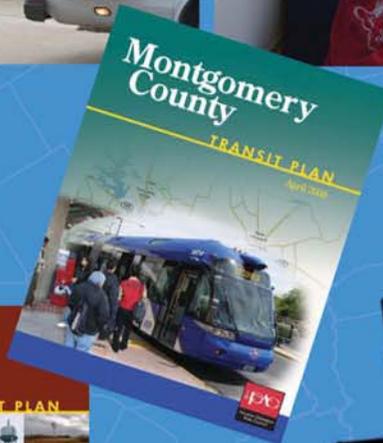
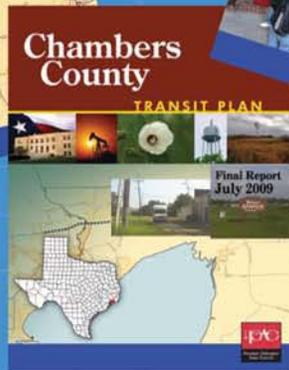
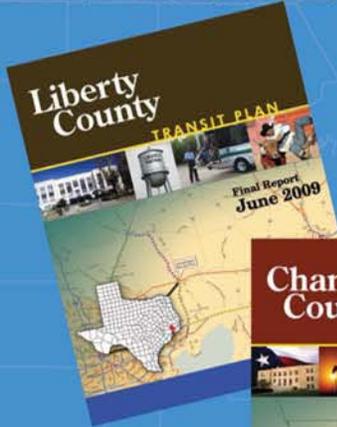


Gulf Coast Region Updated Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan



Executive Summary



December 2011



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary presents a very brief overview of the key findings and recommendations that are included in the Updated Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP) for the Gulf Coast Region. Following are a series of related questions and their answers.

What is the RCTP ?

The RCTP is a comprehensive multi-agency plan to better coordinate the public transportation services in our region. It is part of a statewide planning process that includes the councils of governments in Texas. The purpose of the coordination plan is to ensure that all of the agencies that are responsible for planning and providing public transportation are working together to make their services more convenient for their customers and more efficient.

Why is the RCTP important ?

When the transportation service providers, regional planners and health and human service agencies work together it can save the tax-payers money and increase the effectiveness of the transportation services in our communities.

What's in it for me ?

Do you (or someone you know) need a ride ? Are you too young or too old to drive ? Do you sometimes not have enough gas money to get where you need to go and get back? Do you know about the low-cost public transportation options in your community ? {If not, call 211, the United Way Helpline for information about available transportation options in your area. For more details about the regional transit coordination plan, visit the project website at www.ridethegulfcoast.com.

The RCTP contains information about the public transportation options in your community and about the ongoing efforts to improve the regional public transportation system based on the transportation related needs that we heard about in the past. Many new projects have been implemented in response to those needs and we want to make sure that: 1) you are aware of those new or expanded services; and 2) that your unmet transportation related needs are documented for future action.

What we heard in the past:

Within the METRO service area there are many people that use the METRO and METROLift services on a regular basis and generally they can get to and from their

desired destinations. There are also some communities within the METRO service area where people have had limited success in using the METRO system for various reasons including but not limited to the following: they could not use it easily for cross-town trips, for mid-day, evenings or weekends or for longer distance trips that required more than one transfer.

Communities that are outside of the METRO Service Area have had very limited public transportation options in the past. Most of those communities are in Eastern Harris County or the outer counties. Those communities have had some form of a limited demand response service (dial-a-ride) for the elderly and disabled in parts of their areas. There has been a lack of adequate funding for county-wide demand response public transportation services for the general public in the outer counties in the Gulf Coast region. The general public with limited mobility options also includes those with lower incomes, youth, students and adults for various trip purposes including but not limited to employment, educational opportunities and recreation.

What has been done:

New and/or expanded transit services have been implemented recently in many communities that are responsive to transportation related needs that were identified before. Those new or expanded public transportation services are in Fort Bend County, Montgomery County, Eastern Harris County, Galveston and Brazoria Counties and Austin County. A regional transit services guide has been developed to provide more information to the general public and stakeholders about public transportation options. Transportation service providers in our region can now purchase transit vehicles through the H-GAC Buy cooperative purchasing program, saving taxpayer dollars.

What else needs to be done ?

Several projects have been identified to advance the coordination between service providers and stakeholder agencies in the region. Those projects include providing more information about the existing services and the benefits of using transit to elected officials as well as to the general public in more forms. A seamless regional transit fare policy is being pursued as well as coordinated training for drivers and operations staff, insurance pools and maintenance agreements are being considered among other strategies.

Respondents to a recent survey by Care for Elders of more than a thousand seniors in Houston and Harris County indicated that ***transportation and mobility challenges*** are

their highest priority concerns. **Table ES-1** summarizes some recommendations to improve the transportation system from their perspective.¹

Table ES-1. Transportation and Mobility Needs, Seniors 2010

Transportation and Mobility- Recommendations	Frequency	Percent
Improve how current transportation programs operate so that they better meet seniors' needs.	669	58.22
Make it safer for seniors to get around outside their homes by doing things like putting in sidewalks and allowing more time to cross the street.	205	17.84
Provide helpers on Metro buses and other transit vehicles to help riders get on/off, carry packages, etc.	173	15.06
Reduce the cost of current transportation programs.	102	8.88
Total	1149	100

There were 12,897 validated responses to the 2007 Onboard Transit Survey representing more than 329,000 transit system trips (boardings) on METRO, the Woodlands Express and Island Transit.

Those survey respondents who used the METRO local bus system offered many comments about the service that can be viewed as suggestions for improvement or transit related needs. The top responses by categories are noted below.²

Table ES-2. METRO Local Weekday Comments

Improvement Related Comments	Frequency
Concern about operating transit services on time.	1,318
Expand levels of service (earlier service, later service, more frequent service, add midday service).	1,304
Compliments or comments specific to a particular service.	1,054
Concern about driver attitude/courtesy/safe driving habits	757

As part of the Regional Transit Framework Study a Non-Rider telephone survey was conducted and several focus groups were coordinated to identify the transit related issues (needs) for riders and non-riders. In addition, a report that identified the regional

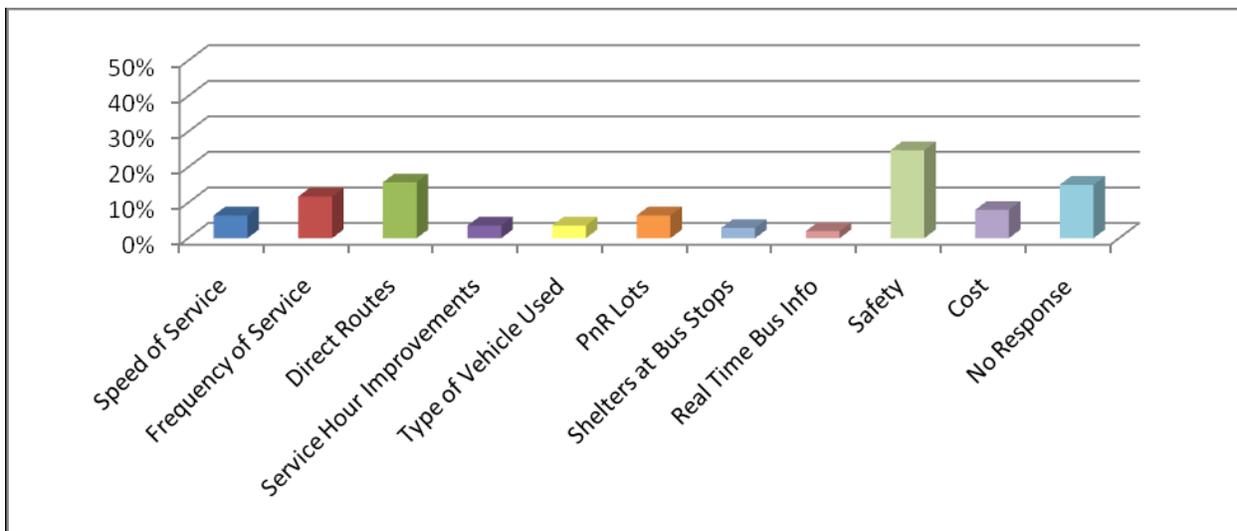
¹ Care for Elders, www.careforelders.org, 2010.

² H-GAC 2007 Transit Onboard Survey, Dikita Management Services, RSM Services Corporation.

transit deficiencies and needs was developed. The most significant results of those efforts are summarized below.

The Non-Rider Survey reported responses from 452 people throughout the TMA region. Overall, safety was the most influential factor affecting the decision to use public transit, followed by direct routes and then frequency of service.

Figure ES-1. Overall Factors Affecting the Decision to Use Public Transit³



Regional transit needs include the following:

- New commuter based services will be needed to meet the demand of the projected population growth in suburban communities.
- New local services needed to connect local communities with the regional services.
- Investments in right-of-way improvements or other transit priority measures to reduce the impact of traffic congestion.
- Network of coordinated local and regional transit services to provide seamless regional travel".⁴

Moving towards a more coordinated and more comprehensive transit service delivery system will require a better understanding of the overlaps and gaps in the service delivery system from the customers' and funders' perspectives. A local workshop was

³ Source: H-GAC Regional Transit Framework Study Non-Rider Telephone Survey, 2010.

⁴ H-GAC Regional Transit Framework Study—Regional Transit Deficiencies and Needs Report, 2010.

recently organized in relation to that challenge through the United Way of Greater Houston. It was titled “Bridging the Social Services Transportation Gap: A Workshop on Forming Strategic Collaborations”. The purpose of the workshop was to better understand the transportation stakeholder agencies and to get acquainted with their representatives and staff from various non-profit organizations. In addition, the participants discussed transportation related challenges and potential solutions to address those challenges.

In general terms, there may be several opportunities to enhance the public transportation system in the Gulf Coast Region to be more coordinated. Some of the more apparent ones relate to 1) potential local match funding that could be used to leverage other resources, 2) overlapping service areas, and 3) uncoordinated county-level delivery systems. Each of those opportunities are explained more thoroughly in the RCTP document (pages 43-45).

Next Steps, 2011-2015

The following outline provides some guidance in advancing the transit service planning and coordination activities in the region for the next few years.

1. Review and Re-prioritize Pilot Projects (as needed) for regional coordination, including but not limited to expanded Resource Sharing and Public Information.
2. Develop a 2011 Coordination Action Plan and prioritize potential pilot projects for implementation in the 2011-2015 timeframe with assistance from the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) members.
3. Prepare an analysis of Non-Emergency Medical Trips using the Demand Response Accessibility Tool (DRT) or similar tools and techniques.
4. Conduct Travel Pattern Analyses of County-to-County Flows for total trips (Work and Non-Work trips).
5. Coordinate Regional Transit System Monitoring and Evaluation.
6. Expand the Coordinated Voucher Program to Brazoria and Galveston Counties through Intra-local Agreements with Gulf Coast Connect and Fort Bend County (FBC) through FBC Transit.
7. Develop a regional transit coordination financial plan.
8. Evaluate the locations of LEP households relative to transit access.
9. Update and refine the Transit Needs Index (TNI) methodology as more detailed Census 2010 data becomes available.

Table ES-3 highlights some potential Pilot Projects for further development that were summarized in the Action Plan from the 2006 Regional Transit Coordination Plan (Executive Summary pages 11-14). More details are available in the original published

documents, copies are available by request to H-GAC or at (www.ridethegulfcoast.com).

Table ES-3. Potential Pilot Projects, 2011-2015

2011 Action Plan Summary	Potential Pilot Projects
Consumer Information Program	211 Transportation Specialist
	Regional Mobility Manager Web based information (new).
Business and Public Officials Information Program	Regional Transportation Alliance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify transit champion(s) • Share information.
Cooperative Resource Development	Expand and publicize H-GAC Buy, Regional Training Coordination Universal Certification Standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drivers • mechanics • dispatchers Shared Maintenance Program Regional Transportation Ambassador Program Service Providers Fair- for agencies that requested technical assistance paired with agencies that offered technical assistance (6 categories).
Revised Rules & Regulations	Focus on Rules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that inhibit Trip Chaining & Trip Sharing • Encourage ineffective gate-keeping (ie, abruptly terminate experimentation) Review and update Barriers, Constraints, Opportunities relative to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medicaid dispatching modifications Use of School Buses for off peak HHS Transportation. Capital Replacement Strategy for vehicles better matching of medical services to transportation needs.
Overall Coordination Body	Continuation strategy- Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee, TAC, TPC, H-GAC Board

Establish New Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review service gaps, areas lacking sufficient coverage (area, hours, days), • 31 service recommendations were identified.
Flexible Insurance	Insurance pool.
Equipment and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization of alternative fuels, strategies to reduce emissions from transit vehicles • Policies and procedures for fare sharing transfers, electronic media (smart cards) for seamless fare system • improved communications between drivers and passengers
Access to Public Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel Counseling • home improvements • neighborhood improvements • trip assistance
Funding Strategy	<p>Federal, State, local Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated pursuit of grant funds by H-GAC and four TxDOT Districts (Gulf Coast region) • Combining resources of traditionally separate funding streams • Include funding concerns on legislative agendas at local, state and federal levels • Establish financial plans for pilot projects • Create a position for liaison (specialist) to pursue state and federal grants for the region • Actively pursue funding sources outside of state and federal grants

Other potential Pilot Projects based on public input:

- Transportation Options Counseling.
- Infrastructure/Service Improvements in high transit need areas.
- Car-share Program
- Volunteer Driver Voucher Program