

Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan Update



Final Report

Houston-Galveston Area Council

September 2017

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The Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan was approved by the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee on August 17, 2017. It was accepted by the H-GAC Transportation Policy Council on September 22, 2017.



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Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The greater Houston area is the fifth largest metropolitan region in the United States. Between 2014 and 2015 the Houston region led the nation with a population increase of over 159,000: a growth rate of 2.4%. Between 2010 and 2015 more than 700,000 people and over 440,000 jobs were added to the region. Current forecasts indicate that by 2040 the region will be home to 10 million people and over 4 million jobs. Additionally, there is an increasing population of elderly persons (65 and older) which was reported at 9% of the population in 2010 and is estimated to double to 18% by 2040.¹ The combined effect of that recent growth and changes in other regional demographic factors has resulted in the need to provide more transportation options for local residents.

The regionally coordinated transportation planning process is designed to improve the mobility options for persons with disabilities, individuals aged 65 and older, individuals with lower incomes, persons with limited English skills, youth and veterans, among others. The benefits of identifying transportation related needs and gaps and addressing them helps all residents. The value added to society related to better access to medical care, employment and training opportunities for people who don't or cannot drive should also be considered. A local stakeholder stated recently that all trips begin and end as pedestrian trips and it is critical that all needed infrastructure improvements benefit the general population.

The Gulf Coast Region reported close to 90 million annual transit trips (boardings) with annual operations and capital costs close to \$855 million.² Approximately 96% of the regional transit ridership and associated investment and expenditures are under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO). All regional transit coordination initiatives and related activities should be coordinated with METRO in a proactive manner to be successful.

During his opening remarks at a local transportation symposium, Jack Steele, Executive Director of the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), pointed out the purpose of the meeting; “to talk about *partnerships* and *collaboration*, not just because partnerships are good, which they are, and collaboration is more efficient, which it is, but because partnerships and collaborations are essential in providing more transit service, especially for those areas not served by the region's major transit provider.”³

The smaller transit operators in the region face multiple challenges including the lack of a dedicated transit funding source, lower population densities than Harris County and the need to

¹ Source Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) Community and Environmental Planning at www.h-gac.com.

² Source: Federal Transit Administration National Transit Database, 2014.

³ Gulf Coast Assessment of Unmet Transportation Needs, H-GAC, October 2016.

provide longer trips for many of their customers. Preliminary estimates of the funding gap for the smaller transit operators range between \$3 million and \$16 million per year depending on federal and state funding levels. Funding priorities for larger scale transit projects are being developed through a parallel planning process that will be part of the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan.

The vulnerable population groups noted above are the core groups whose transportation needs are the special focus of the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP). However, the RCTP provides an important role in the Gulf Coast Region to focus upon the gaps, needs, best practices and challenges faced in the rapidly growing region for all its residents. The RCTP is developed by H-GAC in close coordination with the region's transit providers through the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS).

Addressing transit gaps and needs requires four distinct strategies. First, consistent with the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), is the need for **broad regional connectivity** of transportation services along major travel corridors. Second is the development of **new and innovative local transit services** in urban as well as rural locations that are currently unserved or underserved. Third is the continuous **improvement and expansion of existing services** by current transit and human service agencies. Finally, is the enhancement of **coordination between adjacent agencies** to build coordinated services at the sub-regional level.

To implement those strategies, "best practice" examples of partnerships and collaboration between transit agencies in the Gulf Coast region were highlighted by Texas Transportation Institute researcher, Linda Cherrington and include the following:

- Southern Brazoria County Transit
- Woodlands and the City of Conroe- Conroe Connections
- METRO and Harris County Transit (HCT) Baytown Park and Ride
- HCT- East Harris County and the City of Baytown
- Fort Bend Express
- Island Transit and Gulf Coast Center Connect Transit
- METRO Star Vanpool⁴

Rapid continued growth in the Gulf Coast Planning Region (especially in the Urban and Suburban Counties) increases the need for transit service. It places great stress upon existing transportation services and increases demand for new transit services. Funding is stretched further as needs increase beyond currently-available resources. Existing funding is inadequate to meet current transit needs in future years.

⁴ Power of Transit Symposium, H-GAC, June 2016

“We’re not going to be able to build highways and roadways fast enough to reduce the congestion we already have, much less accommodate the growth that is coming” stated Lex Frieden, a member of the METRO Board of Directors, during a recent RCTP panel discussion.

Improving transit service for the vulnerable populations listed above also improves transit service for the general population. Most seniors and persons with disabilities in cities with fixed route service travel by bus (or rail) if they are ambulatory, rather than by paratransit or dial-a-ride service. As mentioned in the RCTP agency survey of public transit and human service providers, the two greatest needs are for additional funding and expanded fixed route bus service. Designing solutions to address regional mobility problems should consider fixed route bus service as a primary alternative that may have a lower per-passenger cost with a higher volume of ridership than demand responsive services.

A recent regional transportation opinion survey revealed some interesting results concerning needs and attitudes toward transit by the public within the region. Among the over 2,000 respondents throughout the region who participated, 81% supported the addition of transit services in areas that do not currently have them. When questioned regarding the need for additional local revenue to fund general transit service, 79%, either strongly or somewhat favored that option. Additional funding for commuter rail was either strongly or somewhat favored by 76% of respondents, more funding for regular bus service by 72%, and additional funding for park and ride service by 77% of those who answered the survey. While responses were slightly more favorable in Harris County, all areas of the region expressed significantly positive sentiments towards transit.⁵

This report includes several recommendations to address identified transit service gaps. The recommendations are based on transit needs that include factors such as: median household income, senior population, persons with disabilities, households without automobiles and population density.

Among the primary recommendations emerging from the gap analysis were the following:

- Development of additional revenue sources for transit;⁶
- Enhanced regional and intercity connectivity to improve mobility for all riders in travelling to and between locations throughout the Gulf Coast Region;
- The implementation of new transit services in communities that have no or relatively limited transit services such as: Alvin, Pasadena, Channelview, Chambers County, Liberty County, Waller County and Walker County/Huntsville;
- New transit in areas of growth and emerging demographic change such as League City, Webster and other Bay Area communities straddling Harris and Galveston Counties;

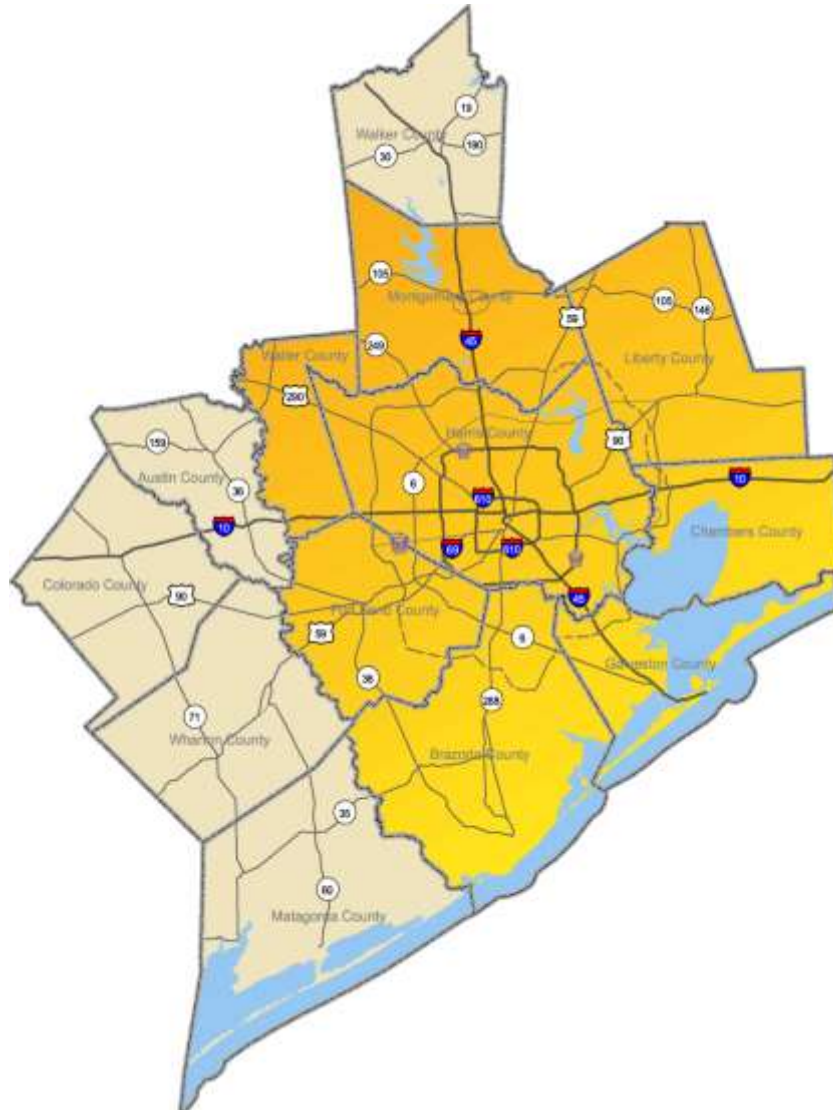
⁵ Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment Survey Conducted by Community Development Strategies (CDS) for H-GAC (March 2017)

⁶ For more details see the RCTP Financial Plan, Appendix G.

Mission Bend, Four Corners, Missouri City and Stafford in northern and eastern Fort Bend County; and communities in western Harris County, specifically the Highway 6 corridor north of the Barker/Cypress Reservoir.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires each state to engage in the development of a regionally coordinated transportation planning process every five years. The Texas Department of Transportation-Public Transportation Division (TxDOT-PTN) leads that process for the 24 regions throughout the state of Texas that results in coordinated transit plans in each region. TxDOT Region 16, the Gulf Coast Planning Region, is comprised of 13 counties: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller and Wharton. See **Map 1**.

**MAP 1
13- COUNTY GULF COAST PLANNING REGION**



I. INTRODUCTION

Rapid growth has and continues to bring dramatic changes to the Gulf Coast Planning Region. The expansion of transportation infrastructure and services has not kept pace with the region's economic growth, exacerbating the number of residents with limited access to transportation services and increased congestion on regional roadways.

According to the 2015 Kinder Survey the biggest problem facing people in the Houston area today is traffic noted by 28% of respondents. Over the past three years, traffic has gotten worse in Houston. The percentages of respondents agreeing with that statement increased from 53% in 2009 to 65% in 2015. The best long term solution to the traffic problem is transit according to 40% of respondents in 2009 and 44% of respondents in 2015.

Preparing a plan that focuses on the needs of persons with disabilities, individuals over 65, persons with low incomes, youth, Limited English Proficiency and veterans is challenging in the current and emerging population growth environment. Not only are the populations of the groups listed above expanding, but demographic trends indicate the expansion is occurring outwards from the urban core, where fewer transportation services are available.

H-GAC staff, working with RTCS stakeholders and coordinating with various residents, have developed a relevant plan for the difficult and dynamic environment that the Gulf Coast Planning Region faces. The Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP) seeks to address both challenges to coordination and the many regional transit gaps by recommending changes to the current regional transit paradigm in several ways:

- First, by enhancing regional connectivity wherever possible.
- Second, by increasing local coordination in human services transportation and transit services to create a more sub-regionally connected system. Given the large geographic size and population of the Gulf Coast Planning Region, good sub-regional connections are valuable.
- Third, by closing the most significant of the transit gaps within the region. Some have existed for several years; others are relatively new and a product of rapid growth.
- Fourth, by improving the level of service and span of service of existing providers.
- Finally, by identifying additional funding. Additional and new sources of funding need to be leveraged for all the above initiatives to see progress in more than the most marginal of results.

Representatives of transportation stakeholder and human service organizations serve on the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) to the H-GAC Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The RTCS is the steering committee for the development and coordination of activities for the RCTP. The goals of the RTCS reflect the goals of the RCTP which are to, first

improve the delivery and scope of public transportation service in the Gulf Coast Planning Region; and second to generate efficiencies in operation that can lead to increased levels of service and addressing of service gaps.

While all elements of the study are important, the core of the RCTP analysis includes the Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis in identifying the needs for a better coordinated and pragmatic solution to the challenges faced in the coming years by the Gulf Coast Region.

H-GAC staff and the RTCS have worked together on developing and implementing a multi-faceted approach of outreach, survey research, analyses and recommendations in developing the 2016-2017 Gulf Coast Region RCTP. Among the steps taken in community outreach are the following:

- Use of the Ride the Gulf Coast Website- Community Transportation Suggestion Box to gather comments from individuals by email;
- Extensive use of a professional focus group study which included all categories of vulnerable population groups previously identified;⁷
- Hosted “The Power of Transit” Symposium in June 2016 which included 40 in-person and 117 on-line participants;
- Conducted a scientific public survey of transit needs and sentiments within the Gulf Coast Region with over 2,000 randomly selected telephone responses received regionwide in addition to several hundred online responses.
- Coordination of seven public meetings in June 2017 for the public to review and comment on the Draft Final Report. A summary of that public outreach effort is provided in RCTP Appendix I Public Outreach- Phase Two Report.

Completion of the RCTP and moving forward with the plan require these steps authorized by the RTCS:

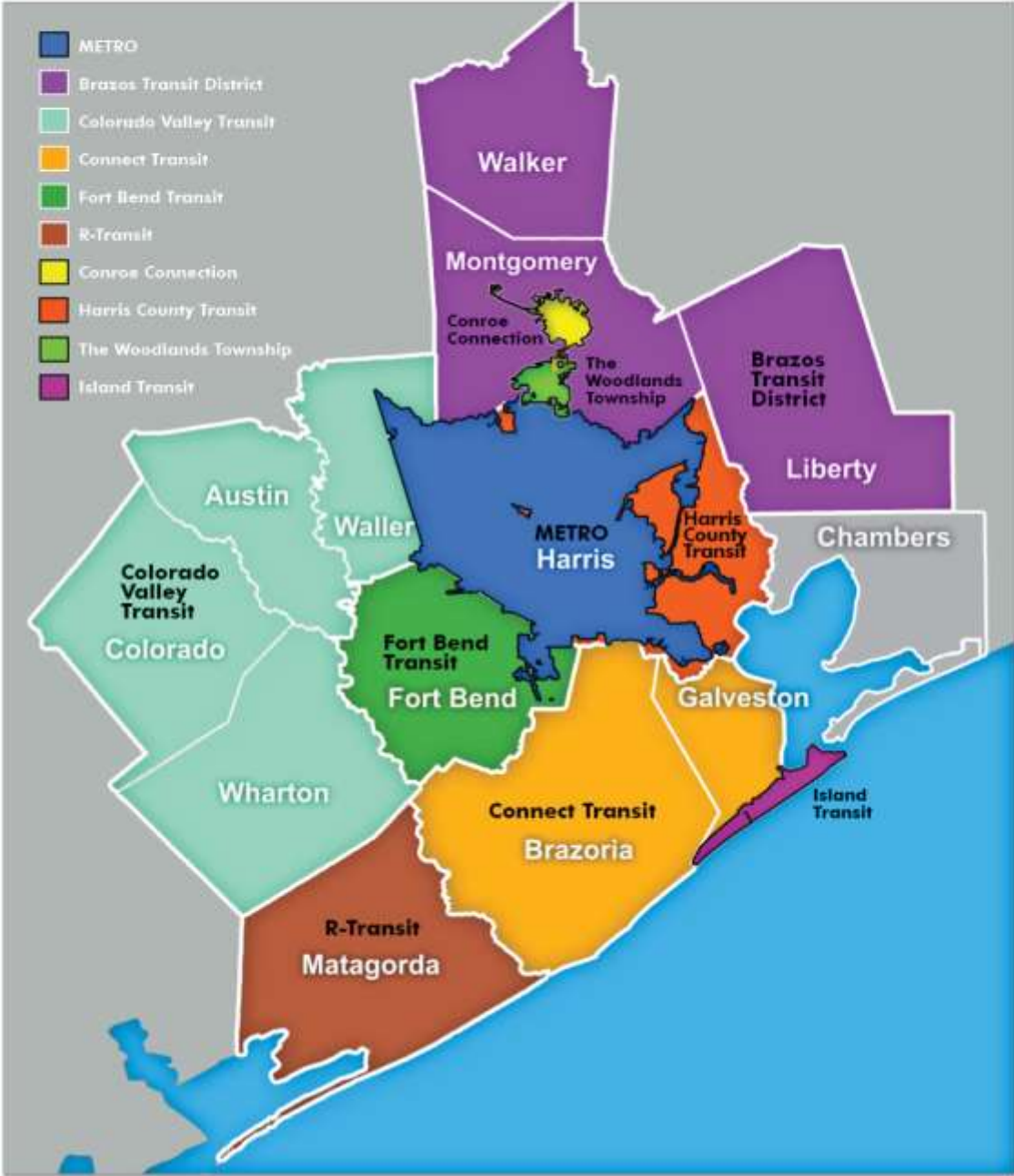
- Encourage outreach among local leaders and policymakers to address existing gaps;
- Foster public-private partnerships to enhance service levels within the Gulf Coast Planning Region;
- Develop, where possible, new local revenue sources to enhance service or leverage federal funds;
- Boost regional and sub-regional efforts at coordination and service development that may emerge at the grassroots level;
- Maintain and strengthen the existing public transportation alliance;
- Work towards hiring a Regional Mobility Manager to foster greater regional coordination;
- Continue efforts towards a seamless Regional Fare Policy;
- Initiate a Regional Shared Maintenance Program;

⁷ RCTP Focus Groups were facilitated by the United Way Nonprofit Connections for H-GAC, August 2016.

- Complete efforts towards a regionwide transit information network using Google Transit;
- Develop a Local Match Fund similar to the Transit Worker Initiative that was previously administered through the H-GAC Local Development Council;
- Create baseline public transportation services including the development of a Regional Volunteer Driver e-Voucher Program.

This report is organized according to the outline provided by the TxDOT-Public Transportation Division for the development of similar coordinated plans statewide. Within this document are several summary reports which include excerpts from larger documents which are listed as RCTP Appendices. Those appendices contain more details about the specific topics and are available under separate cover. Electronic copies of all RCTP documents will be available on the H-GAC website for downloading and distributed through public meetings. Printed copies of documents will be made available upon request to H-GAC. **MAP 2** shows the primary service areas for the largest transit service providers in the Gulf Coast Region.

**MAP 2
LARGEST TRANSIT PROVIDERS IN THE GULF COAST PLANNING REGION**



II. TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES SUMMARY⁸

Section II comprises the inventory component of the RCTP report. It gives the framework of information requested by TxDOT that outlines providers within the Gulf Coast Planning Region. H-GAC has conducted extensive survey research and worked with an array of providers to develop the list. Included among service delivery entities are transit, human and social service providers. More details are available in the Transportation Resources Inventory Report.

1. TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS

The Houston-Galveston Area Council conducted a regional survey of transportation providers to create an inventory of services available in the Gulf Coast Region and to better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with the delivery of public transportation for priority populations that include persons with disabilities, individuals aged 65 and older, individuals with lower incomes, persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), children and veterans. The survey covered agencies and organizations that provide public fixed route and demand response services, as well as those providers that offer transportation services to the priority population through private, non-profit, community-based organizations, health and human services agencies, workforce, and other similar organizations. Out of the 184 organizations that were invited to participate in the survey, 60 organizations responded. This section is limited to the agencies for which accurate information was obtained. Greater details on each provider are available in Appendix D.

This inventory of transportation providers in the Gulf Coast Region is organized as follows:

- **Client-Focused Services** – services provided to clients of human service agencies and programs, including private, non-profit community-based organizations, health and human service agencies, workforce agencies, and municipal programs targeted to specific client groups.
- **Public Transportation Providers** – operators of fixed-route, flex-route, and demand-response transportation services that are open to the public.

A. CLIENT FOCUSED TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Non-Profit Organizations

1. **Katy Area Ride Service (KARS):** KARS is a private non-profit organization which provides demand-response services to individuals 65 years and older, persons with disabilities, and veterans who live at or near the City of Katy, Texas. The trips are provided by volunteers who use their own cars. KARS however also charters taxicabs to

⁸ The complete Transportation Resources Inventory Report is available under separate cover as Appendix D to the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan.

augment the services provided by volunteers. Annual trips provided through KARS has driven 150 seniors on 6,000 trips and the request grow daily.

Contact: Kathie Gerritzen, Director
Phone: (832) 773-8645
Address: P.O. Box 1062, Katy, TX 77492
Agency Website: www.karskaty.org

2. **Mounting Horizons Inc. (MHI):** MHI is a private non-profit organization that provides demand-response and subscription service to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, and individuals with lower income who live in the Harris, Galveston and the surrounding counties. The service is provided Monday – Friday from 7 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. MHI mission is to stimulate renewal and development of communities by providing programs in education, community restoration, independent living and health and human services.

Contact: Perry Hunter
Phone: (713) 510-8755
Address: 5600 NW Central Drive, Suite 250, Houston, Texas 77092
Agency Website: www.mountinghorizons.org

3. **Interfaith of The Woodlands:** Interfaith of The Woodlands is a private, non-profit agency which provides demand-response transportation by purchasing service and through volunteer drivers. This service is available to individuals 65 years and over who are enrolled in the program and reside in South Montgomery and Northern Harris Counties. Interfaith provides curb to curb, door to door, or escorted round-trip transportation services to local health care appointments, grocery stores, and social activities. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contact: Lucy Gomez, Director of Program and Services
Phone: (832) 615-8208
Address: 4242 Interfaith Way, The Woodlands, Texas 77381
E-mail: lgomez@woodlandsinterfaith.org

4. **BrightStar Care Houston/The Woodlands:** BrightStar Care Houston/The Woodlands is a public (Federal/HHS) agency which provides demand-response services to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, veterans, and the LEP population. The service area includes the City of Houston, Texas Medical Center, the City of Conroe-Woodlands area, and Northern Harris and Montgomery Counties. Hours of operation are Monday – Sunday, 6:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.

Contact: Andi Horger, Administrator
Phone: (281) 367-7827

Address: 8505 Technology Forest Place, Suite 502, The Woodlands, Texas 77381
Agency Website: <http://www.brightstarcare.com/north-houston-the-woodlands/>

5. **Salvation Army:** The Salvation Army is a public (Federal/State/HHS) agency which provides fixed route, after school program service, as well as contract transportation for field trips to individuals 65 years and over, children and youth, persons of low-income and the general public. The service area for the Salvation Army transportation program covers the greater Houston metropolitan area. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contact: Patrick Mouton, Branch Director
Phone: (713) 695-3388
Address: 2600 Aldine Westfield, Houston, Texas 77093
Website: www.salvationarmyhouston.org

6. **City of West University:** The City of West University is a public, government agency which provides transportation by appointment only to individuals 65 years and over who reside within the city limits.

Contact: Toby Brooks, Manager
Phone: (713) 662-5897
Address: 6104 Auden, Houston, Texas 77005
Email: tbrooks@westutx.gov

7. **Area Agency on Aging:** Area Agency on Aging is a public, government agency and part of a nationwide network of agencies that coordinate supportive services for individuals 60 years and over, as well as for their caregivers, where applicable. The services they provide include providing information, referrals, and assistance, congregate and home delivered meals, transportation, legal advice, care coordination, in-home visitation, health maintenance services and more.

Contact: Debroah Moore, Bureau Chief
Phone: (832) 393-4410
Address: 8000 North Stadium Drive, Houston, Texas 77054
Email: Beverly.brown@houstontx.gov

8. **Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) - Area Agency on Aging:** The Area Agency on Aging Department within H-GAC provides a variety of services that includes contracting for demand-response services for individuals 60 years and over who live outside of Harris County and within the H-GAC region. Hours of operation are Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contact: Curtis M. Cooper, Manager

Phone: (713) 627-3200

Address: P. O. Box 22777, Houston, Texas 77227-2777

Email: Curtis.cooper@h-gac.com

9. **Heritage Hall Senior Center:** Heritage Hall Senior Center is a public, government agency which provides transportation for meal deliveries, shopping and social transportation for individuals 65 years and over, veterans, LEP population, and persons of low-income. The service area includes the Houston Metropolitan area. Hours of operation are Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contact: Elizabeth Flores, Director

Phone: (713) 675-4487

Address: 1025 Oates Road, Houston, Texas 77029

Website: www.cityofsanjancitocity.gov

10. **Medical Transportation:** Medical Transportation is a private, non-profit agency which provides ambulatory non-emergency related transportation services to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, persons of low-income, and persons with limited English proficiency in the Greater Houston metropolitan area. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 5:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contact: Javier Hidalgo

Phone: (832) 434-1721

Address: 12531 Lancelot Drive, Houston, Texas 77031

E-mail: javiemedicaltransportation@gmail.com

11. **Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare:** Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare is a government agency which provides mental health services to adults and children along with services to individuals with developmental disabilities. These services include case management, medication management, skills training, and substance abuse treatment. Limited transportation is provided to clients as a last resort. Service areas include Liberty, Montgomery, and Walker Counties. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 7:30 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contact: Catherine Prestigovanni, Director of Strategic Development

Phone: (936) 521-8418

Address: 1506 FM 2854, Conroe, Texas 77304

E-mail: millem@tcbhc.org

12. **American Red Cross** – American Red Cross is a private, non-profit agency which provides non-emergency medical transportation to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, persons of low-income, and LEP population. Service areas include Harris and Fort Bend counties. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contacts – Steve Atchison, Director of Transportation Services

Phone:(713) 313-1762

Address: 2700 Southwest Freeway, Houston, Texas 77098

E-mail: steve.atchison@redcross.org

13. **Northwest Assistance Ministries** – Northwest Assistance Ministries is a private, non-profit agency which provides social service programs such as: Meals on Wheels, Senior Center, Children’s Health Clinic and limited fixed route transportation services to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, persons of low-income, children, general population, and LEP population. Service areas are limited to Northwest Harris County within 6 miles of zip code 77090 of congregate senior center. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contacts – Grace Jackson, Senior Service Director

Phone:(281) 885-4628

Address: 1555 Kuykendahl, Houston, Texas 77090

Agency Website: www.namonline.org

14. **HK Express Transit Service** – HK Express is a private, non-profit agency which provides transportation to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, veterans, persons of low-income, and LEP population. Service areas include Harris and Galveston counties. Hours of operation are Monday – Saturday, 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. and Holidays, 6:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Contacts – Larna Brown, Director

Phone:(832) 574-4348

Address: 957 Nasa Parkway, Suite 333, Houston, Texas 77058

E-mail: admin@texastranspor.com

Privately-Operated Transportation Services

1. **Houston Transportation Services, dba Lone Star Cab Company:** The Lone Star Cab Company is the largest cab company in the region and provides demand-response and ridesharing services to the public in the Houston metropolitan area, including counties adjacent to Harris County.

Contact- Ricky Kamins, Chief Operating Officer

Phone: (713) 880-9002

Address: 5825 Kelly Street, Houston, TX 77055

E-mail: rickam5327@aol.com

2. **Lone Silver Transportation Non-emergency medical transportation:** Lone Silver Transportation is a private for-profit transportation agency which provides fixed route and

demand-response medical transportation service to the public. Their service area includes Harris, Galveston, Fort Bend and Brazoria counties. Hours of operations are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 5:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contact: Amy Wingate, Office Manager

Phone: (832) 803-5652

Address: 6401 Bingle Road, Suite 210, Houston, TX 77092

E-mail: amywingate@live.com

Website: www.lonesilvertransportation.com

3. **AFC Transportation (AFC):** AFC is a private, for-profit transportation provider which provides service to the public, corporate and government groups. AFC provides service Monday – Sunday, including holidays, from 5:00a.m. until 10:00 p.m.

Contact: John Ferrari, VP

Phone: (713) 988-5466

Address: 15734 Aldine Westfield Road, Houston, TX 77032

E-mail: john@afchouston.com

4. **MyMediTransit.com.** MyMediTransit.Com is a private, for-profit transportation provider which services 33 counties in Texas. MyMediTransit.com provides demand response, ridesharing (carpooling), and shared rides for individuals 65 years and older, persons with disabilities, veterans, LEP individuals, and the public. Trips supported by this service include medical, grocery store, pharmacy and various other transportation trips. The service operates from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

Contact: Donald Rawls, Manager

Phone: (832) 683-4472

Address: 16151 Cairnway Drive, Suite 106, Houston, Texas 77084

Website: www.mymeditransit.com

5. **Paler Transportation LLC:** Paler Transportation LLC is a private, for-profit agency which provides fixed route and ridesharing services to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, veterans and persons of low income. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 5 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contacts: Hernand Paler

Phone: (281) 499-9110

Address: 13955 Murphy Rd. Suite, Houston, Texas 77477

6. **Integrity Transportation Service:** Integrity Transportation Service is a private, for-profit agency which provides fixed route and subscription services to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, and persons of low-income. Their service area includes

Harris, Brazoria and Galveston counties. Hours of operation are Monday – Saturday, 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. and Holidays, 5 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contacts – Stevette Walton, Owner/Director

Phone:(281) 763-7592

Address: 6923 Steams Street, Houston, Texas 77021

E-mail: mlargroup@gmail.com

- 7. Bryant Transportation Service:** Bryant Transportation is a private, for-profit agency which provides demand response, ridesharing and subscription services to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, children and youth, persons of low-income and the general public. Their service area includes Harris, Fort Bend, Galveston, Montgomery and Waller Counties. Hours of operation are Monday – Sunday, 5:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. and Holidays, 5 a.m. until 10:00 p.m.

Contact: Michael Bryant, Owner

Phone: (832) 881-7852

Address: 7815 Bowen Street, Houston, Texas 77051

Email: bryanttransport@att.net

- 8. Agape Medical Transport:** Agape Medical Transport is a private, for-profit agency which provides fixed route, demand response, ridesharing and subscription services to individuals 65 years and over, persons with disabilities, and persons of low-income. Their service area includes area within Harris and Montgomery Counties. Hours of operation are weekdays, Monday – Friday, 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.

Contact: Ed Harris, Owner

Phone: (832) 289-1857

Address: 11359 Harbor Breeze Drive, Houston, Texas 77356

E-mail: getedharris@gmail.com

- 9. American Medical Response of Texas:** American Medical Response of Texas is a private, a private, for-profit agency which provides ambulance transportation service to the general public. The service area includes Houston and the surrounding cities. Hours of operation are 24 hours and 7 days a week.

Contacts –Kevin Tipton, General Manager

Phone:(713) 741-7474

Address: 5405 Consulate Plaza Drive, Houston, Texas 77032

Website: www.amr.net

- 10. Alamo Bus Service:** Alamo Bus Service is a private, for-profit agency which provides demand-response and ridesharing transportation to children using school buses. The service area includes City of Houston and other cities of Harris County.

Contact: Valerie Guevara, Manager
Phone: (713) 643-7788
Address: 7815 Bowen Street, Houston, Texas 77051
Website: www.alamobusservice.com

11. **Corporate Services International (CSI):** Corporate Services International is a private, for-profit agency which provides private charter bus service and shuttle bus services to the general public. Their service area includes destinations within the State of Texas and Louisiana. Hours of operation are Monday – Sunday, 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. and Holidays, 7 a.m. until 10:00 p.m.

Contact: Alex Nasser, Director
Phone: (713)647-6906
Address: 5701 SW Freeway, Houston, Texas 77057
E-mail: alex@csidmc.com

12. **Amera Solutions:** Amera Solutions is a private, for-profit agency which provides fixed route medical transportation services to the general public. Their service area includes the Cities of Houston, San Antonio, and Austin Texas. Hours of operation are Monday – Friday, 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Contacts –Administrator
Phone: (281) 872-6400
Address: 11601 Shadow Creek Parkway, Suite 111-225 Pearland, Texas 77584
E-mail: amera@amerasolutions.com

B. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS

Direct Recipients of Funding from FTA

This section provides profiles of transit services listed in the Texas A & M Transportation Institute (TTI) inventory for public transportation providers within the Gulf Coast Planning region but also includes profiles for Harris County Transit and the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) which were both covered by the transportation inventory survey conducted by H-GAC. There are nine agencies involved in operating and/or planning the transit services for the area. They include:

- Brazos Transit District
- Colorado Valley Transit District
- Fort Bend County Transit
- Galveston County Transit District (GCTD) Island Transit
- Gulf Coast Center (GCC) Connect Transit
- Harris County Transit

- Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO)
- The City of Conroe, Conroe Connect
- The Woodlands Township

1. **Brazos Transit District (BTD):** The Brazos Transit District (BTD) was established in 1974 and is a political subdivision of Texas authorized by the Texas Transportation Code, Chapter 458. BTD serves as a Rural Transit District for 21 counties in Central and Eastern Texas, and receives State funds for transit services. BTD also serves as an Urban Transit District (UTD) for the College Station–Bryan and Conroe–The Woodlands Urbanized Areas (UZAs). BTD operates mostly demand-response service in rural areas and fixed route bus and ADA services in Cleveland, Dayton, Liberty, Lufkin, and Nacogdoches.

BTD passes the allocated State funds for the Conroe–The Woodlands UZA to two providers in the UZA: The City of Conroe and The Woodlands Township. Conroe–Woodlands UZA are dual designated recipients of FTA Section 5307 (Urbanized Area Formula Program), Section 5311 (Rural Transportation Program) and Section 5339 (Bus and Bus Facilities Grants Program) funds.

- i. The City of Conroe, provides fixed-route bus and ADA paratransit services within the city limits through Conroe Connection Transit.
- ii. The Woodlands Township provides an urban circulator trolley service with Complementary ADA Paratransit services in The Woodlands Town Center and operates The Woodlands Express, a commuter bus service, which provides connecting service to downtown Houston, The Texas Medical Center and Greenway Plaza.
- iii. Greyhound provides private intercity bus service in BTD’s service area, with connections to BTD service.

Contact: Alivia Youree, Grants and Reporting Coordinator

Phone: (979) 778-0607

E-mail: alivia@btd.org

Address: 1759 N. East Rudder Freeway, Bryan, TX 77803

2. **Colorado Valley Transit District (CVTD):** CVTD is a Rural Transit District and receives State funding for the rural transit services it provides. CVTD provides transit services in Austin, Colorado, Waller, and Wharton Counties, and operates demand-response service for the public throughout this service area. CVTD also provides the deviated-fixed-route loop service within the city limits of Bellville and Sealy in Austin County, and within the city limits of El Campo and Wharton in Wharton County. In addition, it contracts with Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) to

provide vanpool service for commuters in Waller County.

Four private intercity bus companies: Arrow Trailways of Texas, Kerrville Bus Company, Greyhound, and Valley Transit Company, operate lines within CVTD's service area. The Amtrak passenger rail line passes through the CVTD service as well.

Contact: Claudia Wicks, Transportation Director

Phone: (979) 732-6281

E-mail: cvt@gotransit.org

- 3. Fort Bend County Transit:** Fort Bend County Transit serves as a Rural Transit District for Fort Bend County and receives Federal and State funding to support its rural transit services. A significant land area and population in the Houston Urbanized Area (UZA) lie within parts of Fort Bend County. The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) is the direct recipient of Federal UZA funding for the Houston UZA and shares a portion of this funding with Fort Bend County through which it provides transit services for those areas in Fort Bend County that are part of the Houston UZA. In addition to its rural service, Fort Bend Transit also operates demand-response service throughout the county as well as point-deviation-route service within the city limits of Richmond and Rosenberg. Fort Bend Transit additionally operates commuter service from three park-and-ride locations in Fort Bend County which connect passengers to Houston destinations at Greenway Plaza, the Galleria, and the Texas Medical Center.

Contact: Paulette Shelton, Transit Director

Phone: (281) 633-7433

Address: 12550 Emily Court, Suite 400, Sugar Land, TX 77478

E-mail: Paulette.Shelton@FortbendCountyTX.gov

- 4. Galveston County Transit District (GCTD):** GCTD serves as a Rural Transit District for rural areas of Galveston County. GCTD does not however operate these transit services directly but rather contracts with the Gulf Coast Center to provide transit service within the rural areas in mainland Galveston County, and with the City of Galveston to provide service for the Island. Under its contract with GCTD, Gulf Coast Center operates demand-response service in the rural areas of mainland Galveston County through its transportation program Connect Transit. The City of Galveston operates fixed-route bus and ADA paratransit services for Galveston Island through Island Transit. Connect Transit and Island Transit jointly deliver park-and-ride commuter service known as Island Connect for riders travelling between Galveston Island, Texas City, and League City.

Contact – Rick Beverlin, Assistant City Manager

Phone: (409) 797-3520

Address: 832 Rosenberg, Galveston, TX 77553

E-mail: RBeverlin@GalvestonTX.Gov

- 5. Gulf Coast Center (GCC):** GCC serves as a Rural Transit District and receives State funding for the transportation services it provides to the rural areas of Brazoria County. GCC also serves as an Urban Transit District for the Lake Jackson–Angleton and Texas City urbanized areas (UZAs).

Through its transportation program, Connect Transit, GCC provides demand-response service in rural Brazoria County, fixed-route service in Southern Brazoria County, and ADA paratransit service within the city limits of Lake Jackson, Angleton, Freeport, and Clute. Under an interlocal agreement with the Galveston Transit District, GCC also provides fixed-route bus, ADA paratransit, demand-response, and commuter service to Galveston County.

Contact: James Hollis, Transportation Director

Phone: (409) 944- 4446

Address: 4352 E. F. Lowry Expressway, Texas City, TX 77591

E-mail: jamesh@gulfcoastcenter.org

- 6. Harris County Transit:** Harris County Transit was established in 2008 as a Division of the Harris County Community Services Department, to provide transit service outside the METRO service area. Harris County Transit is a direct recipient of FTA section 5307 and 5310 Urbanized Area program funds. Harris County provides transportation with three coordinated services: Fixed Route bus service in eastern Harris County; the RIDES taxi voucher, shared ride and mobility management program and Medical Transportation Program. In fiscal year 2015, Harris County Transit operated 1,660 Square miles to 4,944,332 population.

Contact: Ken Fickes, Transportation Director

Phone: (713) 578- 2255

Address: 8410 Lantern Point Dr., Houston, TX 77054

E-mail: Ken.Fickes@csd.hctx.net

- 7. METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY OF HARRIS COUNTY (METRO):**

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas (METRO) is a metropolitan rapid transit authority created in 1978 pursuant to Chapter 451 of the Texas Transportation Code. The Authority provides transit services for a 1,303-square mile service area with a population of approximately 3.6 million people. The service areas include the cities of Houston, Bellaire, Bunker Hill Village, El Lago, Hedwig Village, Hillshire Village, Humble, Hunters Creek village, and West University Place, in addition to significant portions of unincorporated Harris County.

METRO is the region's largest public transit provider and offers a safe, reliable, and affordable transportation service to about 275,000 riders every day. The Authority provides public bus service utilizing a fleet of approximately 1,233 buses, as well as 166 METROLift paratransit service vans. Its passenger facilities include 8,899 active bus stop and 32,271 parking spaces.

METRO operates a system of High Occupancy Vehicle/High Occupancy Toll (HOT/HOV) Lanes, referred as Express Lanes, on the Southwest, Gulf, North, Eastex and Northwest freeways. These lanes are open free to buses, vanpools, carpools and motorcycles and single-occupant vehicles during some hours if they pay a toll. For FY2016, the projected HOV/HOT lane ridership is approximately 28 million.

METROrail consists of three light-rail lines; the Red Line (North), Green Line (East End) and the Purple Line (Southeast), totaling 22 miles of rail. It carries 55,000 passengers daily, making it one of the nation's most traveled lines, based on boardings per track mile.

METROLift is a complementary paratransit service offered by METRO in accordance with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). METROLift provides transportation for persons with disabilities who cannot board, ride or disembark from a regular METRO fixed-route bus, even if that bus is equipped with a wheelchair lift or ramp. METROLift is a curb-to-curb service, with assistance beyond the curb provided when needed, due to disability.

METRO's revenue sources include a 1% local sales tax, fares, and federal grants and coordinates all services funded under FTA Sections 5307, 5310, 5337, 5339.

Contacts: Mary B. Fay, Director Grants; Jim Archer, Director Service Planning and Evaluation

Phone: (713) 739-3715; (713) 739-6820

Address: 1900 Main Street, P.O. Box 61429, Houston Texas, TX 77208-1429

E-mails: mary.fay@ridemetro.org; James.Archer@ridemetro.org

- 8. The Woodlands Township:** The Woodlands Township is a special purpose district, and a political subdivision of the State of Texas located in unincorporated areas of Montgomery and Harris Counties. On October 1, 2012, The Woodlands Township, the City of Conroe and parts of unincorporated Montgomery County were included in a new large urbanized area (UZA) based on the results of the 2010 decennial U.S. Census. The Township and the City of Conroe were named as dual designated recipients for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant funds for the newly formed Conroe-Woodlands UZA. By agreement, the Township is responsible for the performance and financial

viability of certain public transit operations for the southern portion of the UZA and the City of Conroe is responsible for certain transit operations for the northern portion of the UZA. The Township, as an FTA-designated direct recipient of federal funding, receives grant funding and provides transit operations and services which include:

- A park and ride operation (The Woodlands Express) that operates from three community locations with 30 coaches providing round trip transportation from The Woodlands to three Houston employment centers weekdays Monday through Friday. Approximately 2,700 riders per day use this service, making it the second largest service in the region, behind METRO. The Woodlands Express is operated by the Township through a Commuter Bus Operating contract. Users are charged a fare for this service.
- A fare-free urban circulator trolley service providing transportation service to business locations and residences in The Woodlands Town Center area. This service operates daily and is complemented by ADA Paratransit service.

Health and Human Service Agencies

Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)

In 2015, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) began a reorganization to produce a more efficient, effective, and responsive system. In September 2016, the first phase of that effort became operational and the second phase occurs September 1, 2017. The changes affect the following agencies: Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS); Department of State Health Services (DSHS); Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS); and Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

As of September 1, 2016, programs and services previously administrated or delivered by the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) have been transferred by the Texas Legislature to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) or the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). On September 1, 2017, DADS is scheduled to close. Most state hospitals, administrative services, state supported living centers and regulatory services programs from DADS, DSHS, and DFPS will transfer to HHSC.

Regional Headquarters

Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)

10060 Fuqua Street

Houston, Texas 77089

Telephone: (713) 294-6861

www.hhs.texas.gov

Workforce Commission

The Workforce Commission provides services that will reduce or remove a customer's barrier to employment that is caused by the disabling condition. That could be a variety of services and they are very individualized. Services include counseling and guidance, reasonable accommodations, assistive technology, vocational or academic training, mental or physical restoration, vehicle modification, work experience, job placement or supported employment, etc.

Texas Workforce Commission (formerly DARS)

Regional Headquarters

Ron Fleming, Regional Director
6220 Westpark Drive, Suite 110
Houston, Texas 77057
Telephone: **(713) 267-8510**
1-866-281-1804

Houston Field Headquarters

427 W 20th Suite 110
Houston, Texas 77008
Telephone: (713) 802-3100
(877) 787-8999

E-mail: customers@twc.state.tx.us

Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Regional Office
6900 Almeda Road, Houston, Texas 77030
Telephone: (713) 383-1999; 1-800-827-1000
www.nvf.gov

United Way of Greater Houston

Po Box 3247
Houston, Texas 77253
Telephone: (713) 685-2374
Website: <http://www.unitedwayhouston.org>

Community Care Services (formerly DADS)

Janina Sodus, Regional Office Director
1425 East 40th Street
Houston, Texas 77022
Telephone: (713) 692-1635
Website: <http://www.hhs.texas.gov>

Texas Department of Aging

Houston-Galveston AAA

Telephone: (713) 685-2374 or 800-437-7396

Website: <http://www.h-gac.com/human-services/aging/default.aspx>

**TABLE 1
OFFICES OF THE AREA AGENCY ON AGING**

County	Regional Offices	Area Agency on Aging	Local Authority	Aging and Disability Resource Center
Austin	Region 6: 979-732-8503	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Texana Center: 281-239-1363	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Brazoria	Region 6: 713-692-1635 (Pearland)	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Gulf Coast Center: 1-888-839-3229	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Chambers	Region 6: 713-692-1635	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Spindletop Center: 1-800-317-5809 x5481	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Colorado	Region 6: 979-732-8503	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Texana Center: 281-239-1363	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Fort Bend	Region 6: 713-692-1635	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Texana Center: 281-239-1363	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Galveston	Region 6: 409-943-2830	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Gulf Coast Center: 1-888-839-3229	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372

TABLE 1 (Cont'd)

Harris	Region 6: 713-692-1635	Harris County: 800-213-8471	The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD: 713-970-7000	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Liberty	Region 6: 1-800-881-3006	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Tri-County Services: 936-334-3275 (City of Liberty) 281-432-3075 (City of Cleveland)	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Matagorda	Region 6: 713-692-1635	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Texana Center: 281-239-1363	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Montgomery	Region 6: 1-800-881-3006	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Tri-County Services: 936-521-6200	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Walker	Region 6: 1-800-881-3006	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Tri-County Services: 936-291-5800	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Waller	Region 6: 979-732-8503	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Texana Center: 281-239-1363	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372
Wharton	Region 6: 979-732-8503	Houston-Galveston: 800-437-7396	Texana Center: 281-239-1363	Care Connection: 1-855-937-2372

2. TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

Several organizations conduct transportation planning activities in the Gulf Coast Region. These include The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), and a few others described below.

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT): The Public Transportation Division of TxDOT is responsible for coordinating short range planning activities for the Gulf Coast Region. TxDOT produces a statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) for transit projects which are subsequently incorporated into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). TxDOT exercises oversight over state public transportation funding through its Public Transportation Division. In addition, TxDOT manages, provides oversight, and disperses funding for transit services provided in rural areas through Section 5310, 5311, 5316, and 5317 programs.

Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC): The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is a voluntary association of 133 local government entities and elected officials from within the 13-county planning region that includes Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Wharton Counties. This Council of Governments serves as an instrument of cooperation among its member, and promotes orderly development within the planning region while protecting the welfare and safety of its residents. All H-GAC planning programs are carried out under the policy direction of its 36-member Board of Directors which is composed of elected officials from the member local governments. H-GAC programs support local government concerns such as transportation, environmental and community planning, air and water quality issues, criminal justice, regional economic and demographic forecasting, and cooperative purchasing.

H-GAC – Metropolitan Planning Organization

Distinct from the Council of Governments, the Transportation Department within H-GAC is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for an 8-county Transportation Management Area (TMA) that covers Harris, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Liberty, Montgomery, and Waller Counties. The MPO is responsible for transportation planning within that boundary. Key planning activities include the development of a long range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) – which defines the regions’ transportation needs, goals, and policies over a 25-year horizon; the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) – a fiscally constrained plan of prioritized transit, highway, roadway, pedestrian-bicycle, and transportation operations projects approved to receive federal funding over a 4-year period; the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) - a statement of work programmed for a 2-year window; and the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP) – designed to reduce inefficiencies in the system that provides transportation services regionally.

OTHER AGENCIES IN GULF COAST REGION THAT CONDUCT TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ACTIVITIES:

- **Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO):** Conducts planning activities for the METRO service area, which includes long term regional planning.
- **Harris County Community Service Department Office of Transit Services** (Harris County Transit): Conducts planning activities for the Eastern Harris County region and segments of the METRO service area that are underserved.
- **Conroe Connection:** Develop sub-regional park and ride, infrastructure and fixed route planning.
- **Woodlands Township:** Manage the Woodlands Express and local service.
- **Gulf Coast Center/Connect Transit:** Develop transportation programs within Brazoria and Galveston Counties.
- **Galveston County Transit District/Island Transit:** Provide administration for operations and management of transit facilities, Texas City Park and Ride service, Texas City transit service, Galveston Trolley and Galveston transit service.
- **The Fort Bend County Public Transportation Department** (Fort Bend Transit): Provides administration for operations and management of transit services, park and ride facilities and for point deviation and demand-response services.

TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES INVENTORY AND STAKEHOLDER AGENCY SURVEYS SUMMARY REPORT

The Houston-Galveston Area Council performed two surveys to assess the resources available and the transportation needs of individuals 65 years and older, persons with disabilities, persons of low income, veterans, youth and individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP). The surveys looked at public and private transit agencies as well as a range of social service agencies that provided transportation to clients, and are referenced in two phases:

- **Phase I – Transportation Resources Inventory Survey (TRI).** This focused on identifying transportation resources in the region, documenting current service parameters and geographic coverage identified by respondents, and revealing where gaps in service exist. (Appendix D).
- **Phase II - Stakeholder/Agency Survey.** This focused on the identification of regional coordination efforts as well as constraints/obstacle and opportunities encountered in providing and coordinating services. (Appendix H).

Surveys were completed using an online survey tool to make the process convenient for participants. Considerable effort was expended to construct the fullest possible inventory of human services, public and private transportation organizations in the region. A list of contacts was compiled from a variety of sources, including contacts from the 2011 Coordinated Plan Inventory, contacts provided by United Way and Harris County RIDES program and input from Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) members.

Phase I – Transportation Resources Inventory Survey (TRI)

184 organizations were invited to participate in the Phase I - TRI survey: 28% of these organizations responded. The responding agencies and organizations providing these transit services fall into one of the following provider categories: public transportation, human service transportation, brokers transportation, transportation provided by schools, and other transportation providers. A detailed inventory of individual providers in the Gulf Coast Region is available in Appendix D.

The transportation programs and services reported in this survey vary greatly in their policies and in the delivery of their services. The largest group of responding agencies were private, non-profit organizations (19 entities - 38%). This was followed by private for-profit organizations (with 32%), and Government entities – City or County (with 17%). The largest group of clients served by the responding agencies were seniors and low-income individuals, both at 57%.

Most organizations (65%) indicated that they provided demand response services to their clients, while 43% indicated that they provided fixed route service, 31% indicated that they provided subscription services, while 28% indicated they provided ridesharing services and occasionally dropped off clients in the general area of their destinations.

About half of the responding organizations provided county-wide transportation services. Most of those that did not provide county-wide service served two or more cities, particularly in the greater Houston Metropolitan area. The inventory accounts for a total of 2.7 million trips. The number of passenger trips provided varied widely by the organizations reporting, and ranged for example, from 1.5 million annual trips by Greater Houston Transportation Company to 100 annual trips provided Interfaith of the Woodlands. Gathering information regarding financial matters was challenging. However, for those organizations that reported, total revenues were over \$3.2 million while expenditures exceeded \$6.0 million.

A total of 1,763 passenger vehicles are available to responding agencies for transporting priority populations. Fleet sizes ranged from one van up to the 1,000 wheelchair-accessible minivans operated by the Greater Houston Transportation company. Most health and human service providers reported having less than 10 vehicles.

The Gulf Coast Region has many transportation providers and programs in place, offering a range of transportation services. However, the needs of the target population are not being met. Following are some of the of the gaps identified:

- Service outside the METRO service area is inadequate;
- Direct service to medical facilities in the region is lacking;
- Different scheduling, dispatching, and reporting software is used by providers making information sharing difficult; and
- Passenger transfers between different transportation services is limited.

Phase II - Stakeholder/Agency Survey

The Phase II - Stakeholder/Agency survey was administrated following the TRI survey, to determine the level of, and commitment to existing coordination activities throughout the Gulf Coast region. A total of 133 organizations were invited to participate in this survey: 26% of the invited organizations responded. The largest group of responding agencies were private, non-profit organizations (41%), followed by Government entities - City or County (35%).

Much of the transportation services provided were through demand responsive systems, weekdays - Monday through Friday. Many of these services were client specific and had prequalification requirements and restrictions to using them. It appears that most of the trip purposes demanded were for medical visits, essential shopping trips for groceries, to drug stores, and for work trips.

Some survey respondents, particularly human service agencies, identified several barriers to their efforts to provide transportation services for their clients. These include lack of service in outlying and rural areas and the lack of resources to provide or contract out needed transportation services for their clients.

The survey revealed that there was some form of coordination of efforts underway among transportation providers and health and human service organizations. Most of the agencies indicated that they were already participating in some type of coordinated activity, or else were interested in coordinating their transportation services with other organizations.

A combination of activities and strategies are recommended to increase and improve transportation coordination for the region. They include:

- Working collaboratively with operators to improve service delivery of existing programs, including, dispatch and managing demands.
- Working on promoting cross-agency collaboration to promote seamless fare and cross-boundary travel.
- Working on developing a centralized transportation information center.
- Working on a plan to coordinate and consolidate federal and state grant programs.
- Prioritizing pedestrian path of travel improvements to fixed-route bus stops in areas of the region with high populations of seniors and persons with disabilities.

III. COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE PUBLIC’S UNMET TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

This Needs Assessment examines the local conditions that influence the public transportation service delivered in the Gulf Coast Region. It analyzes the demographic profiles and travel patterns of the target population to determine how these factors shape the demand for transit. The assessment also identifies those locations with service gaps, describes the unmet needs of the population, and outlines inefficiencies that exist in transportation service delivery in the region. Findings from the assessment guide the development of recommendations for the improvement of the public transportation system within the Gulf Coast Planning Region.

A. GEOGRAPHIC DATA

The Gulf Coast Planning Region (Planning Region 16) is comprised of thirteen counties in the Upper Gulf Coast of Southeast Texas. These same counties make up the service area of the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), a voluntary association of local governments organized to guide the orderly development of the region, promote economic growth, and enhance the quality of life of the citizens.

The Planning Region covers an area of 12,500 square miles which makes it larger than the State of Maryland. The region also contains a total of 134 cities including notably, the City of Houston – the largest city in Texas and the fourth largest city in the United States. The huge size of the region coupled with the low population density in the rural counties pose severe challenges to providing adequate transit services to residents of the region. While approximately two-thirds of the population of the Gulf Coast Planning Region reside within Harris County, as much as twenty-eight percent of the region’s population reside in four sub-urban counties adjacent to Harris County: Montgomery, Fort Bend, Brazoria, and Galveston counties. The eight remaining counties in the planning region are further removed from the City of Houston, and are predominantly rural in character. In addition to the varying amounts of urban development, the counties also differ in their demographics, travel patterns, economic base, and transportation needs.

B. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Demographic data is used to identify the populations with a high need for public transportation and provides a basis for determining the most appropriate transport mode for a community. Key characteristics of the population of the Gulf Coast Planning Region include its size, diversity, localized concentrations, and high growth rate.

Population Growth:

The Gulf Coast Region has experienced dramatic changes to the size of its population over the last few decades. Census statistics released in 2016 indicate that the region has a population of

about 6.8 million residents.⁹ This is up from the 6.1 million residents reported in the 2010 decennial census¹⁰ and the 4.8 million residents recorded by the 2000 decennial census.¹¹ The population change between the years 2000 and 2010 represent a growth of 25.4%, a high-water mark spiked by the influx of evacuees from Hurricane Katrina. H-GAC's regional growth forecasts indicate that by the year 2040, the region will be home to 10 million people. Most of the region's population is clustered within urban centers in Harris County and the four adjoining sub-urban counties. Metro Houston is the fifth largest metropolitan region in the United States and between 2014 and 2015, led the nation with a population increase of over 159,000: a growth rate of 2.4%. Although the population increases recently experienced by the region in recent years have been among the fastest in the nation, current growth has occurred at a markedly lower rate than was experienced in previous years. The population in the region is nevertheless expected to continue to increase vigorously over the coming decades, which will result in a consistent rise in demand for transportation services.

Age

One of the goals of the RCTP is to improve the mobility options for individuals in two age categories: individuals 65 years and over, and the youth. Demographic statistics show that the Gulf Coast Region population is gradually aging. In 2010, roughly 9% of the population were 65 years and over. Census statistics for the year 2015 indicate that individuals in that age group currently make up nearly 10% of the population.¹² Regional forecasts suggest that by 2040, the proportion of the individuals 65 years and over in the region will be nearly double what it is today. As they age, individuals tend to decrease their use of personal vehicles and rely more on public transit for their transportation need. In addition, the older an individual gets, the greater the probability of their having a form of disability that imposes challenges to their mobility. As many as 226,488 adults aged 65 years and over self-reported having some form of disability. This amounts to about 36% of population of that age group in the region.

On the other end of the spectrum, population forecasts indicate a decline in the proportion of the younger people and an increase in the share of households without children.¹³ By the year 2040, children younger than 20 are expected to make up a smaller portion of the total population than they do today, and households without children will increase from 56% to 66%. Youth typically depend on transit services for their routine trips. The implication of the growth trend is that over time, there will be a reduction in the demand for transportation by this segment of the population.

Race

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2011–2015 American Community Survey Estimates from American Fact Finder, last accessed February 2017.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ H-GAC Demographic Profiles, July 2016.

The population in the Gulf Coast Region is as diverse as it is large. Currently, the Non-Hispanic White residents are the single largest racial group in the region. Studies of population growth trends however indicate that a significant shift in this demographic characteristic of the region is underway. Since the 1980s, the overall proportion of Non-Hispanic White residents has been decreasing while the share of Hispanic residents is rapidly increasing. Significantly, while the White population is still a majority in the more rural counties, the Hispanic or Latino population are decidedly the majority ethnic group in Harris County, the most populated area in the region. This demographic trend is expected to continue as the region experiences further urban development.

Income

Transportation is a major barrier to persons with low income in the Gulf Coast Region. Most low-income individuals are typically unable to afford a personal vehicle to travel to the places they need to go and are therefore dependent on public transportation. The low income face significant mobility challenges where there are limited or no transit services available. The Gulf Coast Planning Region is currently home to over 300,000 households who live at or below the poverty line.¹⁴ This figure accounts for about 14% of all the households in the region. Low income households are found all over the Gulf Coast Region and often coincide with other indicators of disadvantage such as single parent households, racial minority status, and a limited proficiency in the English language. Concentrated pockets of low-income households may be found in Eastern Montgomery County, the ethnic communities of the Eastside, Northside, and South Houston, and parts of Fort Bend and Wharton Counties. Matagorda County (20.5%) and Walker County (22.7%) both rural counties, stand out as having a significant proportion of all their households classified as living at or below the poverty line.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2011–2015 American Community Survey Estimates from American Fact Finder, last accessed February 2017.

TABLE 2
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE GULF COAST PLANNING REGION

Region	Total Population	Median HH Income	Persons in Poverty	LEP Population	Population 65 and Over	Disabilities (under 65)
Texas	27,469,114	\$53,207	15.9%	14.00%	11.7%	8.1%
Gulf Coast Region	6,826,702	\$60,047	14.75%	13.77%	9.76%	7.06%
Austin County	29,563	\$53,687	12.7%	5.09%	18.0%	8.6%
Brazoria County	346,312	\$69,749	10.6%	5.74%	11.1%	6.4%
Chambers County	38,863	\$70,544	9.6%	6.52%	10.9%	10.2%
Colorado County	20,870	\$46,618	14.5%	4.08%	20.8%	9.0%
Fort Bend County	716,087	\$89,152	7.0%	8.30%	9.9%	5.5%
Galveston County	322,225	\$62,313	14.0%	4.61%	13.1%	9.5%
Harris County	4,538,028	\$54,457	16.6%	17.34%	9.4%	6.6%
Liberty County	79,654	\$48,729	15.8%	5.0%	12.9%	12.8%
Matagorda County	36,700	\$40,797	20.5%	9.86%	15.9%	10.2%
Montgomery County	537,559	\$68,838	10.1%	7.19%	12.3%	7.3%
Walker County	70,699	\$37,666	22.7%	3.58%	11.7%	6.1%
Waller County	48,656	\$51,348	16.8%	9.22%	11.7%	9.3%
Wharton County	41,486	\$45,176	17.2%	7.39%	16.1%	9.0%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey Estimates from American Fact Finder

Persons with Disabilities

Accessible transportation is critical for persons with disabilities as it gives them freedom to travel where they desire when they choose, and provides a level of independence that many consider important to their well-being. There are approximately 624,360 persons with disabilities living in the Gulf Coast Region. This comprises about 9.6% of the population.¹⁵ Persons with disabilities are found throughout all the counties in the Gulf Coast Region. There are however many parts of the region that do not have paratransit services.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

As many as 13.77% of the residents of the Gulf Coast Region do not speak English as their primary language and have difficulty reading, writing or otherwise communicating effectively in that medium.¹⁶ They are members of several immigrant communities that include persons of Vietnamese, Chinese, Hispanic or Latino, Korean, Honduran, and Japanese descent, among others. Large immigrant communities can be found predominantly within Harris County and the suburban counties of the region. Assessing and meeting the transportation needs of the LEP

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2011–2015 American Community Survey Estimates from American Fact Finder, last accessed February 2017

¹⁶ Ibid.

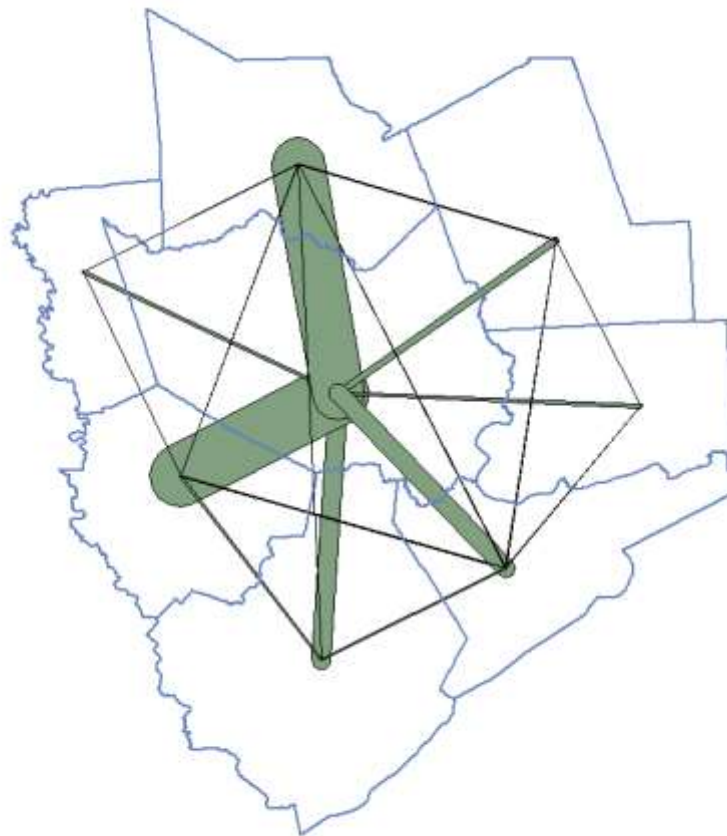
population requires a process of engagement that is culturally competent (easily understood by members of that group).

H-GAC has adopted a Public Participation Plan (PPP) which implements a language assistant protocol that where appropriate, will dispense information to persons with limited English communication skills in their primary spoken language. This helps to ensure that language is not a barrier to persons needing assistance with transportation services.

Travel Patterns Summary¹⁷

As shown in **Figure 1** regional travel patterns are forecasted to be most significant between the neighboring counties of Harris, Fort Bend and Montgomery compared to others in the greater Houston Region.

**FIGURE 1
INTER-COUNTY HOME BASED WORK COMMUTER TRIPS 2025**



¹⁷ More details about the regional travel patterns are in the RCTP Travel Patterns report as Appendix C which is available under separate cover.

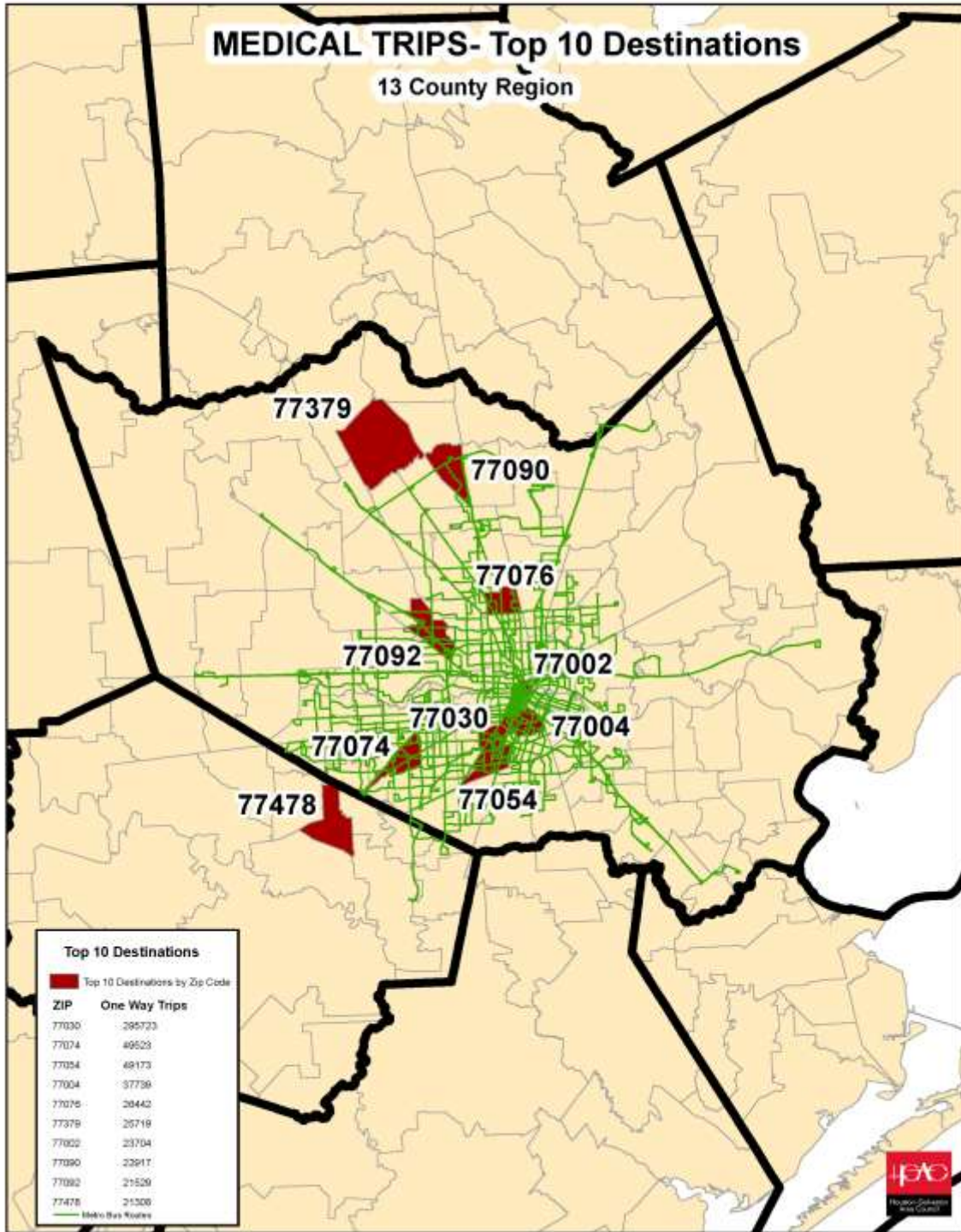
This information is intentionally brief and has been summarized to highlight only the key patterns. Those patterns could be relevant for new or expanded public transportation services in some areas to address unmet transportation related needs for non-traditional or emerging travel patterns. The analyses of the travel patterns also identify potential corridors for future reverse commute services or non-traditional transit services.

Highway related transportation planning activities have traditionally focused on commuter related travel patterns during the morning and evening peak periods which are significant in most of the freeway corridors that connect to downtown Houston. The typical travel patterns for medical related trips for seniors and persons with disabilities may not fit the traditional commuter trip patterns. In addition, off- peak or second shift employment opportunities for low-income persons would likely require some non-traditional travel. It could be helpful to better understand the order of magnitude of the dominant travel patterns within and between counties. That understanding could help to identify potential travel corridors for future investments and to also describe the most significant and emerging travel patterns for non-traditional travel. One example of those off-peak travel patterns is shown in **Map 3** which illustrates the top ten destinations by zip codes for the Medical Transportation Program based on 2011 data.¹⁸

¹⁸ Source: H-GAC Gulf Coast MTP Brief V2, internal briefing paper, 2012.

MAP 3

MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM DESTINATIONS



C. ASSESSMENT OF UNMET TRANSPORTATION NEEDS SUMMARY¹⁹

1. Introduction

The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to identify and evaluate what is important for further actions that will improve the transportation options available for vulnerable groups including; seniors (65+), persons with disabilities, youth, veterans and persons with low incomes among others. The Needs Assessment process provides a foundation for the discussion of gaps in the transportation system, that can be closed by new or better coordinated services or other strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional system.

The Needs Assessment starts with the summaries of two recent public engagement activities that were designed to gather input to be used for the development of the updated Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP). Individual perspectives of the needs of specific vulnerable groups and collective views of stakeholders follow.

2. Public Outreach and Needs Assessment

Starting in February 2016 a RCTP Suggestion Box was set up and a flyer was distributed by email to local stakeholders encouraging them to submit comments about needed improvements to the regional community transportation system. Community transportation is defined here as non-single occupant vehicle (SOV) travel. A toll-free phone number was also available for interested persons to submit comments by a voice recording. In response, 13 detailed written comments were submitted to the online RCTP Suggestion Box by email and twitter along with other citizen comments. The comments focused on unmet transportation related needs in specific parts of the region.

"I am visually impaired and have never driven. Relying on METROLift and the kindness of family and friends is how I get around. While I am appreciative of the service, I often fear that proposed changes to their service may push people with disabilities to having less options than before. Also, although my disability is not mobility related, due to poor vision, navigating broken and dangerous sidewalks could put me in danger if I were to ride the big city bus." (Carol)

Prioritize the expansion of transit services in the Clear Lake, Bay Area, Galveston County areas (Heather Millar, Lynn Lohr, Roger Mora)

Expand multi-modal transportation in the region, adoption of Complete Streets Policy (Linda Shead, Jay Crossley), including commuter bus options in the Energy Corridor District (Clark Martinson)

¹⁹ The complete Assessment of Unmet Transportation Needs is available under separate cover as RCTP Appendix E.

The complete detailed comments are included in Appendix E.

A summary of some of the key topics that were received through the RCTP Suggestion Box is shown below with an indication of their sources.

- Passenger Rail Corridors along Major Highways (North, South, East and West)
City of Houston Staff
- Local Bus Transit System Expansion Westward
Public Comment
- Energy Corridor District- Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Expansion
Agency Staff
- Park and Ride System Connectivity
Public Comment
- Senior Transportation Access Improvements
Agency Staff Representative
- Bay Area Transit Connectivity
Agency Staff Representative

Four of the six suggestions represent needs or gaps that will be discussed in greater detail in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report.

On June 22, 2016, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) hosted "The Power of Transit 2016 - Advancing Regional Coordination-Focusing on Solutions" symposium. The livestreamed panel discussion gathered members of the community, transit providers, experts, and policy makers to discuss regional transportation related needs, some underlying causes of those needs and some recommended strategies to address them. Approximately 40 participants attended the symposium in-person while another 117 participants logged into the RCTP website during the panel discussion from several Texas cities and from as far away as France. It is presumed that persons logged into the website to view the symposium.

Some of the key recommendations from that symposium include the following ideas:

- Establish a One Call/One Click system for regional transportation information, coordination and reservations
- Develop a regional coordinated fare structure
- Utilize advances in technology to improve communication and access to information
- Set up transit information booths (or kiosks) for transit related information in multiple languages
- Coordinate transportation infrastructure improvements to include wheelchair and pedestrian access where feasible
- Encourage regional partnerships and collaboration between public and private entities
- Replicate best practices by expanding local transit success stories
- Coordinate strategic transportation planning activities to include multiple disciplines

- Focus on strategies to improve access to and from higher capacity transit corridors.

Table 3 provides a matrix of needs as identified by regional transit and social service providers per interviews with H-GAC staff. As shown in the matrix, demand response service and local bus service are shown as high demand needs. A universal fare and express/park and ride are also viewed as quite important.

**TABLE 3
TRANSIT NEEDS AND GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PROVIDERS²⁰**

2017 Regional Transit Framework Study Update: Needs and Goals Identified by Agencies and Non-Profits														
Issue	Colorado Valley Transit	City of Conroe	Brazos Transit District	MOVINC- Senior Rides	The Woodlands Township	Connect Transit/GCC	Island Transit	Harris County Transit	Gulf Coast Rail District	Fort Bend County Transit	United Way of Greater Houston	HK Express	METRO	American Red Cross
Demand Response	S		S	S		S		S		S	S	S		S
Circulator Bus	S				S									
Local Bus	L	S				S	S	S		S		L	S	
Regional Bus	S	L			L	L		L						
Express/Commuter/P&R Bus	S	S			S		S			S			S	
Reverse/Suburb-to-Suburb Commute	S				S	S			L	L				
Connections to Intercity Bus/Rail/HSR		L							L	L			S	
Streetcars							S							
High-Capacity Local Transit (LRT/BRT)										L	L		S	
High-Capacity Commuter Transit/CRT	L				L		L		S	L			L	
Transit/P&R Facilities								S		S			S	S
O&M/Facilities		L				S				S		L	S	
Regional/Universal Fare			S		S	S	S	L		S	S		S	S
Technology Upgrades (Dispatch, Fare Collection, Customer Service, etc.)			S	S	S	L	L							
Transit-Oriented Development							L						S	
Fleet Upgrade/Renewal	S			S										S
Based on interviews conducted spring & summer 2015														
KEY:														
Short-term Need:	S													
Long-term Goal:	L													
	TBC 5/08/2015													

²⁰ Interviews conducted by H-GAC staff in 2015, updated 5-8-17.

3. Geographic Data Analyses

The following data and maps illustrate some of the locations of the highest unmet transit needs in the Gulf Coast Planning Region as measured by the Transit Need Index (TNI).

Two different and complimentary methodologies were used for the Transit Needs Index (TNI). The first was developed at the county-level as part of the RCTP Demographic Profiles.²¹

County-Level TNI

1. Calculate Peer Group Averages for each county (urban, suburban, rural) for each Demographic Factor (6 factors).
2. Calculate Standard Deviations from peer group average values (means) for each Demographic Factor.
3. Estimate variances from means and associate with TNI Scores:
 - a. One Standard Deviation Above the mean=High TNI = 3
 - b. Within one Standard Deviation= Moderate TNI= 2
 - c. One Standard Deviation Below the mean=Low TNI= 1
 - d. Adjust TNI scores to reflect the weighting factors
4. Calculate Total TNI Scores for each county=Sum (TNI Scores for each demographic factor).

Block Group Level TNI

1. Urban counties are: Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Montgomery.
2. Rural counties: Austin, Chambers, Colorado, Liberty, Matagorda, Waller, Wharton, and Walker.
3. TNI factor calculation:

$TNI_POP_DEN = BG \text{ population density} / \text{region population density}$

$TNI_MED_INC = (-1) * (BG \text{ Median Income} - \text{Region Median Income}) / \text{Region Median Income}$

$TNI_ZERO_CAR = \text{Percent BG zero car household} / \text{percent of regional zero car households}$

$TNI_CHILD = \text{Percent BG children} / \text{percent region children}$

²¹ Houston-Galveston Area Council Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan Demographic Profiles, July 2016.

TNI_SENIOR = Percent BG seniors/percent regional seniors

TNI_DISABLED = Percent BG disabled population/percent regional disabled population

4. Urban Transit Need Index = 20% TNI_POP_DEN + 20% TNI_ZERO_CAR + 15%TNI_SENIOR + 15%TNI_DISABLED + 10%TNI_CHILD + 20%TNI_MED_INC

5. Rural Transit Need Index = 10%TNI_POP_DEN + 10%TNI_NO_CAR + 25%TNI_SENIOR + 25%TNI_DISABLED + 10%TNI_CHILD + 20%TNI_MED_INC

6. Rural regional percentage:

Rural Region Population Density	Rural Region No Car Households Percentage	Rural Region Senior Population Percentage	Rural Region Children Percentage	Rural Region Median Household Income	Rural Region Disabled Population Percentage
45.9889	0.0509	0.1292	0.1727	45,908	0.0679

7. Urban regional percentage:

Urban Region Population Density	Urban Region No Car HHS Percentage	Urban Region Senior Percentage	Urban Region Children Percentage	Urban Region Median Household Income	Urban Region Disabled Percentage
967.0909	0.0599	0.0913	0.1976	62,667	0.0494

Table 4 summarizes those counties with the highest TNI values that were estimated as part of the RCTP demographics update. Wharton County, which is served by the Colorado Valley Transit District, has a TNI of 13 which stands out as the highest area of need primarily because of the following factors:

- Lower than median HH income;
- Higher than average percentages of persons with disabilities, seniors (65+) and households without automobiles.

Harris County also has a high TNI of 12.5 primarily due to the following factors:

- Higher than peer cities average for population density, number of children and households without automobiles;
- Lower than peer cities average for median household income. ²²

A relatively large proportion of Harris County’s population is on the east side that is outside of the METRO Service Area and therefore doesn’t have access to the METRO bus and light rail system.

**TABLE 4
COUNTY LEVEL HIGHEST RANKED TRANSIT NEED INDEX SCORES**

County	RCTP Classification	TNI Score	Comments
Wharton	Rural	13	Within Colorado Valley Transit (CVT) Service Area.
Harris	Urban	12.5	Large population base outside of the METRO Service Area.
Galveston	Suburban	11.75	High level of households without automobiles and persons with disabilities
Liberty	Rural	11.25	Highest percentage of persons with disabilities.
Colorado	Rural	11.25	Highest percentage of seniors (65 +).
Walker	Rural	11.0	Lowest median HH income.

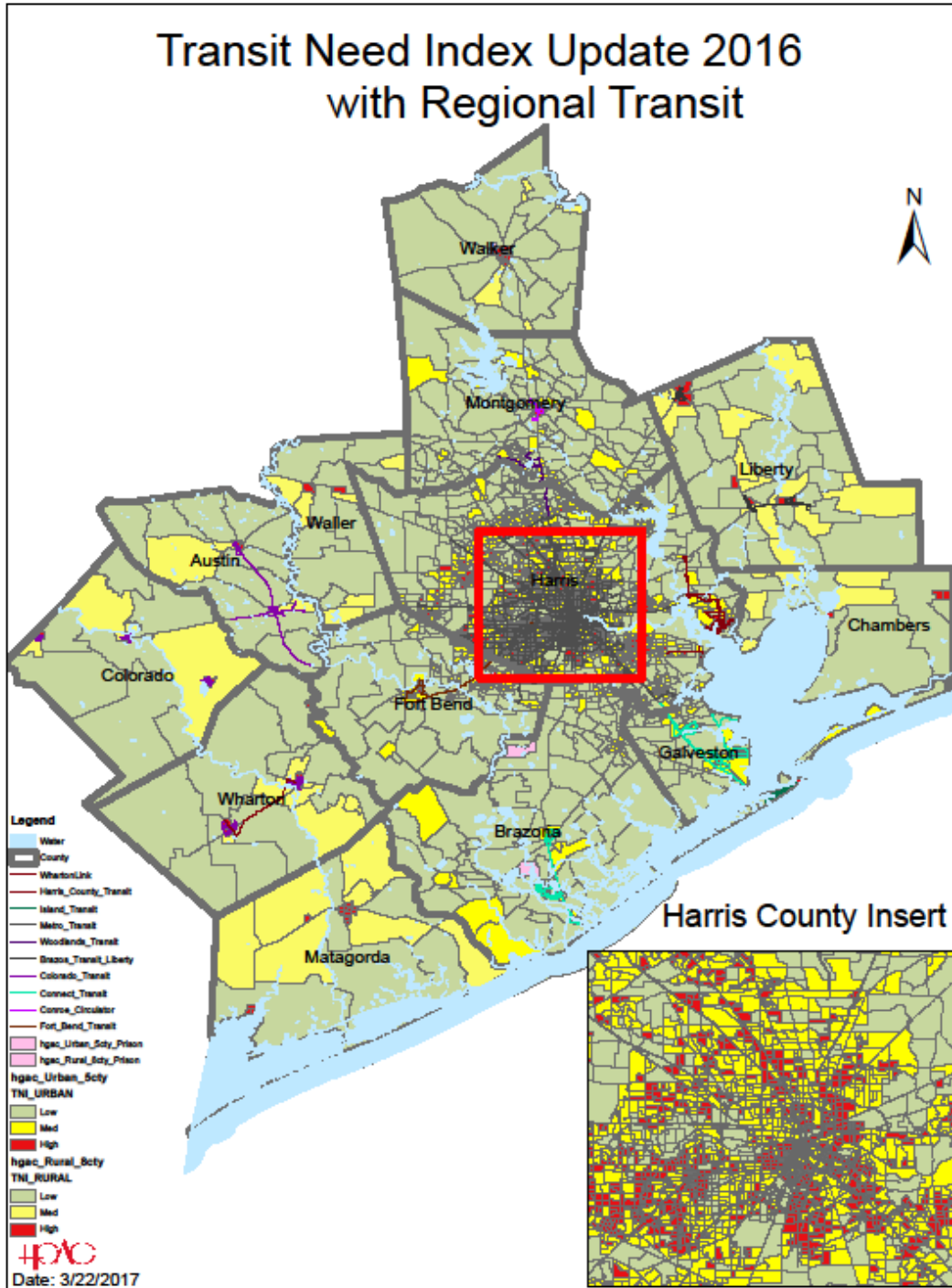
²² H-GAC Demographic Profiles, July 2016

The following maps (**Maps 4-7**) are based on demographic data at the Census block group level of the census. The maps contain data for the Transit Need Index (TNI), the TNI Buffer Analysis, households below the poverty level, and persons with limited English proficiency (speak Spanish). Those demographic maps are overlaid with lines representing the regional fixed route transit systems. Higher resolution maps for more detailed planning purposes are available by request to H-GAC.

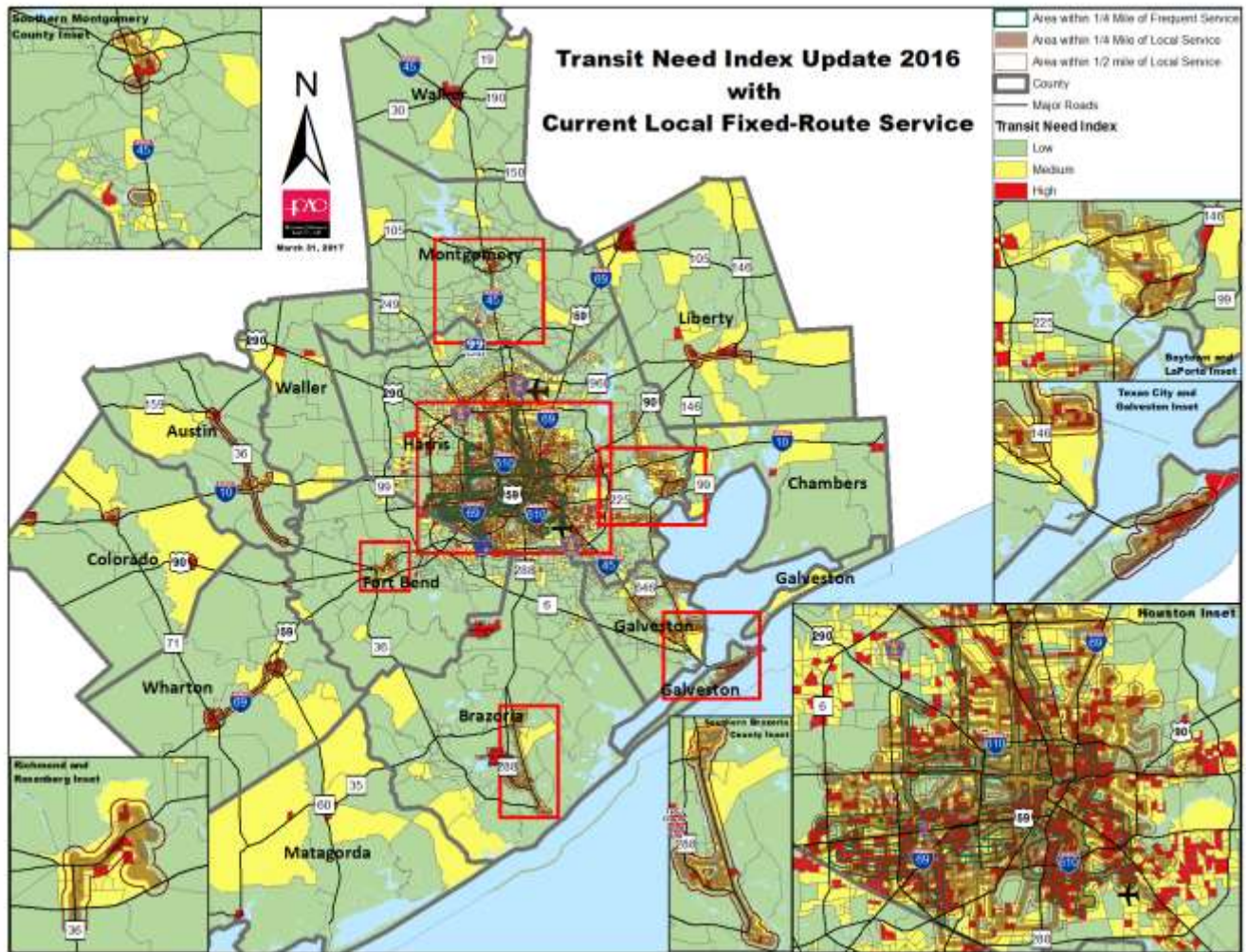
Most of the significant areas with high TNI concentrations are shown to exist in Harris County. A high TNI score indicates a concentrated need for transit service. Many of the urban areas have access to the extensive transit system coverage area provided by the METRO bus/rail system. Extensive coverage meeting extensive need is a means for meeting transit travel requirements and METRO succeeds in many portions of its service area.

The importance of these maps is to identify those locations with higher TNI values *that do not have nearby fixed transit routes such as northwest and eastern Harris County*. Areas with higher needs in Harris County are discussed in more detail in the Gap Analysis. Other rural areas with higher TNI concentrations are: Huntsville, Conroe, Cleveland, Liberty, Dayton, Prairie View, Hempstead, Lake Jackson and Bay City. Although Chambers County did not have a high TNI score because of a higher median income level per the recent Census data, there is not a public transportation provider in Chambers County.

**MAP 4
REGIONAL TRANSIT NEED INDEX**



MAP 5 TNI WITH BUFFER ANALYSIS²³



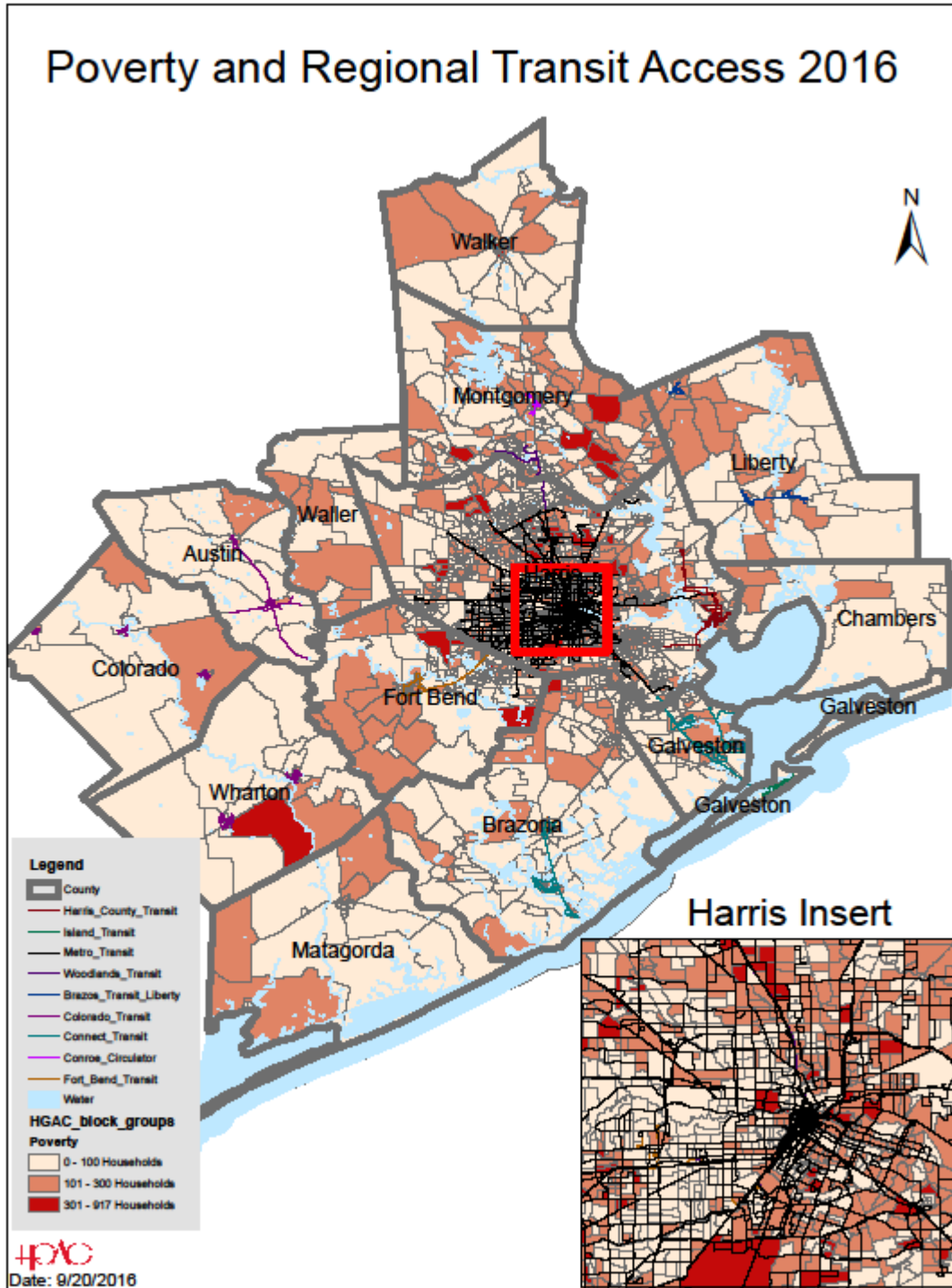
As shown in **Map 6**, the locations of households below the poverty level when combined with the regional fixed transit routes indicates other areas with more prominent transit need such as larger sections of the adjacent suburban and rural counties, particularly, East Montgomery and Northern Fort Bend counties.

A similar analysis of the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population that is Spanish speaking (**Map 7**) highlights more areas in the northwest, east and southeastern Harris, Waller, Fort Bend and Montgomery counties. Closer analyses of the data for each county will help to clarify the apparent areas of need as shown in the maps. Coordination with the local transportation

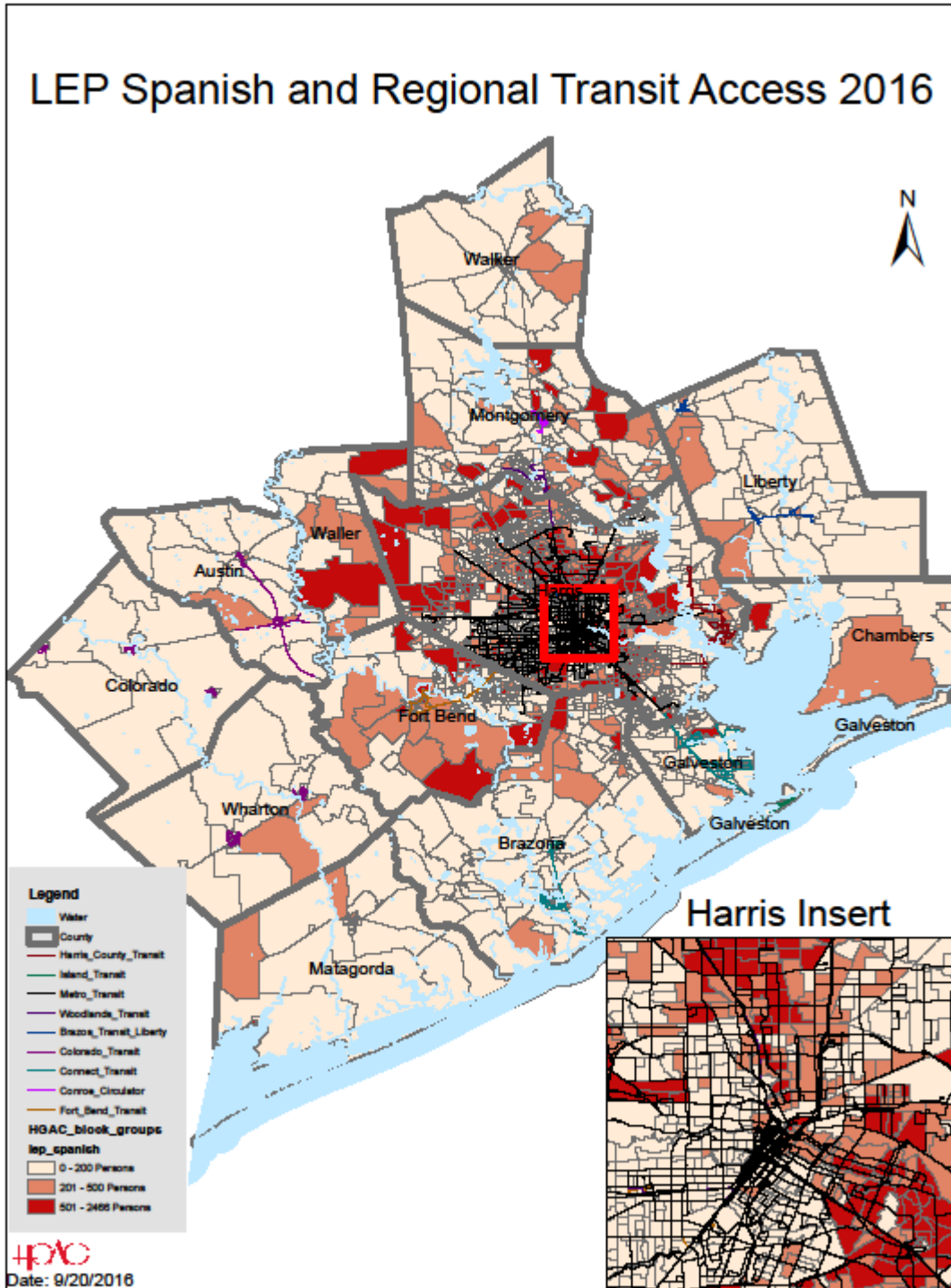
²³ Some of the locations identified as high transit need areas (shown in red) are prisons in Brazoria and Walker counties.

stakeholders within each county will help to confirm those areas that appear to have higher than average transportation related needs based on the data that was considered.

**MAP 6
POVERTY AND REGIONAL TRANSIT**



MAP 7
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND TRANSIT



4. Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment Survey Analysis

Community Development Strategies along with Recon MR were contracted by H-GAC to conduct the Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment Survey. The telephone and online surveys were conducted between December 2016 and February 2017. Two thousand randomly selected individuals throughout the 13- county region responded to the phone survey plus several hundred additional respondents answered the questions on line. Results were tabulated for the phone survey, the online survey and combined results.

Demographics trended older on the survey since despite more substantive efforts to contact potential respondents via cell phones, much greater success was realized through land lines (which tend to have older users). More than two thirds of the respondents were 45 or older and more than one quarter were over 65.

Transit needs were overwhelming seen as high in the region. Using transit as a tool to address regional issues was valuable in multiple ways by a large margin. Response percentages shown include those who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements forwarded to the individuals surveyed;

- Among an overwhelming 95% of all respondents' services should be provided to seniors and persons with disabilities;
- 86% of all respondents believed that regular bus service should be delivered in the region;
- 89% of all respondents advocated Park and Ride service to major employment centers;
- A smaller amount (70%) favored commuter rail service in the region;
- 89% view transit service as valuable in reducing pollution;
- 85% view transit service as valuable in reducing congestion.

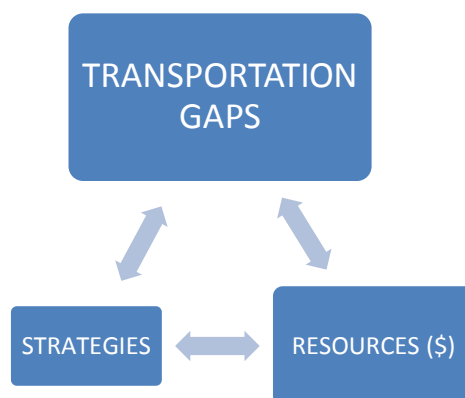
Willingness to pay for transit service through increased local revenues were also high within the region. Responses tended to remain similar for all segments of the population regardless of their geographic locations, whether rural, suburban or within Harris County. A favorable response is measured by those who strongly or somewhat favor a statement regarding local transit funding.

- Among 79% of all respondents there is a favorable opinion of continuing local funding
- 72% favor additional local revenues for bus service
- 77% favor additional local revenues for Park and Ride Service
- 76% favor additional local revenues for Commuter Rail service

Results on the survey indicate a strong opinion among the respondents of a need for additional transit services within the region. Additionally, community respondents indicated a favorable attitude to use additional local revenues to pay for transit services.

D. GAP ANALYSIS SUMMARY²⁴

**FIGURE 2
GAP ANALYSIS PROCESS**



The purpose of the Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP) Gap Analysis is to document the gaps in the regional transportation system and to use that information to develop potential strategies to address those gaps. The Federal Transit Administration provides a working definition of transit service related gaps for seniors and persons with disabilities: “When public transportation is insufficient, inappropriate or unavailable”.²⁵

The gaps in transportation services can be described in various ways, including but not limited to the following:

- Geographically
- Public comments and suggestions
- Temporally, by days of the week and times of the day
- Access measures such as travel times
- Levels of Service
- Financial Resources

Another type of gap relates to infrastructure development. Infrastructure gaps refer to obstructions in the path from an individual’s origin to their destination. Normally focused upon individuals with disabilities, it may be also relevant for other individuals due to safety considerations. Obstructions may include: lack of sidewalks, sidewalks on one side of the street, poorly maintained or narrow sidewalks and lack of ADA-compliant ramps.

The regional geographic gap analysis highlights areas with transportation related needs (potential gaps) for essential stakeholders that were identified in the RCTP Needs Assessment process. The

²⁴ More details are available in the Gap Analysis Report, RCTP Appendix F.

²⁵ Federal Register Vol 79, No. 109, June, 2014.

two largest and most significant regional gaps have resulted from the historic development of the service area for the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO). When METRO was established in 1979 the cities in eastern Harris County opted out of the one-cent sales tax referendum. That resulted in a large segment of eastern Harris County residents that don't have access to needed transit services. Further, the federal transit funding guidelines are based on the population and service related data, within the Houston Urbanized Area which extends beyond the Harris County borders. The combination of those geographic and funding gaps will require some innovative strategies to address the transportation related needs of people in those areas.

Some of the key findings from the regional gap analyses are summarized below:

- Approximately 45% of the regional population is located within ¼ mile, or five-minute walk, of the regional transit system's local bus routes
- The majority of the regional population (55%) is located outside of that walking distance which suggests a formidable gap in access to the regional transit services
- 68% of regional transit trips to major employment centers take more than 90 minutes for people who walk to access transit services
- Several areas within the region with significant concentrations of employment are not served by any local bus service

When participants in the RCTP Focus Groups were asked about obstacles to their routine travel the following responses are highlighted:

- Extremely difficult to travel to outlying areas such as Channelview, Deer Park, Humble, Missouri City, Webster, Galveston, The Woodlands
- Lack of transportation is a major barrier to job opportunities in the industrial/energy sectors in east Harris County
- Erratic bus schedules make it difficult to get to work on time or to meet medical appointments and job interviews
- Passengers with packages, mothers with young children and strollers impacting boarding process and drivers have been impatient with them
- For better passenger comfort restroom facilities should be available to the public at transit facilities such as transit centers, park and ride lots and rail stations
- Recent changes by METRO resulted in routes moved out of some neighborhoods requiring longer walks and safety concerns when crossing busy streets to get to a bus stop.²⁶

The highest priority geographic gaps are the lack of adequate transit services in some higher density areas in Harris County and adjacent counties. Other high priority gaps include the lack of baseline transit services in some rural counties.

²⁶ Gulf Coast RCTP Needs Assessment, Appendix E, Focus Groups Summary Report, October 2016.

Strategies to close gaps;

- Collaborations with local elected officials, and community leaders,
- Public Private Partnerships for transportation enhancements,
- Innovative Funding Options (see the RCTP Financial Plan).

Recommendations:

1. Transit Expansion to suburban areas within Harris County;

- in areas >2,000 people per square mile,
- with higher than average TNI values,
- without fixed route transit services.

2. Transit development and/or expansion (where feasible) in suburban and rural counties;

- Recommended baseline--county-wide demand response service for the general public, for all trip purposes,
- Route extensions or new routes as warranted based on TNI values, current services, local support, financial resources (such as local match) and the results of a benefit-cost assessment.

E. FINANCIAL PLAN SUMMARY²⁷

In recent years the level of federal funding for public transportation has increased nationwide. However, the transit funding allocated to small urban and rural operators in the state of Texas has remained relatively flat at \$29 million per year. That has constrained the amount of state funding that could be used as leverage for more federal funds. Since the state funding has been used as local match there has been a widening gap between the funds that are available and the funds actually needed to sustain and expand regional transit services consistent with regional growth and urbanization.

In a 2016 survey of Gulf Coast public and private transportation stakeholders, a question was asked about the biggest constraints encountered in providing and coordinating transportation services. Fifty percent of the respondents identified a lack of funding needed to serve current needs, followed by inadequate existing fixed route services.²⁸

²⁷ The detailed RCTP Financial Plan is available under separate cover as Appendix G.

²⁸ Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan, 2016 Transportation Agency Survey Update, 2017.

For planning purposes, a significant amount of funding, approximately \$33.8 billion, is included in the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for transit projects in the greater Houston region.²⁹ The 2040 RTP includes many larger scale transit projects and their associated costs.

For the RCTP Financial Plan the primary focus is on transit investments that will benefit the vulnerable population groups including but not limited to seniors (65+), persons with disabilities, youth, veterans and persons with low incomes. One of the funding related challenges is to program the shorter term transit needs into annual, five-year and ten-year programs of projects. With that objective in mind the RCTP Financial Plan outlines a strategy to increase the amount of regional funding that is available to address those shorter term needs. Another significant challenge is to explain how the various funding resources, which have been described as “silos”, are set up today and how a better coordinated regional funding stream would be more beneficial.

Key Recommendations:

- Advance planning and coordination for incremental regional transit expansion, where feasible, through the development of Pilot Projects to address the highest priority transportation related needs.
- Explore innovative funding options to supplement federal and state funding for smaller transit operators (that don't receive sales tax revenues)
 - Coordination and planning to establish a Local Match development fund
 - More research to quantify potential societal and economic benefits that could lead to future legislative actions to enhance the funding available for regional transit and ridesharing services (including alternative modes).

The annual funding that is used to support various public and human services transportation in the Gulf Coast region comes from various sources including federal, state and local resources.

A summary of expenses and ridership for the largest transit operators is shown in **Table 5**. As indicated, the total annual operating expenses were approximately \$484 million in 2014. The capital expenses vary from year-to-year and for 2014, \$372 million was budgeted for a total of \$855 million in expenses. The regional ridership was estimated at 89.3 million boardings.

²⁹ The 2040 RTP is for the greater Houston Transportation Management area which includes Harris and seven adjacent counties.

TABLE 5
GULF COAST ANNUAL FINANCIAL SUMMARY
LARGEST TRANSIT OPERATORS - 2014³⁰

Agency	Operating Expenses	Capital Expenses	Total Expenses	Ridership
METRO	\$454,397,826	\$369,878,818	\$824,276,644	85,369,587
Brazos Transit District³¹	\$380,000		\$380,000	26,000
BTD Conroe-Woodlands³²	\$8,513,198		\$8,513,198	817,069
Fort Bend County Transit	\$6,517,549	\$720,310	\$7,237,859	389,272
Gulf Coast Center	\$5,345,456	\$625,653	\$5,971,109	334,195
Island Transit	\$4,441,171	\$659,322	\$5,100,493	862,335
Harris County CSD Transit	\$3,922,093	\$60,674	\$3,982,767	172,862
Totals	\$483,517,293	\$371,944,777	\$855,462,070	89,253,184

Map 8 shows the urbanized areas within the Gulf Coast Region. The two large urbanized areas with populations greater than 200,000 are the Houston UZA and the Conroe-The Woodlands UZA. The smaller urbanized areas with populations below 200,000 include Lake Jackson-Angleton and Texas City-La Marque. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) appropriations to the UZAs (in FY 2016) total approximately \$80 million annually as shown in **Table 6**.

³⁰ Federal Transit Administration National Transit Database Agency Profiles 2014.

³¹ Includes BTD rural services in Liberty, Montgomery and Walker counties only.

³² Source-TxDOT PTN District Profiles, 2016

**MAP 8
GULF COAST URBANIZED AREAS**

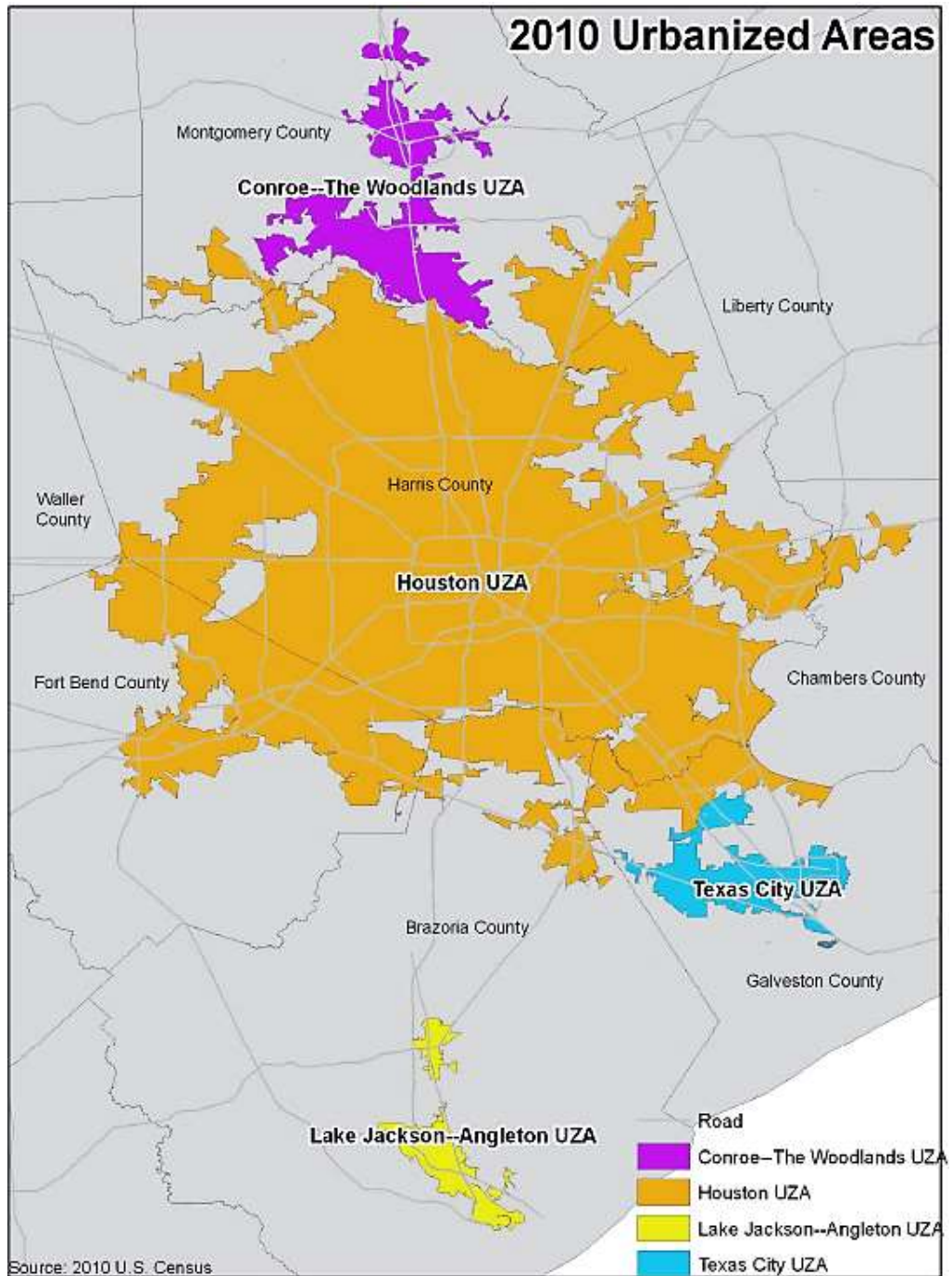


TABLE 6
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION APPROPRIATIONS – FY 2016³³

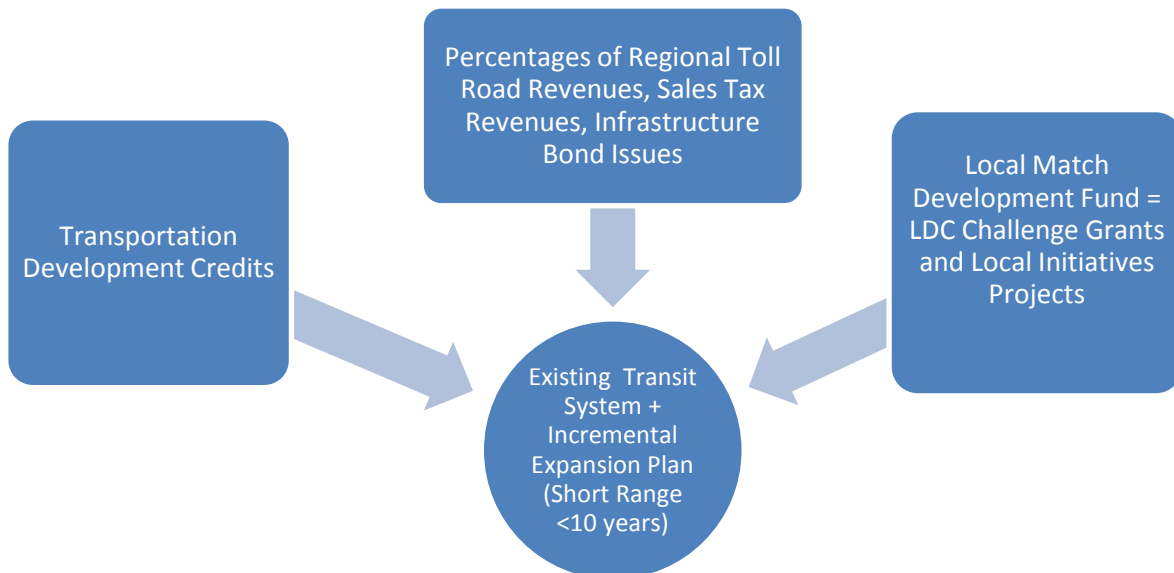
Agency	\$ Amounts
Houston Urbanized Area (UZA)	\$74,651,029
Conroe-The Woodlands UZA	\$3,018,098
Lake Jackson- Angleton UZA	\$1,059,930
Texas City UZA	\$1,398,432
Totals	\$80,127,429

RCTP Financial Plan Strategies

The basic strategy recommends the development of resources to provide a more stable revenue source for existing transit services and for potential expansions. One of the challenges with this approach requires the refinement of annual programs of projects to include an incremental expansion budget.

Some of the potential resources for the RCTP Financial Plan are not readily available and may require legislative actions to become feasible. The options discussed in this document should be considered as hypothetical, for planning purposes. **Figure 3** shows the key *concepts* of the RCTP Financial Plan.

FIGURE 3
RCTP FINANCIAL PLAN CONCEPT



The RCTP incremental expansion financial plan concept includes maintaining the existing federal and state funding levels for transportation projects serving the mobility needs of transportation

³³ FTA Apportionments for 5307 and 5340

disadvantaged groups including but not limited to seniors (65+), persons with disabilities, youth, veterans and persons with low incomes.

A parallel planning process is in the beginning stages to address the longer term financial requirements for large scale transit investments in the Gulf Coast region, such as high capacity transit. Approximately \$31 million of the total regional expenditure amount (4%) is associated with the smaller transit operators. For RCTP planning purposes it is presumed that any incremental service expansions will require additional funding, particularly for those smaller transit operators. An annual growth rate of 6.5% per year was used to estimate the gap in expenditures of approximately \$2 million per year for those operators.³⁴

The basic improvement strategy involves moving incrementally towards a better level of transit services in areas where potential demand exists and former constraints to expansion were primarily due to a lack of local financial resources.

There have been several recent voter approvals for increased transportation funding to mitigate growing traffic congestion in Texas. The results of the 2017 RCTP Community Transportation Survey indicates substantial support throughout the region for additional transit services for funding different transportation modes.³⁵

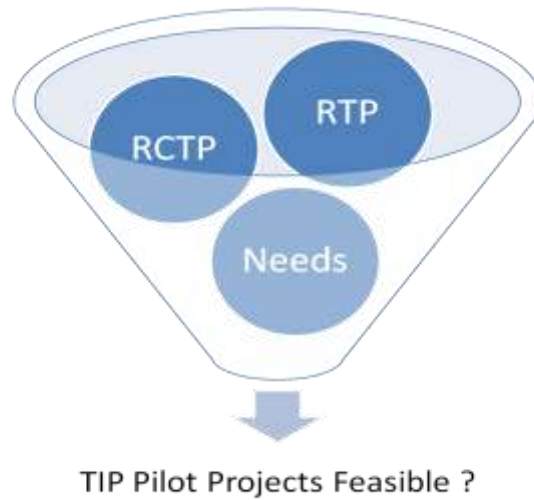
It would be prudent to include transportation initiatives that would incentivize transit development and other ridesharing options such as carpooling, vanpooling and other alternative modes. It is recommended that a proactive approach be considered to review and analyze the potential benefits of including more longer range multimodal transportation options within heavily traveled roadway corridors.

The following describes a strategy for developing and incorporating pilot projects that are responsive to the transportation related needs that were identified in the 2040 RTP and the RCTP Unmet Needs Assessment, into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as illustrated in **Figure 4**.

³⁴ Source: Texas Department of Transportation- Public Transportation Division, Public Transportation Needs Assessment, 2015.

³⁵ Source: RCTP Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment Survey, March 2017.

FIGURE 4
RCTP FINANCIAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



That process is considered as a first step to advance planning recommendations further towards implementation. The outline of the process includes the following steps:

- Identify regional transit needs for vulnerable population groups
- Coordinate with local stakeholders to confirm identified needs
- Conduct feasibility assessments of potential pilot projects
- Develop pilot projects for a trial period of 3-5 years
- Monitor and evaluate progress based on ridership goals, efficiency and effectiveness
- Sustain and expand successful pilot projects.

F. TRANSIT GAPS - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section summarizes the findings and recommendations for areas with identified transit gaps based on information from various sources. Findings refer to an assessment of the current situations including why a transit gap exists and how it is relevant. It can comprise a description of the circumstances, challenges and opportunities present.

Recommendations are informed suggestions that are offered as approaches to effectively address the noted transit gaps. Alternatives may be offered as potential solutions or improvements to current circumstances and challenges.

Finding # 1 – Funding for transit outside of the METRO service area is very limited. This is because, outside of the METRO service area, there is currently no dedicated funding source for transit. Local revenue sources for the non-federal share of transit service costs primarily come from the local general fund, which tend to be both limited and subject to year- to- year changes. Experience has shown that changes in local leadership, deteriorating economic conditions or negative perceptions of the role or effectiveness of transit services can lead to the reduction or elimination of local transit services. Stability in operations and long term planning is very difficult for local agencies lacking a dedicated source of funding. Most geographic gaps identified below are in areas outside of the METRO service area and the correlation to funding is not a coincidence.

Recommendation # 1 - All existing revenue sources (including local funding) should continue to be used. Areas with transit gaps that are underserved or not served by transit should consider utilizing local funds to leverage more state and federal funds for services in the short and medium term so that service gaps may be addressed. Per the 2017 results of the H-GAC Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment Survey³⁶, there is very strong regionwide community support for funding transit services where they currently do not exist.

Long-term solutions to regional transit funding would involve alternate means of funding besides general local revenues. Recommended innovative funding mechanisms include the development of a Local Match Fund and the augmentation of roadway Infrastructure Bonds to include transit initiatives. Additional revenue sources could include Transportation Development Credits (TDC) and a portion of toll road revenues; pending approvals by local elected officials and transportation agency staff.

³⁶ H-GAC Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment Community Survey, Question 41, Public Transit should be provided to areas that lack transit today; 81% agree.

Finding # 2 – Lack of Regional Connectivity is a serious gap that leads to fragmentation in transit services throughout the Gulf Coast region. Looking at a regional map of fixed route transit services (see **MAP 4**), the relatively dispersed and disconnected nature of the overall transit system is evident and connectivity between various transit providers is generally lacking. Park and Ride and demand response services are options that are available in most areas within Harris County. Peak period commuter bus services are generally available in one direction although reverse commute services are available in some corridors.

Off peak transit connections along many well-travelled roadway corridors largely do not exist. Other corridors such as SH 288, SH 6, and FM 1960 lack virtually any regional transit connectivity which results in extreme difficulty in transit travel to important origins and destinations along those corridors. All strata of the region are impacted by these substantial gaps

Recommendation # 2 - Enhancing regional connectivity should be among the highest priorities in coordinating and improving regional transit services. Improved connectivity along the growing IH 45 South /Gulf Freeway corridor between Houston and Galveston in the form of Express Bus or Commuter Rail services are potential options that could provide better mobility and accessibility to many residents. Better transit access to additional destinations would impact individuals of a wide variety of demographic and economic levels. More regional connectivity can also positively impact modal share.

Finding # 3 – Liberty County and the Cities of Cleveland, Liberty and Dayton have a high transit need. The percentage of persons with disabilities are very high countywide. Limited fixed/flexible route service exists in Cleveland, Dayton and Liberty with little service elsewhere. Liberty County is the largest rural county in the Gulf Coast Planning Region with nearly 80,000 residents. Transit service is limited for a county of its size and previous planning efforts identified the lack of local funding for expanded countywide transit services.

Recommendation # 3 - Liberty County officials, stakeholders and others should consider increasing the level of existing services especially for persons with disabilities and those over 65. Utilizing all available 5311 federal formula rural operating funds for Liberty County should be considered by fully matching federal dollars with local revenues and maximizing county service in rural areas and small cities.

Finding # 4 - The area of Bay Area/Webster/League City straddles the Harris and Galveston Counties' border, encompasses multiple jurisdictions and is connected geographically. However, outside of the League City Park and Ride service to Galveston and the Bay Area Park and Ride services to Houston, other modes of transit service in this area are minimal.

Density has increased substantially in League City and with increased density and transit need in the adjoining Bay Area including Webster and Clear Lake City in Harris County, fixed route bus

service is a viable option to meet the transportation related needs of those individuals in those communities who would use the service.

Recommendation # 4- Fixed route service should be considered for this growing and unique area. Federal Urbanized Area (UZA) operating funds may be available for both areas and the service could be delivered by existing providers such as METRO, Harris County Transit and Connect Transit. A feasibility study may be needed due to the unique configuration and nature of the area.

Finding # 5 – Alvin in Brazoria County has a significant transit need per the Transit Need Map. However, the residents of Alvin, with a population of nearly 26,000 (2015 US Census estimate), lacks significant transit service. Recently, Alvin considered service that would provide circulation service in Alvin and links to the County Seat in Angleton. The Transit Service Plan was rejected by the Alvin City Council.

Recommendation # 5 – Reconsideration of bus service in Alvin, with internal community circulation as well as links to the Southern Brazoria Transit service. Connect Transit would be a natural service provider.

Finding # 6a – Most of the areas that abut Harris County in Fort Bend County have both high levels of need per the Transit Need Map. Unincorporated areas of need in Fort Bend County include Mission Bend (within Fort Bend County) and Four Corners.

Finding # 6b – The incorporated communities of Missouri City and Stafford also have significant transit needs. Missouri City is part of METRO, but it has historically rejected fixed route service in favor of demand response services. Stafford has significant transit need, and is located adjacent to Missouri City.

Recommendation # 6a – Fort Bend County should consider an arrangement where flexible route or fixed route service that is provided to the Mission Bend (Fort Bend County) and the Four Corners areas of Fort Bend County. Coordination with METRO to link riders with services inside Harris County would be practical. Fort Bend Transit has the expertise to operate flexible route (point deviation service) in Mission Bend and Four Corners owing to its experience with Richmond/Rosenberg point deviation service.

Recommendation # 6b - Fixed or flexible route services are a potential means of addressing the existing service gaps in Missouri City and Stafford as well. Another possible innovative service to consider is first mile/last mile shuttles to the Missouri Park and Ride which could benefit

existing transit riders and persons needing transit services who want to access Houston employment and/or activity centers.

Finding # 7 – Walker County and Huntsville are areas of high transit need per both the TNI and the Transit Needs Map. Limited transit service is provided by over 65 transportation services (Senior Rides) and minimal rural transit service by the Brazos Transit District. Private student transportation meets a degree of student need. Walker County and the City of Huntsville provide a modest level of funding which is substantially below the level at which federal funds would be fully matched.

Recommendation # 7 – Leaders and stakeholders should consider working together to increase the local level of funding for transit services so that the federal match can be better leveraged. The result can be a greater level of local service. Options that provide more trips per vehicle such as flexible routes may be considered.

Finding # 8 – Chambers County is the only county that does not have a designated public transit service provider among the 13 counties in the Gulf Coast Planning Region. While per capita income is higher than average in Chambers County, overall transit need is close to the average among rural counties with a score of “9”. Children and young adults, an identified need factor by FTA and TxDOT, is higher than average in Chambers County. The over 65 population is higher than the rural average. While not a higher than average need, The Transit Need Index still shows that considerable transportation needs exist in Chambers County that are unmet by the existing level of transportation.

Recommendation # 8 – Provide a general demand response countywide system that links communities within Chambers County. A Park and Ride service from Chambers County linked to employment opportunities, medical facilities and specialists in Harris County would also be beneficial for Chambers County residents. Harris County Transit, Brazos Transit District or Connect Transit are all potential service providers.

Finding # 9 – Montgomery County has been historically underserved by transit except for The Woodlands Express Park and Ride network and relatively new fixed-route service inside the City of Conroe. Funding for local match (for available federal funding) has been especially challenging in the rural areas and locations that are part of the Houston Urbanized Area.

New service initiatives have occurred in the past few months as local officials, stakeholders and current service providers have worked diligently in developing countywide coordination and connectivity in Montgomery County and improved community transit.

Using the relatively new Conroe-Woodlands Transit UZA as the means to increase services countywide, Montgomery County has moved forward with efforts at county level coordination. Meeting bylaws were adjusted to facilitate extensive discussion of countywide mobility issues beside matters relating to the UZA at its quarterly meetings. It is a unique practice designed to provide a forum for countywide mobility efforts.

Recommendation # 9 – The initiation of a concerted attempt to improve transit/mobility service in Montgomery County is one of the identified regional best practices. Initial actions are only in the preliminary phase. Continued coordinated action is recommended.

Finding # 10 – Nearly one quarter of the land area (primarily in the eastern portion) of Harris County is outside of METRO’s service area. Locations that comprise the eastern communities in Harris County lack a dedicated funding source (sales tax) to fund transit services. However, needs for transit services are substantial in eastern Harris County and do not stop within the METRO service area.

Among the eastern Harris County areas with a high transit need are: Baytown, Channelview, La Porte, and Pasadena. Baytown is served by 4 routes (with recent expansion of service): La Porte is served by one route. Channelview has no service.

Pasadena, the second largest incorporated city in the Gulf Coast Planning Region (2015 Census) with substantial employment, also has considerable roadway links to Houston to the northwest, south and west but only provides very limited service through Harris County Rides.

Recommendation # 10 – Pasadena has a clear need for fixed route transit services. Given its employment needs, population density, geographic and economic links to Houston, and overall high transit needs, developing fixed route transit services, both internally-connected and linked significantly with METRO routes, is highly recommended. Channelview may also be considered for transit service.

Finding # 11 – Transit need and density along SH-6 and FM 1960 to the west of Beltway 8 in Harris County has grown substantially in the last five years. The outward population and transit needs growth is primarily in areas that are beyond METRO’s local route coverage. Thus, no fixed route or demand response service is provided. While Harris County Rides is available, the distance to many services makes it cost prohibitive.

METRO provides service along portions of SH-6 but there are considerable gaps. Efforts to add service in adjacent areas have met with community resistance or lack of interest. Good faith attempts to address a service gap do not cause the gap to disappear. Population and demographic trends over the last five years (along with long range projections) indicate the gaps will only worsen over time.

Recommendation # 11 - METRO is making a long-term effort to address challenges in its growing Service Area through its Long-Range Plan. H-GAC should work with METRO as appropriate in assisting in the implementation of the METRO Long-Range Plan. METRO is the ideal provider to develop service in new areas of need to connect with its existing local route coverage.

Interim (pilot) service may be possible since implementation of METRO routes could be several years in the future. Use of Transportation Networking Companies (TNCs), including Microtransit, linking residences to employment/education and medical services with smaller vehicles in the Energy Corridor from the Highway 6 and other growing areas is possible.

Finding # 12 – The small cities of Prairie View and Hempstead each have a high level of transit need per the Transit Need Index Map. Currently demand response service is the only public transit offered in Waller County. The greater reliability and certainty of fixed route or flexible route service over demand response service would allow more individuals to access growing job openings, educational opportunities, medical services and shopping.

Another transportation option offered is Prairie View A&M University Transportation Services, which is available for students, faculty and staff for on-campus and off-campus trips.³⁷

Recommendation # 12 – To provide flexible route or fixed route service to Hempstead and Prairie View with connections between the two communities and Prairie View A&M University. While additional services may develop in other communities in Waller County such as Brookshire and Waller along with connections to Harris County, new service in Hempstead and Prairie View is of the most significant need.

Finding # 13 – The county seat of Matagorda County, Bay City, has a high level of transit need per the Transit Need Index Map. Currently, demand response service is the only public transit offered in Matagorda County. The greater reliability and certainty of fixed route or flexible route service over demand response service would allow more individuals to access job opportunities, medical services and shopping.

Recommendation # 13 – To provide flexible route Bay City transit service as described in the Matagorda County Transit Service Plan, October 2010.

³⁷ Texas A&M Transportation Institute Transportation Services Survey Findings, 2013, pp.2

IV. PLANNING FOR COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

Comprehensive services in the Gulf Coast Planning Region will require the integration of various services and should result in the implementation of new transit services. Traditional coordination roles in enhancing service will continue to play an important role, while new ride sharing services and emerging technologies will also provide for new options and resources in the future.

Coordination services using existing funding resources include:

- FTA funded programs including 5307, 5339 and 5311 operating, capital and planning funds for local transit agencies;
- Other FTA-funded programs including 5310 for person with disabilities and seniors (65+) in the urbanized (UZA) and non-UZA areas of the Gulf Coast Planning Region
- HHS Services Program - Medical Transportation Program (MTP);
- State Public Transportation Funding;
- Area Agency on Aging Senior Funding;
- Local Municipal Revenue;
- Work Force Programs;
- Local Non-Profit Revenue (Contributions, Grants, Fundraising)

H-GAC staff are exploring alternate funding sources to meet the burgeoning local and regional needs for transit services. Possible longer term funding sources include the Local Match Development Fund and Infrastructure Bonds. The current survey conducted for this study indicates a high level of community support for local funding.

Among the large challenges to overcome in developing comprehensive regional transit and health and human services is remaining aware of the difficulties of coordinating various sources and addressing their independence over time. Funding silos have existed before the first coordination plans were conducted in Texas in 2006; many of the same silos remain. Change remains elusive.

Advancement usually occurs in a very large region such as the Gulf Coast Planning Region from the “bottom up”. H-GAC staff and the RTCS can provide a framework and support change involving transit, coordination, connectivity, service expansion and addressing service gaps. Often it can only support it. Nevertheless, the Gulf Coast Planning Region can provide effective transit planning with action and support at the regional level that will impact vulnerable populations. Activity that takes place at the sub-regional level will invariably require local champions and local supporters to move forward.

Newer transit services generally provide additional opportunities for targeted populations. H-GAC can often highlight these kinds of emerging opportunities. Although many of the services delivered by Transportation Networking Companies (TNC) have been considered as services targeted towards more “upscale patrons” since they require smart phones and credit cards, many

members of the total population can use them and technological changes may result in the service becoming more universal in the future. Programs such as *first mile/last mile* may emerge as a valuable means of filling transit gaps and allowing access for seniors, persons with disabilities, etc. to park and ride transit services and other locations at a moderate cost.

An emerging transportation related 5310 Program issue (for seniors and persons with disabilities) is the requirement for larger transit vehicles, with more space to accommodate the larger mobility devices (power chairs) which do not fit into the standard wheelchair spaces on the transit buses.

The unmet transportation related needs from the information above are: 1) Lack of adequate local match funding. To sustain and expand the successful (fixed route) transit services in those small urban and rural areas a more reliable funding source is needed and; 2) Outdated vehicle design standards.

A potential solution to the local match funding shortage could be through a challenge grant program like the Transit Worker Initiative. A potential solution to the vehicle design challenge could be using the H-GAC Buy Cooperative Purchasing program for specialized transit vehicles that can transport passengers using the larger mobility devices and have more positions for persons in wheelchairs.

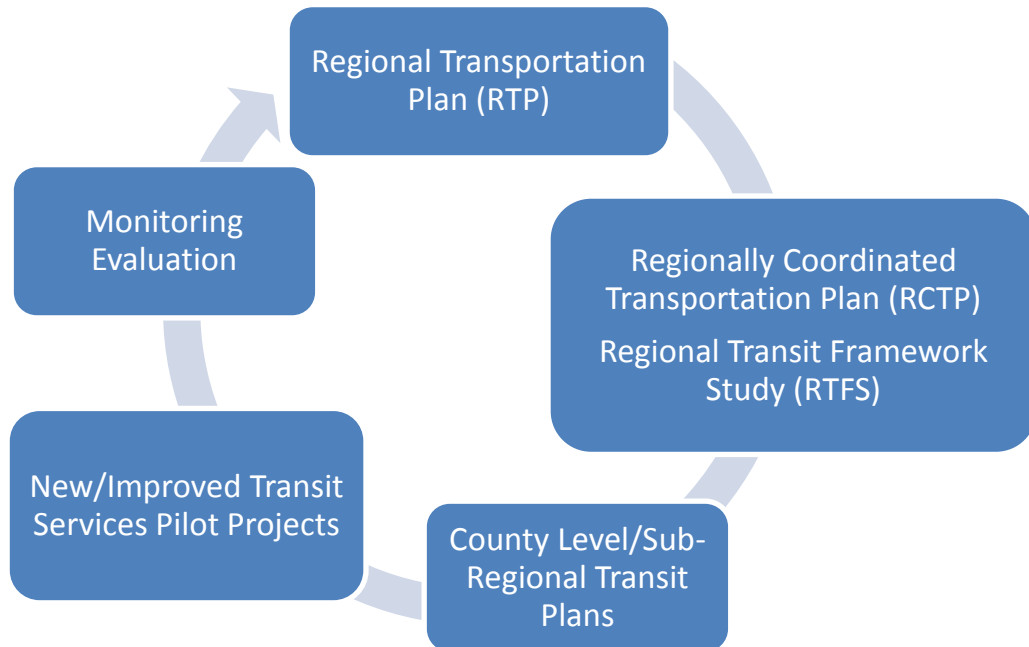
V. INTEGRATED PLANNING PROCESS

A. RELATED PLANS IN THE RCTP PLANNING PROCESS

The Gulf Coast RCTP planning process focuses on the coordination between the public transportation and health and human service transportation services within the 13-county region. The 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which is the primary transportation plan for the region, focuses on the eight-county MPO Planning Region with a 20-year planning horizon. The RTP includes the transportation plans and associated funding for large scale regional capital projects including roadways, transit, freight and alternative modes. The 2011 RCTP was incorporated into the 2040 RTP and it is anticipated that the 2017 RCTP will be included as part of the 2045 RTP.

County-level transit plans have been developed in the 5 rural counties during the past 9 years. Those plans were approved by local commissioners' courts or boards of directors. The recommendations from those county-level plans have not been implemented largely because of the lack of local funding needed to leverage more federal or state funds, to expand existing services. **Figure 5** illustrates that planning process.

**FIGURE 5
REGIONAL TRANSIT PLANNING PROCESS**



A newer regional transit planning initiative is the Regional Transit Framework Study. That plan is currently being updated and includes an incremental expansion component that will be part of the 2045 RTP which is scheduled for completion in 2018.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) is scheduled to complete its next long range plan update in 2018. Regional transit agencies submit their requests for federal planning funds to H-GAC to be included in the Unified Planning Work Program that is updated on a two-year cycle.

As the planning recommendations advance towards project implementation they are included in the four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). No other health and human service or work force agencies engage in formal transportation planning however efforts are beginning to include funding for transportation services in the budgets developed by non-profit agencies. .

B. BEST PRACTICES IN THE HOUSTON – GALVESTON PLANNING REGION

Highly successful efforts have emerged in different parts of the region in terms of meeting community needs and addressing gaps in transit service. The best practices outlined developed from within the communities and their success is contingent upon both local coordination and partnerships. It can be done working with local officials, staff, human service agencies and often transit agency support.

Best practices have recently emerged in at least three diverse locations: regular bus service in Southern Brazoria County, mobility county wide efforts in Montgomery County and demand response service with Harris County Rides that has expanded to Brazoria, Galveston and Montgomery Counties.



Photo provided by Connect Transit

Comprised of four cities, Lake Jackson, Angleton, Clute and Freeport, Southern Brazoria County did not seem the ideal location to start a bus system. The wide range of community needs, including Brazosport College, overcame some of the logistical obstacles to result in a bus system that well serves the needs of Southern Brazoria residents.

Montgomery County has a substantial rural population of about 150,000 (2010 census). However, the largest component of its population is in the Conroe-Woodlands Urbanized Area (over 200,000 – 2010 census). Another portion of the county located near the Harris County border is part of the Houston UZA. Transit funding is challenging.

The Conroe- Woodlands Urbanized Area has taken a leadership role in working to develop a countywide mobility plan that will impact all locations within Montgomery County.

Rural service has been very limited. Local officials, transit providers, human service agencies and citizens have been aware of the situation and have been taking a series of steps to address the gaps. Among the steps:

- Develop a countywide strategic action plan for seniors, persons with disabilities, veterans and persons with low incomes and the general public;
- Identify and commit funding sources, both local and federal, to expanding existing rural service;
- Commit to hiring of an interim Mobility Manager to help assess the existing community transportation environment.

While its effort is in the earlier stages of development, Montgomery County along with the Conroe-Woodlands Urbanized Area have embarked on a path of addressing the gaps in transit service in Montgomery County.

Alternate means of transportation service have emerged in the last few years. One of the first and most successful alternatives in Houston is Harris County Rides. Service is available to seniors and persons with disabilities. Providing same day trips subsidized for 50% up to \$48 per trip has been well received.

While successful in providing trips within Harris County, the service has successfully contracted with other transit and human service agencies in other counties and communities. Service has recently expanded to Montgomery and Galveston counties. Harris County Rides provides a valuable service that is an important lifeline to many lacking basic transportation options.



Some other local best practices were highlighted during the RCTP Power of Transit Symposium and include the following:

- METRO and Harris County Transit (HCT) Baytown Park and Ride
- HCT- East Harris County and the City of Baytown
- Fort Bend Express
- Island Transit and Gulf Coast Center Connect Transit
- METRO Star Vanpool³⁸

³⁸ Power of Transit Symposium, H-GAC, June 2016

VI. VISION, MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES³⁹

Vision: In the year 2040 our region will have a *multimodal transportation system* through *coordinated investments* that support a *desirable quality of life, enhanced economic vitality and increased safety, access and mobility (italics added for emphasis)*.

The Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) approved the use of the Vision statement, selected transit related goals and performance measures from the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) in July 2015. Those were combined with the RTCS purpose statements as strategies for the development of the RCTP update. The transit related goals and performance measures were chosen to be consistent with the parallel planning processes for the RTP and the RCTP Update:

2040 RTP Transit Related Goals and Performance Measures:

- Improve Safety-Reduce Crash Rates.
- Manage and Mitigate Congestion-Increase Bus On-Time Performance, Increase Reliability.
- Ensure Strong Asset Management and Operations-Incident Response, System Condition.
- Strengthen Regional Economic Competitiveness-Commute Mode Split.
- Conserve and Protect Natural and Cultural Resources-Reduce impacts requiring mitigation (such as vehicle emissions).

The RTCS Purpose statements (recommended as RCTP Strategies) are shown below:

RTCS Purpose:

- Provide guidance related to the implementation of regional transit coordination pilot projects that were identified in the regional transit coordination Action Plan.
- Assist with tasks related to the development of regional transit planning initiatives that focus on identifying opportunities for expanding transit services in the region for all, as well as improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the current regional transit system.
- Promote regional coordination among existing and future public and private transportation providers, social service and health and human service agencies.

For the RCTP Gap Analysis two of the 2040 RTP metrics are recommended because they correlate with some of the regional transit challenges that have been identified by RCTP public comments.

- % transit--commute mode split
- % on-time performance-- increase reliability

³⁹ More details are included in the RCTP Gap Analysis, Appendix F, March 2017, available under separate cover.

It is recommended that the regional percent (%) of transit measure be augmented to include other alternative modes of transportation such as carpool, vanpool, bike and pedestrians. Users of those alternative modes could share access and transit infrastructure facilities. For example, people could walk or bike from a residential area to a nearby transit center or park and ride lot. From there they could take a bus or join a carpool or vanpool if spaces for coordinated staging and empty seats were available.

On-time performance related challenges were identified during the RCTP Focus Groups and were described as unreliable bus schedules for work trips, job interviews and medical appointments. One of the most challenging aspects of maintaining on-time schedules is the impact of routine peak period traffic congestion which can become worse when incidents happen that result in crashes. Recent improvements to the local bus system in Houston through the New Bus Network have significantly improved the frequency of buses along major corridor routes.

The regional modal split, or the share of transit trips, is expected to increase over time with improved and expanded regional transit services.

Objectives for the RCTP emerging from the Needs Assessment/Gap Analysis/Financial Plan include the following:

- Improve the quality of transit infrastructure throughout the region by constructing accessible sidewalks and other related amenities to enhance the ability of individuals to access local bus routes and light rail lines;
- Highlight geographic locations including places, cities and counties with low levels of transit service and high levels of transit need;
- Indicate areas with no general transit service as location with significant transit gaps;
- Provide solutions or alternatives to address geographic gaps;
- Improve levels of service on existing transit where possible;
- Address funding shortfalls in revenue in existing transit agencies through existing and alternative revenue sources.

SECTION VII.

SUSTAIN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENT PLAN

H-GAC's Financial Plan provides a framework for sustaining any plan that is implemented in the Gulf Coast region. The H-GAC 2017 Financial Plan develops the gap analysis by determining the costs for delivering existing and future service.

Plans for all transit agencies in the eight county MPO region are engaged in the four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). It is a fiscally constrained financial plan of transportation projects (including transit) approved to receive federal funds over the next four years. TIP provides a de facto framework for planning throughout the region (especially among smaller providers).

In a 2016 survey of Gulf Coast public and private transportation stakeholders, a question was asked about the biggest constraints encountered in providing and coordinating transportation services. 50% of the respondents identified a lack of funding needed to serve current needs, followed by inadequate existing fixed route services.⁴⁰

For planning purposes, a significant amount of funding, approximately \$33.8 billion (in year of expenditure values), is included in the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for transit projects in the greater Houston region.⁴¹ The 2040 RTP was approved by the H-GAC Transportation Policy Council in January 2015 and reports that:

“Funding also presents a challenge throughout the course of the 2040 RTP. The only dedicated local revenue source for transit is in the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) service area. As rural and suburban areas of the eight county region become increasingly developed, the need for additional transit services of all kinds will be challenged by the lack of long term local funding. Transit dependent communities are segments of the population without personal vehicles that use public transportation as their primary source of mobility. Based on recent Census data and socio-demographic analysis, many of these communities are increasingly being found outside the METRO service area. The H-GAC {led} Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan indicates a need of approximately \$15 million annually—a funding stream that does not currently exist—to address this population.”⁴²

The 2040 RTP includes many larger scale transit projects and their associated costs. Transit funding is summarized in **Table 7** and represents a long term investment in transit initiatives by various strategies as listed below:

⁴⁰ Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan, 2016 Transportation Agency Survey Update, 2017.

⁴¹ The 2040 RTP is for the greater Houston Transportation Management area which includes Harris and seven adjacent counties.

⁴² More details are available in the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan at www.h-gac.com/mobility.

- System Management and Operations
- State of Good Repair
- Multimodal Network Expansion Widening
- Multimodal Network Expansion Construction
- Development Coordination.

TABLE 7
2040 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN
TRANSIT FUNDING

Regional Investment Programs	Totals	Notes
Local High Capacity Transit	\$4,604,631,652	Includes non-corridor light rail, park and ride, transit centers, demand management strategies. ⁴³
Transit Capital	\$3,958,125,346	Includes all other new or expanded facilities, services and vehicles.
Transit Other	\$25,268,270,657	Includes non-capital transit expenditures.
Total	\$33,831,027,655	

For the RCTP Financial Plan the primary focus is on smaller scale transit investments that will benefit the vulnerable population groups including but not limited to seniors (65+), persons with disabilities, youth, veterans and persons with low incomes. One of the fundamental challenges is to relate shorter term transit needs into annual, five-year and ten-year programs of projects for each of the smaller regional transit providers. With that objective in mind this RCTP Financial Plan will outline a strategy to increase the amount of regional funding that is available to address those shorter term needs. Another significant challenge is to explain how the various funding resources which have been described as “silos” are set up today and how a better coordinated regional funding stream would be more beneficial.

Key Recommendations:

- Advance planning and coordination for incremental regional transit expansion, where feasible
- Coordination and planning to establish a Local Match development fund
- More research to clarify potential benefits that could lead to future legislative actions to enhance the funding available for regional transit and ridesharing services (including alternative modes).

⁴³ Non-corridor light rail is not within the right-of-way of major freeway corridors.

1. Organizational Infrastructure

H-GAC combines an experienced staff of four transit professionals with supporting staff who can aid in such key knowledge areas as: Travel Modeling, GIS support, database assistance, Environmental Justice/Title VI, Bicycle/Pedestrian planning, and Public Outreach among others. Implementing the RCTP will be one of the Transit Planning Group's important goals and objectives during the coming years.

Significant transit staff resources and time will be dedicated towards RCTP goals and objectives directly and indirectly. Directly through follow-up and implementation of the plan. Indirectly, improving access to transit services throughout the region, which is congruent with much of the work of H-GAC transit staff.

2. Means of Engaging Regional Stakeholders

Several means exist of engaging regional stakeholders. They include:

- Working with ongoing sub-regional coordination efforts within the planning region to achieve goals on a more scalable level;
- Hold periodic public meetings around the region to gain insight into overall issues and view the progress of RCTP implementation;
- Provide updated information through an online newsletter and social media on the progress of the RCTP.
- Coordination with transit agency public meeting including METRO, Conroe-The Woodlands, Southern Brazoria, and Gulf Coast Transit District.
- Inclusion of vulnerable population groups when possible;

VIII. PERFORMANCE MEASURES TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS⁴⁴

The RTCS approved its locally determined metrics from the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The metrics were chosen to be consistent with the parallel planning processes in the RTP and RCTP updates. The two key RTP metrics for the RCTP are the percent of travel on transit (to include other alternate modes of transportation such as carpool, bike and walking, i.e. non-SOV) and percent on time performance of transit vehicles.

Table 8 displays the recommended performance measures and suggestions for the collection, maintenance and assessment of those values by coordinating the development of a RCTP/RTP Performance Monitoring database. **Table 9** shows similar information for the Statewide Metrics.

**TABLE 8
RCTP PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

Data Items	Collect	Maintain	Assess
Percent Transit	Online-Review Annually	RCTP/RTP Performance Monitoring (PM) Database	3,5, 10 year intervals
On-time Performance	Online-Review Annually	PM Database	3,5, 10 year intervals

Determination of the percent of transit’s success is based upon improvement in the existing modal split for transit services as defined herein. Increasing the percent of transit’s share of service in the future will be measured positively.

⁴⁴ More details about the performance measures are included in the RCTP Gap Analysis Document, Appendix F, March 2017, available under separate cover.

TABLE 9
RCTP STATEWIDE METRICS

Data Items	Collect	Maintain	Provide Data
Collaborations	# Partnerships # Stakeholder Organizations # Individuals	Performance Monitoring (PM) Database	3-5 year intervals
Identification of Gaps and Inefficiencies	# Gaps/inefficiencies identified	PM Database	5 year intervals
Resolution of Gaps and Inefficiencies	# Gaps/inefficiencies resolved	PM Database	5-10 year intervals