

# Action Plan

# To Improve Mobility

## Houston-Galveston Region



**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 Gulf Coast Planning Region

October 19, 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.

### **H-GAC: Overview**

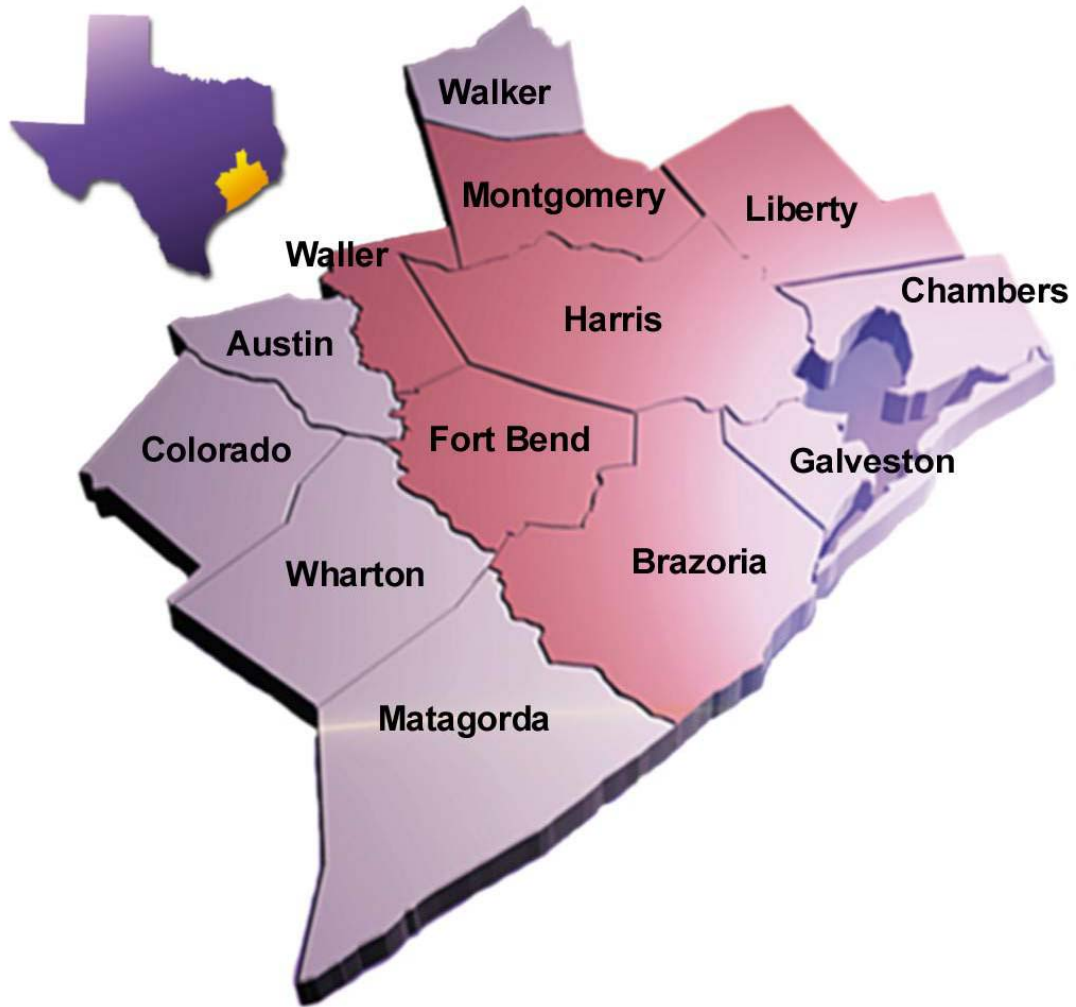
The Houston-Galveston Area Council is the region-wide voluntary association of 132 local governments and local elected officials in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning region of Texas. Its service area is 12,500 square miles and contains almost 5,400,000 people.

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. In February 2005, local government participation in H-GAC continued at a high level. Total [membership](#) stands at [132 local governments](#) - all [13 county governments](#), 105 cities, and [14 school districts](#) - and includes all major general-purpose local governments in the region.

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.

## GULF COAST PLANNING REGION



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.

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 sixteen (18) 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 provided in a separate enclosure.

## **Proposed Action Plan- 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)**

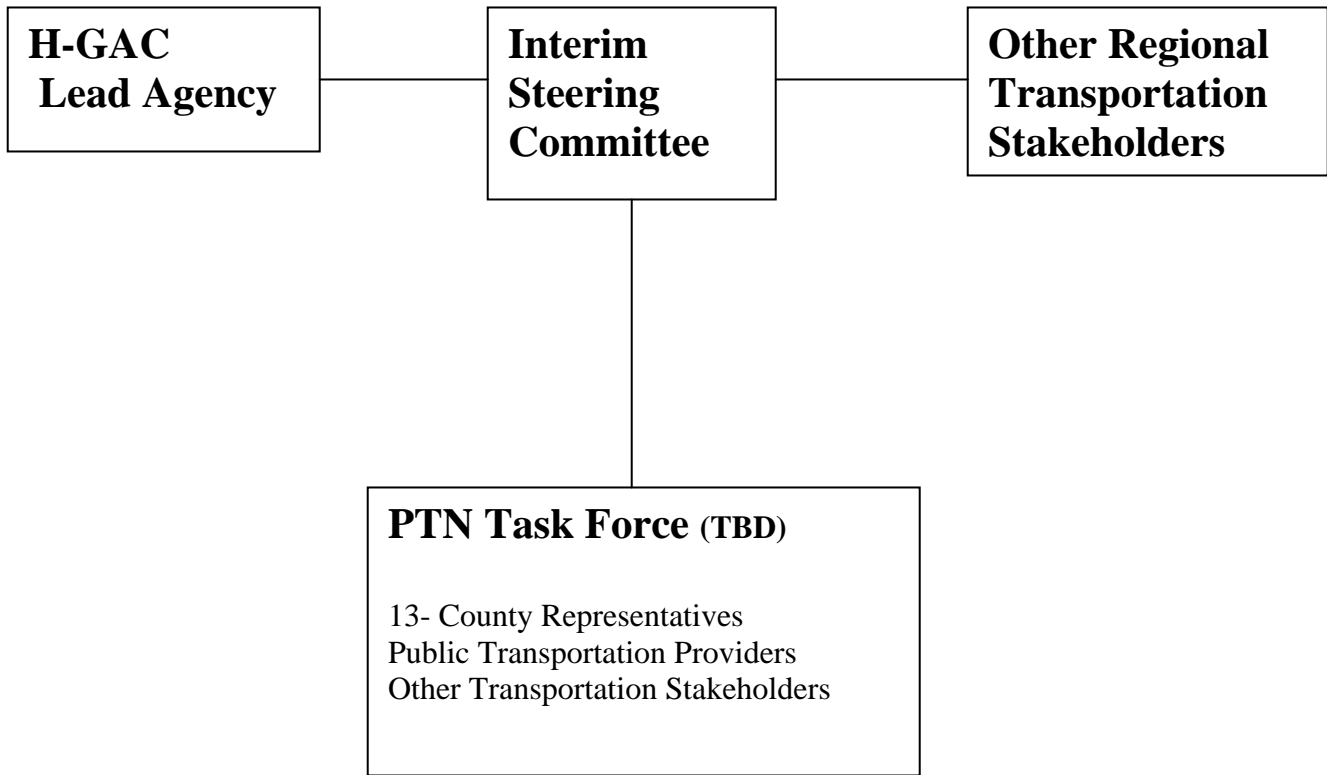
**Preliminary Budget Estimates**

<b>Task Description</b>	<b>Cost Estimates (\$)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Refine Scope of Work</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>Consultants Tasks</b>
<b>1. Regional Assessment</b>	<b>130,000</b>	<b>(13 counties)</b>
<b>2. Goals and Objectives</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>With Performance Measures</b>
<b>3 Public Involvement Plan</b>	<b>10,000</b>	
<b>4. Coordination Planning</b>	<b>40,000</b>	
<b>5. Financial Plan Development</b>	<b>50,000</b>	
<b>6,7 Draft/Final Report</b>	<b>10,000</b>	
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>260,000</b>	<b>Un-funded activities.</b>
<b>Related H-GAC Planning Activities</b>		
Harris County Pilot Project Evaluation	130,000	In process
Harris County-Continued Planning Support	60,000	
Ft. Bend County- Phase 2 Transit Plan	50,000	
Transit Feasibility/ Mobility Plans	100,000	Galveston, Brazoria, E. Harris
Transportation Coordination Plan	50,000	Montgomery County
Transportation Provider Inventory	25,000	
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>415,000</b>	<b>Funded FY 2005-06 UPWP (PL-Funds)</b>

These preliminary budget estimates will be refined as the tasks are defined more clearly. It is anticipated that as a result of refinements to the Scope of Work some of the sub-allocations of needed funds will change.

**The total request for new funding is \$260,000.**

**Houston-Galveston Region  
Public Transportation Coordination  
Recommended Organizational Structure<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> The Public Transportation 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.

## **Inventory of Constraints**

### **Regional Transportation Needs & Barriers Identified**

A sampling of public transportation related needs, barriers and challenges are summarized below.

#### **Elderly and Disabled (E&D) Transportation Needs Identified:** <sup>2</sup>

- **There are many trip denials in both urban and rural areas due to lack of resources and funding.**
- **Operational and Administrative dollars for the 5310 programs (are needed) to enable them to expand their services to meet the demanding need for elderly and disabled (E&D) transportation.**
- **Vehicle replacements (are needed) for small non-profit agencies that are providing client based transportation in their areas for E&D trips into day centers, non-emergency medical services, and other incidental trips.**
- **Coordination (is needed) among current transit providers to prevent duplication of services and open up the ridership to the general E&D public needing transportation.**
- **The 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" transportation services.**

#### **Other Public Transportation Needs and Barriers Identified by Sub-regional Coordinating Councils**

- **Insurance Carrier restrictions against vehicle sharing.**
- **More funding needed from federal sources and local matches to sustain current services and to expand them.**
- **Medicaid trip scheduling guidelines should be improved.**
- **Alternatively fueled new vehicle requirements and associated operational (re-fueling) and maintenance challenges.**

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from the TxDOT Houston District Section 5310 Grant Program FY 2005 Report (summarized by H-GAC staff).

- **Public education is needed for citizens, community leaders and elected officials about public transportation needs and the availability of services. More customer friendly brochures are needed.**
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance is needed relative to access to public transportation, (sidewalks, bus stops, shelters).**
- **Subsidized cab fares are expensive for very low-income individuals.**
- **METROLift Eligibility criteria does not recognize cognitizant disabilities. People who cannot navigate the system (mental patients, Parkinson’s disease, alzheimers) require specialized transportation.**
- **Driver training needed for those transporting ADA clients.**
- **Companions not allowed on trips.**
- **Job access and non-work trip opportunities need to be expanded.**
- **Transfer opportunities between Houston METRO (or METROLift) need to be coordinated better.**

### **The Harris County Coordinated Transportation Study <sup>3</sup>**

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

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<sup>3</sup> Harris County Transportation Coordination Study, Multi-Systems Inc. 2001.

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**

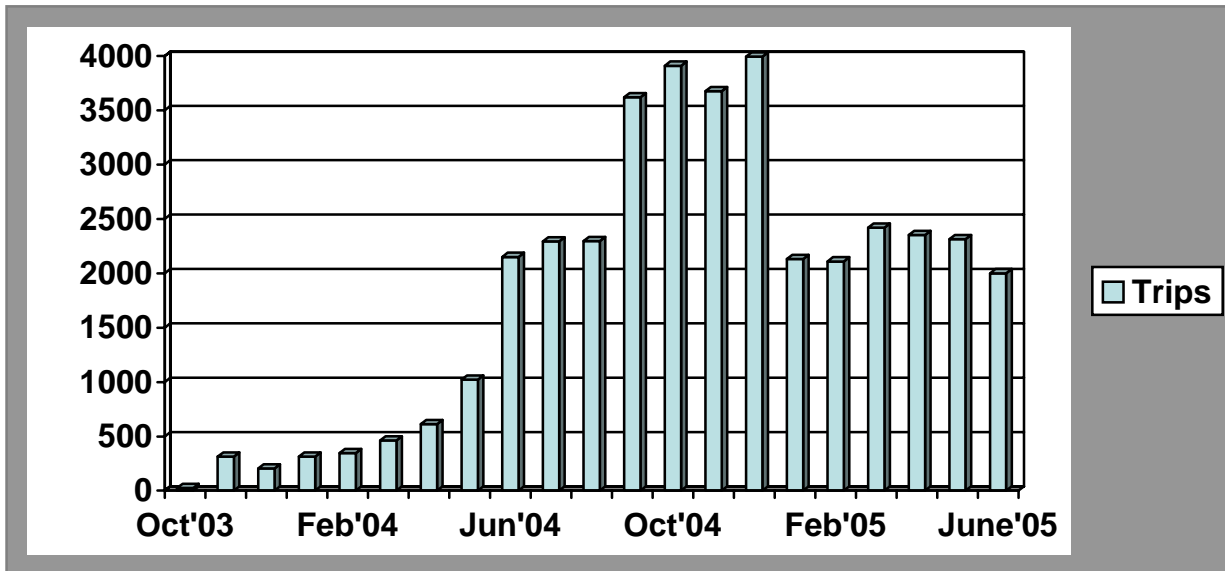
Customers receive and use coupons to “pay for transportation.” In this transaction, they work with a mobility manager to understand how to use the program and how to make wise choices in selecting the right transportation choice for the trip(s) they need.

**(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**

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 which decreased after a fare increase was implemented. The following table includes the current service providers for the Pilot Project.



## Transportation Service Providers

Provider Name	Address	Contact Name	Telephone
American Red Cross ( <i>shared ride</i> )	2700 Southwest Frwy Houston, TX 77098	Robert Anders	713 313-5529
Harris County Social Services ( <i>shared ride</i> )	9418 Jensen Drive Houston, TX 77093	Xavier Lemond	713 696-7900
Mustard Seed Ministries ( <i>shared ride</i> )	8226 Antoine Drive Houston, TX 770	Rev. Paul Landrew	281 272-5157
Greater Houston Transportation Company ( <i>taxi cab</i> )	1406 Hays Houston, TX 77009	Rudolph Bruhns	713 222-7077
Liberty Cab Company	P.O. Box 91092	Wini Brady	713 696-0127

### 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 be the absence of a “ride” but by the trip between the front door and the bus stop.<sup>4</sup>

### 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 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.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> *Technical Memorandum 4: 4-6, Transportation Coordination Model For Harris County*, Prepared by MultySystems, March 2002.

- 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.”<sup>6 7</sup>

### **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 FY00. 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.

#### **Web Page Seed Group**

In FY02 a survey was sent to the Coordination Council membership asking

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<sup>6</sup> *Technical Memorandum 4, 2-17, Transportation Coordination Model For Harris County, Prepared by MultySystems, March 2002.*

<sup>7</sup> *Technical Memorandum 4, Table 5.2: Estimated Program-Related Transportation Demand.*

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.

## **Related Planning Activities**

### **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](http://www.fortbendtransit.com).

#### **Brazoria County Transit Feasibility Study**

This study, completed in April 1995 is based on a detailed analysis of the transportation needs of Brazoria County. Transportation needs were determined by creating a demographic profile of Brazoria County, analyzing travel patterns, land uses, and traffic conditions. The data identified geographic concentrations of transit dependency, need, and demand. High areas of transit need are found in the Houston-Galveston Corridor, within the central areas of Alvin and Manvel. A Small Urban Stratum of high transit need is in the central areas of the cities of Freeport, Clute, and Angleton. The study recommended expansion of Demand-Response services as the most appropriate form of transit service to meet the needs of Brazoria County (at that time).

#### **Galveston County Transit Feasibility Study.**

The purpose of the study was to develop a public transportation plan for Galveston County and to determine if additional transit services would be needed. The project team conducted a

public survey of attitudes and perceived needs of transit in Galveston County. The survey found that the attitudes about transit are fairly positive throughout the county. Residents of Texas City/La Marque **emphasize the importance of mobility to those who lack a travel alternative (elderly, disabled and low-income).**

The study made the following service recommendations:

- Implement a fixed route bus service within the cities of Texas City and LaMarque and provide a storage and maintenance facility for that system. An inter-local agreement could be set up to handle the allocation of costs.
- Expand para-transit (dial-a-ride, demand response) services throughout the county. The services provided by Connect Transportation (by the Gulf Coast Center) could be augmented with service contracts with local taxicab companies.
- Develop a park and ride lot near the intersection of IH 45 and FM 1764 with commuter service to downtown Houston, and Galveston Island. Provide a midday shuttle from that location to downtown Galveston and UTMB.

### **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."

### **Mobility Plan Update for League City.**

That study recommended increasing the awareness of services provided by Connect Transportation, aggressively promoting carpooling or other forms of ride sharing, and begin working toward a fixed route system in small increments. Additional recommendations include Park and Ride service at a location to be determined.

### **FM 518 Corridor Access Management Plan.**

That plan concluded that transit serves a very limited sector of the transportation market in the FM 518 corridor and short-term demographic trends do not indicate any major shifts in modal choice by the population. However, in some areas along the corridor, there is moderate demand for commuter service to both Houston (Texas Medical Center) and to Galveston. Because of the low demand for transit services, the study team recommended **strengthening the curb to curb service of Connect Transportation** by making more buses available and pursuing TDM measures along the FM 518 corridor.

## **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 Analysis** <sup>8</sup>

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. <sup>9</sup>

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.

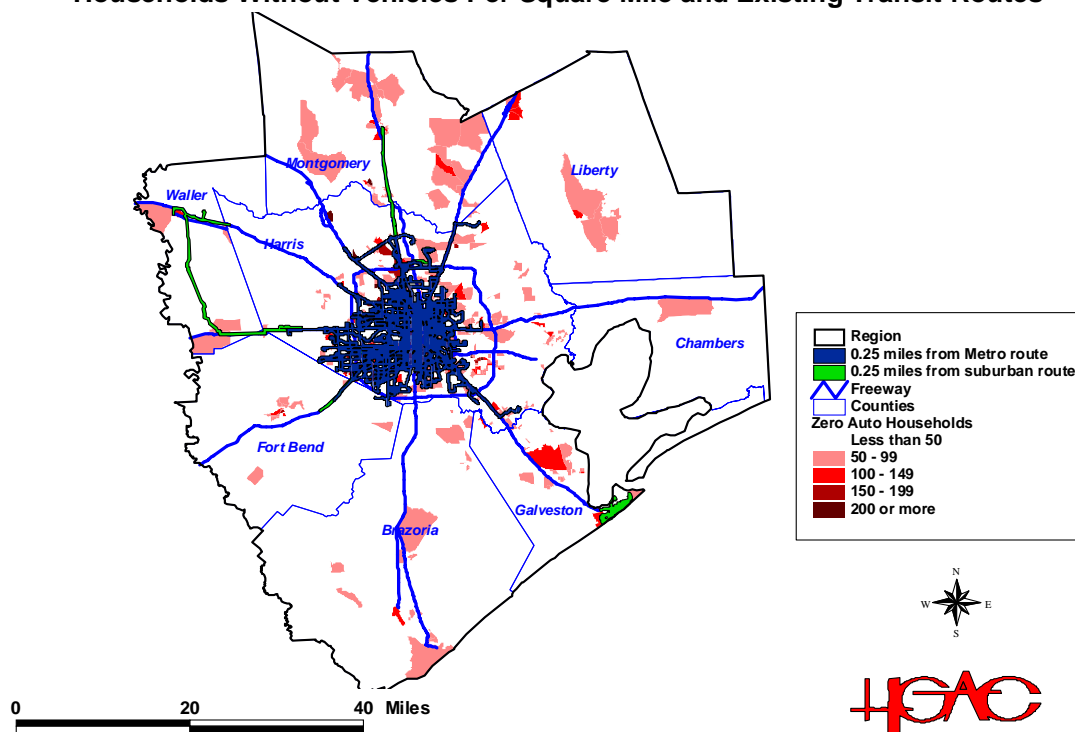
Clusters of zero-auto households are identified as having a higher percentage of “No Vehicle Available” than the county average. The map below shows the highest concentrations of those households outside of the City of Houston and the METRO local bus service coverage area.

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<sup>8</sup> 2025 Regional Transportation Plan-Regional Transportation Needs Assessment- Appendix B, Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup> Brazoria County Transit Feasibility Study, LKC Consultants.

**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.

## Appendix A- Recommended Interim Steering Committee

### Houston-Galveston Regional Public Transportation-Interim Planning Steering Committee

Name	Agency	E-mail	Phone
Lyle Nelson	The District	<a href="mailto:lnbrazos@livingston.net">lnbrazos@livingston.net</a>	
Mike Worthy	Galveston Transit	<a href="mailto:worthymik@cityofgalveston.org">worthymik@cityofgalveston.org</a>	
Paulette Shelton	Fort Bend County`	<a href="mailto:sheltonpc@co.fort-bend.tx.us">sheltonpc@co.fort-bend.tx.us</a>	
Vastene Olier	Colorado Valley Transit	<a href="mailto:cvt@intertex.net">cvt@intertex.net</a>	
Lydia Abebe	HGAC	<a href="mailto:lydia.abebe@h-gac.com">lydia.abebe@h-gac.com</a>	713 993-4501
Rebecca Jasso	UW-Bay Area SC	<a href="mailto:rjasso@uwtgc.org">rjasso@uwtgc.org</a>	281-282-6031
Vernon Chambers	Harris County-HCCTP	<a href="mailto:vchambers@ghac.org">vchambers@ghac.org</a>	713-313-1765
Jane Bavineau	Care for Elders	<a href="mailto:jbavineau@shelteringarms.org">jbavineau@shelteringarms.org</a>	
Peggy Boice	United Way	<a href="mailto:pboice@uwtgc.org">pboice@uwtgc.org</a>	713-685-2490
Rose Hernandez	Harris County	<a href="mailto:Rose-hernandez@co.harris.tx.us">Rose-hernandez@co.harris.tx.us</a>	
Chris Schaefer	The Friendship Ctr	<a href="mailto:Cschaefer@thefriendshipcenter.com">Cschaefer@thefriendshipcenter.com</a>	
Kari Hackett	HGAC	<a href="mailto:kari.hackett@h-gac.com">kari.hackett@h-gac.com</a>	
Glenn Gadbois	Just Transportation Alliances	<a href="mailto:glenn@justtransportation.org">glenn@justtransportation.org</a>	
Wanda Brandon	Metro	<a href="mailto:wb02@ridemetro.org">wb02@ridemetro.org</a>	
James Hollis *	Connect Transit/GCC	JamesH@gcmhmr.com	409-944-4446
Lucy Lapaglia *	TxDOT	llapgl@dot.state.tx.us	713-802-5315
Chamane Barrow *	Brazoria County Center for Independent Living	bccil@neosoft.com	979-849-8465

\* Recommended participants that were not present at the meeting of 10/6/05.

#### Proposed Steering Committee Representation

CATEGORY
Transit authorities and rural transit districts
Agencies that fund public transportation
Client transportation providers
Recipients 5310 Elderly/Disabled
Health and human service agencies that fund or purchase transportation for clients
Other Transportation Agencies
Elected officials, local governments (13 counties in Region)
Private or non-profit organizations that fund or purchase transportation for clients
Agencies that provide services for clients who need transportation
Advocates for those who use or need public transportation and advocates for transit coordination
Community-based organizations
Users of public transportation (urban and rural)
Interested general public
University transportation providers
Private sector providers
Non-profit and/or faith-based transportation providers (including volunteer driver programs)
Student transportation
Business community

## **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 600-square-mile area for qualified disabled passengers who cannot ride fixed-route buses.

### ***The District***

The District provides transit service for Montgomery, Walker and Liberty counties. Its commuter service, using the HOV lane on 1-45 North, connects Montgomery County to major activity centers in Houston. The service is operated from two park and ride lots located in Montgomery County (2,400 daily boardings). The District also provides a fixed-route service for the City of Cleveland resident in Liberty County (1,587 daily boardings) and has provided demand response services for Walker County for the last seventeen years (200 daily boardings).

### ***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 curb-to-curb 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: H-GAC Board of Directors Action in support of H-GAC as Lead Agency. (excerpt from board minutes).**



**H-GAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
(Action Item Summary)**

August 16, 2005 10:00 a.m.  
3555 Timmons Lane, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Conference Room A  
Houston, Texas 770027

**10a. H-GAC TRANSPORTATION PLANNING – REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION PROJECT Endorses H-GAC as the lead agency for an upcoming study on regional public transportation coordination across the 13-county area.**

In response to the Chair’s invitation, H-GAC Director of Transportation Planning Alan Clark explained that the staff is recommending that the Board act today to endorse the Houston-Galveston Area Council as the lead agency for an upcoming study on regional public transportation coordination across our 13-county area.

Using displays shown on the screen around the Board room, Mr. Clark highlighted what is known as the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Project. The populations that are most in need for specialized transportation services and public transportation services tend to be the elderly and the low-income and both of these groups are increasing rapidly. Our own region has had less growth in the older population than we have seen nationally, but it is still going to be growing very rapidly in the coming years.

The lack of transportation services, particularly outside of the metropolitan core, Mr. Clark explained, is a problem for all of our communities and leads to several problems, such as the overuse of emergency medical services, because people are unable to see their regular doctors when they need medical treatment. It can also affect access to jobs and job training. People who can’t travel and can’t shop cannot participate fully in the local economy.

This, of course, has implications for the quality of life in our communities, he emphasized. Lack of the ability to travel results in isolation of people and their inability to meet essential basic needs. And, of course, it results in dependence on others.

**When Mr. Clark had concluded his summary of the project, Judge Bilski moved that the Board authorize H-GAC’s designation as lead agency in the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Project. After her motion was seconded by Vice Chair Wiseman, hearing no discussion, Chair Westmoreland called for a voice vote, which resulted in the unanimous approval of the motion.**

**Appendix D- Letters of Support have been received from the following entities: (alphabetical listing)**

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. Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers- Southwest

**(copies of the actual letters are provided in a separate attachment).**