demonstrated significant growth in ridership, community support, a high level of customer satisfaction and increased the efficient use of vehicles and other resources.

- Coupons are the “currency” customers use to purchase services from 5 qualified transportation providers.
- Community organizations serve as the access point making them partners in marketing the program, funding, and as mobility managers for the customer, and
- Harris County, HGAC, METRO, and the City of Houston work together to support the operations of this program.

The Harris County Coordinated Transportation Program (HCCTP) provides non-emergency transportation services that fill some of the gaps within the current transportation system for people with disabilities or seniors who reside (1) in Harris County and outside of the Metro Service Area or (2) where METRO/METROLift service is insufficient or inappropriate for seniors and people with disabilities or low incomes. Some of the benefits seen so far include the following:

(1) Increasing Coordination

HCCTP increases the coordination of transportation resources through an open RFP process for qualifying the transportation providers that participate in the program. The program utilizes the vehicles, scheduling software and personnel from multiple transportation providers.

The program has multiple access points. It utilizes the relationships organizations already have with their customers. The case workers are beginning to serve as mobility managers.

(2) Promoting Customer Choice

Customers receive and use coupons to “pay for transportation.” In this transaction, they work with a mobility manager to understand how to use the program and how to make wise choices in selecting the right transportation choice for the trip(s) they need.

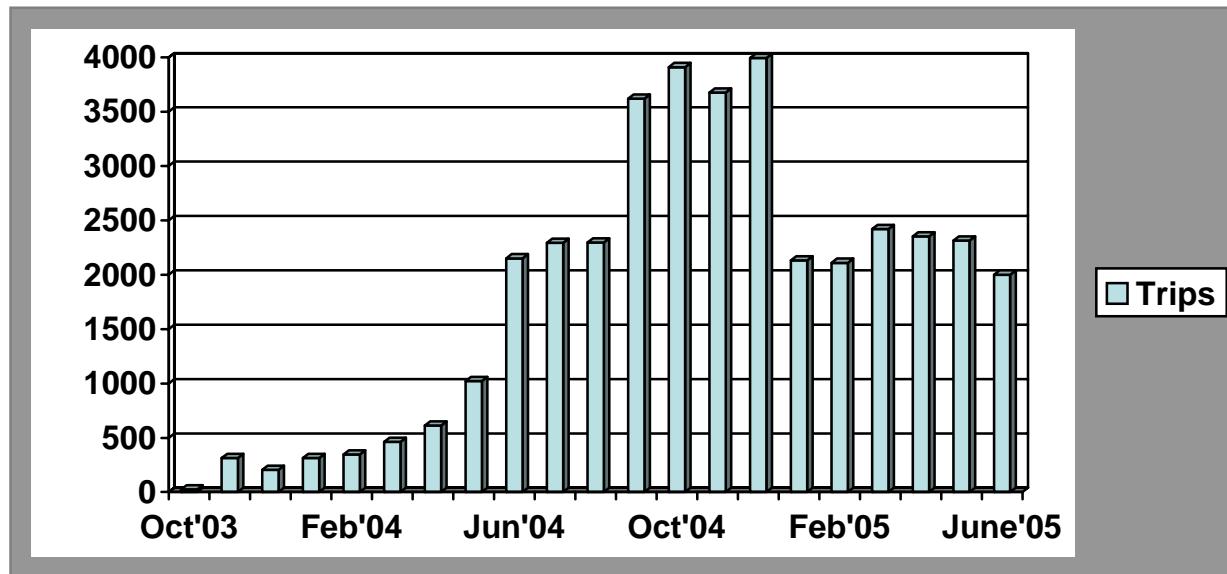
(3) Coordinating Multiple Funding Sources

Many transit agencies and transportation providers have “juggled” the reporting and funding requirements of multiple programs. HCCTP is based on a “coupon” program that has worked well in other areas. The program utilizes fare box revenue generated from ticket sales by non-profit agencies and/or private dollars as local match.

(4) Monitoring performance

² Harris County Transportation Coordination Study, Multi-Systems Inc. 2001.

HCCTP is looking at new ways to monitor efficiency of operations and costs. The Pilot Project is under evaluation by an outside consultant to identify workable methods. A web based application was recently developed to support administrative operations and improve report mechanisms. The graph below shows the monthly ridership trend which decreased after a fare increase was implemented.



NEED FOR “IN FILL” PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

In Harris County there are direct and substantial barriers to accessing public transit and human services transportation, made more acute by the region’s large size, inadequate infrastructure, finances, and/or system capacity.

- While the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) provides service to an area covering nearly 1,300 square miles, some areas receive services only during portions of the day, or lie outside of the METRO service area altogether.
- Neither “service” nor frequency of service equate inevitably to access: Three in five persons with disabilities and seniors living in Houston do not have sidewalks between their residences and the nearest bus stop with an estimated three in four (71%) living in neighborhoods without curb cuts. For the one of every two residents with disabilities and seniors who identify that they live within two blocks of a Houston METRO stop, access to critical services is often short-circuited not by the absence of a “ride” but by the trip between the front door and the bus stop.³

The costs and scope associated with transportation barriers in Harris County are substantial.

- According to the findings of a 2000 mail survey in which residents with disabilities, seniors, and low-income local consumers who had either requested or used transportation services through Houston METRO’s paratransit services, the Red Cross’ community transportation services, and/or other area human service transportation providers were

³ Jackson, Dr. Richard J. and Chris Kochtitzky, MSP, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2001. *Creating a Healthy Environment: The Impact of the Built Environment on Public Health* (Monograph), 12. Prepared for the Sprawl Watch Clearinghouse, Washington D.C.

polled, approximately three in five (59%) of those area residents surveyed reported missing medical appointments, attributing their absence to the statement “I don’t drive, and don’t have a friend/family member to take me.”⁴

- Conservative estimates indicate that there is “a significant and growing need for transportation services.” By 2005, approximately 19% of Houston’s citizens will likely face significant transportation barriers and demand for human services transportation will also increase with the “most conservative estimates of demand (ranging from) 5.034 million trips to a high of 11.2 million trips.”^{5 6}

Gulf Coast Transportation Coordination Council Activities

In FY96, Connect Transit was awarded a grant to provide a transportation coordination model in a small urban/rural environment and The Gulf Coast Transportation Coordination Council was formed. This project reached its final year of Grant funding in FY2000. Member agencies have committed to continuing work on this project. GCC continues to provide funding for the Project Coordinator. The Council consists of city and county governments, human service agencies, public and private transportation providers, H-GAC, and TxDOT. The Council members continue to meet quarterly, with Council member “Seed Groups” meeting more often and reporting activities to the entire Council at the quarterly meetings.

One goal of the Coordination Council members was to **remove obstacles and/or barriers to transportation coordination**. “Seed Group’s” were formed and these committees worked on selected projects. The most recent seed group to come out of this council is Advocacy; the purpose being to find ways to ‘advocate’ for the improvement of transportation through educational efforts. Other seed groups that have been developed over the years are: Marketing , Web Page, Fort Bend County Coordination, Brazoria County Pilot Project, Flex Van Seed Project, JARC Seed Project, CAP Seed Project, and the Safety Seed Group. Summary descriptions of some of their projects follow.

Marketing Seed Group.

The State Management review identified marketing as one of the Connect Transit Program’s weakness’. The Bay Area Transportation Partnership, (a Coordination Council member) in partnership with Connect, developed a multi-year plan for marketing and public relation services. Contracts were implemented in FY03 and included numerous public speaking engagements, development of a new logo design, development of new brochures and marketing materials.

⁴ *Technical Memorandum 4: 4-6, Transportation Coordination Model For Harris County, Prepared by MultySystems, March 2002.*

⁵ *Technical Memorandum 4, 2-17, Transportation Coordination Model For Harris County, Prepared by MultySystems, March 2002.*

⁶ *Technical Memorandum 4, Table 5.2: Estimated Program-Related Transportation Demand.*

Web Page Seed Group

In FY02 a survey was sent to the Coordination Council membership asking for input on ideas for a Connect Transit web page linking transit providers and council members. The Jesse Tree offered services to assist in the design of a web site and getting a web host for the Coordination Council. The Angleton Community Network offered a free web development program. The program was funded through a grant from the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund Board (TIFB). The Grant provided free web site development, free technical support and community web hosting. The design phase was completed and all pertinent information forwarded to the Bay Area Transportation Partnership (BATP). BATP will be responsible for finalizing the project and securing a domain as part of Connect's Marketing Agreement with them.

Brazoria County Pilot Project

Brazoria County Commissioners provided Community Development Block Grant funds to operate a pilot program known as the Brazoria County Shuttle. The Gulf Coast Center matched the funding and provided direct shuttle services five days a week. The Houston Galveston Area Council funded marketing expenses for this project which were utilized for professional flyers and newspaper advertising. The United Way of Brazoria County took on the expense of sending flyers to schools for students to take home and were instrumental in bringing Human Service Agencies into the planning and development of the project. The route stopped at eight locations beginning at 5:37 a.m. and ending at 6:36 p.m. Route stops and times were developed by human service agency members. The shuttle operated for a total of six months, with ridership increasing weekly. (Funding was not available to continue the service).

Flex Van Seed Group

Council member's representing H-GAC, Houston Metro, VPSI and TxDOT implemented a study to assess the feasibility of utilizing the existing van pool fleet to provide additional commute trips or additional demand response trips. Funding for the study was provided by H-GAC. The study assessed feasibility and indicated that development of a pilot project should be implemented.

Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC)

In partnership with Galveston Island Transit, GCC sought JARC funding to expand and enhance transit service both in GCC's two county area and in Island Transit's island service area. Island Transit utilized funding to expand routes and service hours, while GCC's Connect Transit program utilized funding to expand demand response availability and operate specialized shuttle services. (Reference Brazoria County Project and CAP Project.)

UTMB Community Access Program Grant (CAP)

Access to health care has been identified as a **major barrier** for individuals needing medical services in Galveston County. Hospital Emergency rooms were experiencing increased costs as individuals sought routine medical assistance through the ER as opposed to less expensive clinic or doctor visits. In addition, UTMB has limited parking availability for employees and patients. UTMB staff worked with Connect to increase access to clinics and physician offices in Galveston County and provided funding to develop enhanced transit services. Services include the purchase of discounted Island Transit trip tokens, increased Connect demand response service and increased Connect shuttle service from the Mainland to the Island.

Safety Seed Group

The Safety Seed Group developed and routinely publishes a training calendar inclusive of training opportunities provided by member agencies. Member agency staff and volunteers are allowed access to these training opportunities. Trainings such as Vehicle Safety and Defensive Driving, Accident Avoidance Training, Passenger Relations, Traffic Violations Procedures and Vehicle Emergency Procedures have been offered.

Transit Cost Analysis Toolkit

In Human Service Agencies, many times transit is overlooked as a cost because there does not appear to be a direct budgetary connection. Hidden costs occur, for example, as the cost of case workers using personal vehicles to drive clients, are often not considered when evaluating transit costs. In addition, many human service agencies lack the skilled personnel needed to appropriately assess and allocate costs. The Coordination Council sought and received grant funding from the Texas Health and Human Resources Commission to develop a transit cost analysis toolkit that could be duplicated and utilized by large and small human service agencies to identify and evaluate agency transportation costs. GCC agreed to be the test agency for development of the toolkit. The toolkit was finalized and published in FY03.

Fort Bend County Transit Feasibility Study

The purpose of this study was to develop an action plan to address the coordination and implementation of a public transportation program for Fort Bend County. In developing the Fort Bend County Transit Plan, five primary project goals were established by the project Steering Committee and Advisory Committee. These goals have been addressed within the Fort Bend County Transit Plan, and include:

- Assessment of Transit Needs within Fort Bend County.
- Enhancing Existing Services through Coordination.

- Creating Cost-Effective Solutions for New Services.
- Identifying Capital and Operating Funding Sources.
- Creating a Consensus-Driven Transit Strategy for the Future.

An assessment of transit needs in Fort Bend County identified lack of adequate access to jobs, education, medical service, and shopping and inadequate transit options. The existing services currently are provided in a fragmented manner through a variety of agencies. The provision of additional services may require a new organizational approach. The Fort Bend Transit Plan includes a comprehensive discussion on the organizational and management alternatives that are available to Fort Bend County. The Plan presents several potential transit mode and service alternatives. Included within the plan are “low,” “medium,” and “high’ investment alternatives that explore various investment and service level options. ***Coordination*** of transit services is essential in new service expansion and maximizing the impact of local share expenditures.

Recommendations

Potential new services presented within the operating plan and financial plan include:

- Countywide Demand-Response Services;
- Expanded Park & Ride Services and Facilities; and
- Local Circulator and Connector Services.

Other recommendations include:

- ***Coordination of Social/Demand-Response Services*** through a centralized process necessary for federal/state funding assistance
- Designation as Rural Transit District for management of Section 5310 program
- Seek grantee status from FTA to utilize Section 5307 “Large Urban” funds
- Potential creation of a Countywide Transit Authority (under enabling legislation) to provide framework for implementation of rural & urban services

A draft of the plan is available for viewing on the H-GAC Transportation homepage, and on the project website www.fortbendtransit.com .

Flexvan Initiative in Galveston-Brazoria County.

The Flex van (or flexible vanpool) Feasibility Study considered alternate uses of vans from the HGAC/Metro Vanpool program and other options to augment transit services in Galveston and Brazoria Counties. The service concept would utilize the peak period commuter vans with a paid driver to provide midday trips for other trip purposes. The concept was determined to be ***feasible*** based on the assumptions considered. "However, sufficient funding, **coordination issues** and operational challenges will need to be addressed prior to successful implementation."

2025 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

H-GAC staff evaluated some of the potential public transportation needs outside of the METRO service area as part of the 2025 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Staff initiated a Regional Transportation Needs Assessment (RTNA) process to augment the standard call for projects from stakeholder agencies in the region. Part of that assessment included a review of transit system coverage compared to groupings of transportation disadvantage populations as summarized below.

Transit Systems Service and Needs Analysis⁷

The public transportation system deficiency analyses included the following steps:

1. A review of the geographic distribution of transit routes overlaid with the locations of forecasted high density population clusters. Those locations were examined for the potential for fixed-route bus transit in areas with population densities greater than 2,000 persons per square mile. The potential bus routes in the highest density areas were modeled to estimate potential ridership and costs. The analysis showed that approximately 31% of the regional population lived in relatively high density areas more than .25 miles from an existing transit route in 2000. That percentage is estimated to increase to 37 % in 2025 based on population projections. That suggests that the potential demand for expansion of the fixed route public transportation system will increase.
2. Another examination looked at those locations with concentrations of mobility limited persons including the low income, disabled and elderly in terms of the availability of demand response (dial-a-ride) para-transit services. The results of that analysis shows some clustering of population groups that are scattered throughout the region. A sample reference map is provided below showing the distribution of zero-auto households. Chambers County does not have a public transit agency today.
3. One of the techniques used 2000 Census data with a model-based Transportation Need Index (TNI) that identifies areas of greatest potential transit need based on prior experiences in Texas.⁸

That model considers the following factors for urban and rural areas:

- Population density
- Median household income
- Minority population
- Vehicle availability (zero car household)
- Senior population
- Disabled population

For each demographic characteristic listed above a weighting factor was applied to adjust the values for the urban or rural areas.

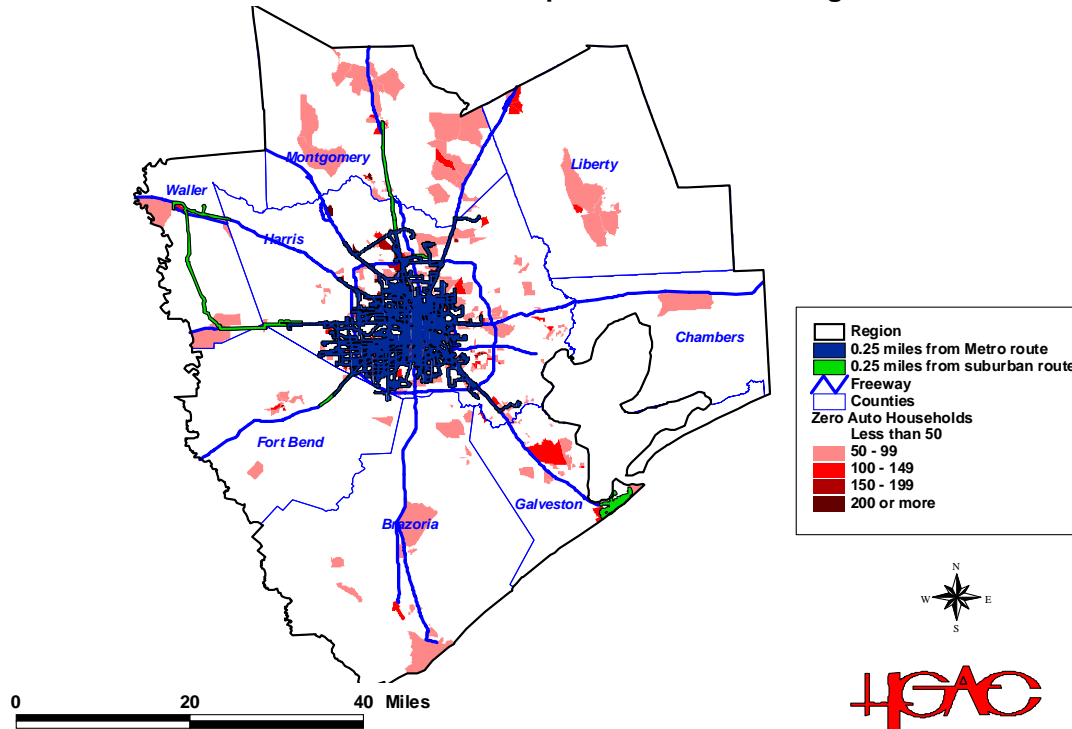
The initial TNI application was developed for the 8 counties within the MPO boundary area. The study area will be expanded to include the 13 counties in the HGAC region. The results of the TNI application are consistent with the findings of other sub-regional planning studies. Additional locations were also identified for further review.

⁷ 2025 Regional Transportation Plan-Regional Transportation Needs Assessment- Appendix B, Chapter 1.

⁸ Brazoria County Transit Feasibility Study, LKC Consultants.

Clusters of zero-auto households are identified as having a higher percentage of “No Vehicle Available” than the county average. The map below shows the highest concentrations of those households outside of the City of Houston and the METRO local bus service coverage area.

Transit-dependent Population: 2000
Households Without Vehicles Per Square Mile and Existing Transit Routes



Recommendations for Regional Transit

The Regional Transportation Needs Assessment (RTNA) process led to numerous recommendations for improvements that would have implications for public transportation coordination efforts for the transportation disadvantaged. The most relevant recommendations are summarized below:

- Implement a regional inter-connected public transportation system to meet basic mobility needs.
- Promote the development of a regional higher speed mass transit system with linkages to future higher speed inter-city express bus and/or passenger rail lines.
- Secure more funding and promote infrastructure improvements to support the increased development of non-motorized transportation including sidewalks, bicycle pathways, pedestrian bridges and compatible open spaces.

Environmental Justice Considerations

In 2000, H-GAC commissioned a series of consumer focus groups with low-income residents, community roundtable discussions, and in-depth interviews with community leaders on transportation and Environmental Justice issues. Many transportation related needs were identified and included concerns about access to public transportation when and where it was available. Additional analyses have begun to understand the travel patterns and accessibility (travel times) from various parts of the region to primary destinations by mode and trip purpose. The following Table shows areas of potential transit need based on concentrations of households with selected characteristics.

Unmet Special Transit Needs

Community	Increased Service	Paratransit		
	Zero-Auto	Poverty	Disability	Seniors
Angleton	•			•
Barrett Station	•	•	•	•
Baytown	•	•	•	•
Brookshire	•			
Cleveland	•	•	•	•
Conroe	•	•	•	•
Cut & Shoot	•	•	•	•
Freeport	•	•	•	•
Hempstead	•	•	•	
Katy	•			•
Kingwood				•
Liberty/Dayton	•	•	•	•
Magnolia	•	•	•	•
Manvel	•	•	•	•
Needville	•			
Pearland	•	•	•	•
Richmond/Rosenberg	•	•	•	•
Splendora	•	•	•	•
Texas City	•			•
The Woodlands				•
Waller	•	•	•	
Willis	•	•	•	
Winfree	•			•

• = Significant Need Present

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.