

Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan



Assessment of Unmet Transportation Needs

Houston-Galveston Area Council

October 2016

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Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan
Needs Assessment**

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Introduction

The purpose of this assessment of unmet transportation related needs is to identify and evaluate those needs for further actions that will improve the transportation options that are 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 better coordinated services or other strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of that system.

This needs assessment starts with 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).

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. The comments focused on unmet transportation related needs in specific parts of the region. Excerpts from those comments are noted below, the complete detailed comments are included in Appendix C.

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

On June 22, 2016 the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) hosted "The Power of Transit 2016-Advancing Regional Coordination-Focusing on Solutions". The livestream 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 and 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 included the following ideas among many others:

- 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.

Following the summary of the Power of Transit Symposium, information is presented for each of those vulnerable population groups as identified above. The information is presented for each group based on anecdotal information from public comments, interviews, geographic analyses and other sources.

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.

There are some long standing funding related challenges to improving opportunities for regional transit expansion and coordination. More funding for the non-federal share of projects, local match, is needed to leverage state and federal funds and to provide better sustainability of new and innovative transit services. Some of the options to be considered include the following ideas which are discussed further in this update to the RCTP:

- Challenge Grants/ Local Worker Initiatives
- Percentage of Toll Road Revenues
- Transportation Development Credits (TDCs).

The RCTP focuses on the coordination of public and private transportation in an area that includes the thirteen counties in the Gulf Coast Planning Region (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Gulf Coast Planning Region

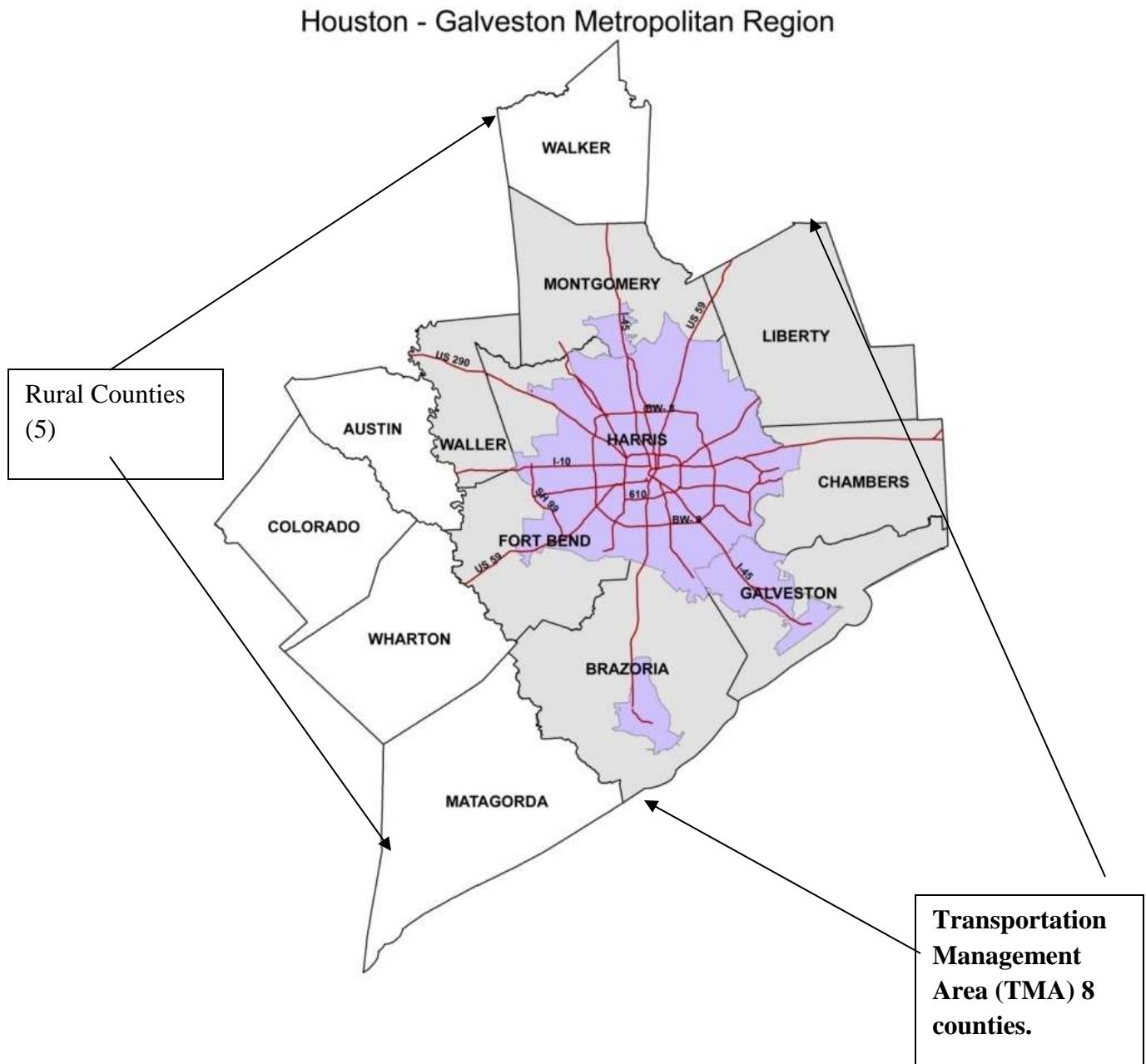
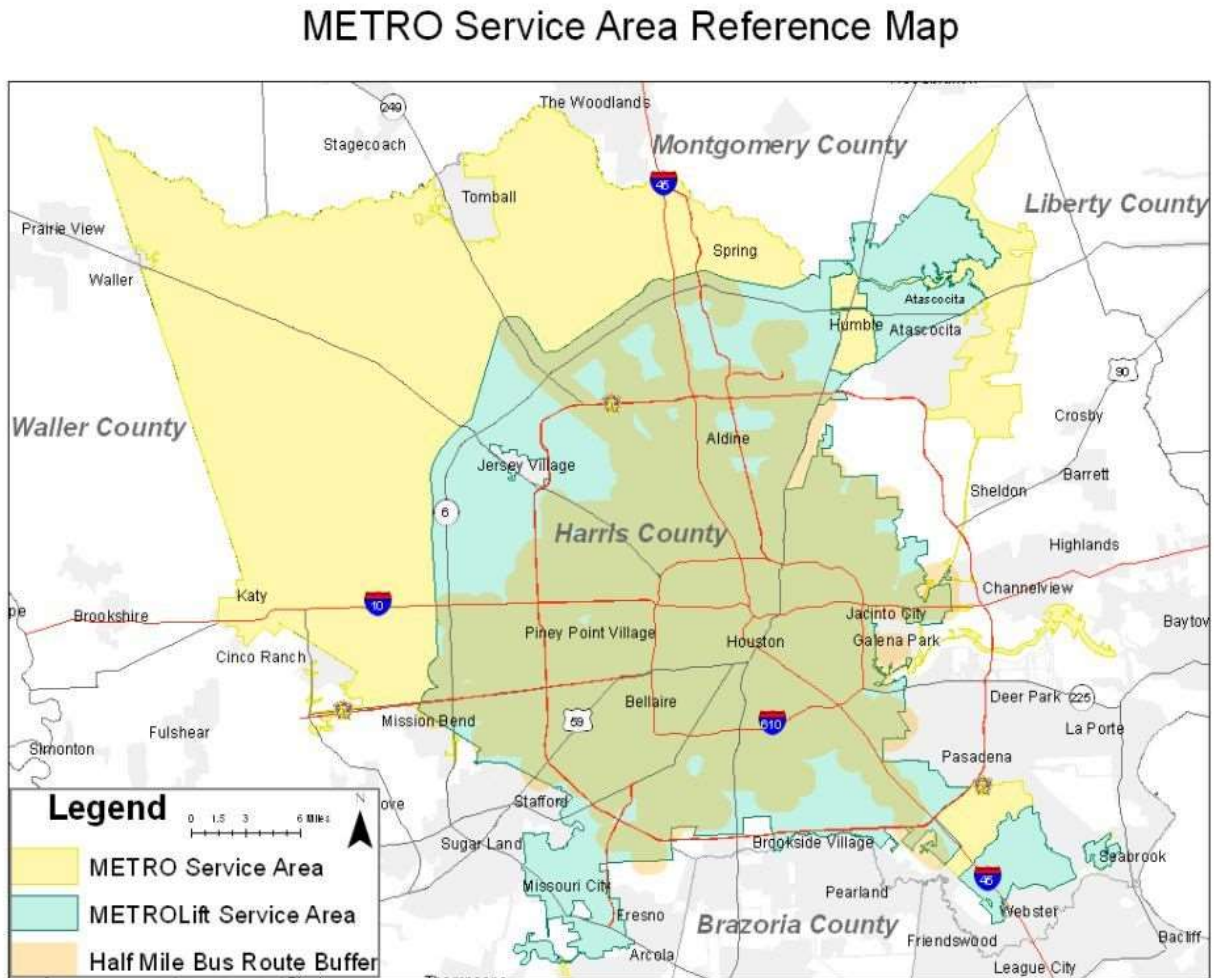


Figure 2 shows the service area boundaries for the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO). Large segments of eastern and northwestern Harris County are outside of the local bus system coverage area. It has been recently estimated that 45% of the regional (13 county) population is located within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the regional transit system local bus routes. Based on that estimate, the majority of the regional population (55%) is located outside of that

area and doesn't have direct access to fixed route transit service within that comfortable walking distance. That reality, in itself, describes a huge challenge in improving the transit accessibility options in Harris County and that challenge is multiplied throughout the suburban and rural counties in the Gulf Coast Region. More detailed maps are included in the section titled Geographic Data Analyses starting on page 36.

Figure 2. METRO Service Area





The Power of Transit symposium panelists included Hon. Matt Sebesta, Brazoria County Judge and Chairman of the H-GAC Transportation Policy Council, Lex Frieden, Professor of Biomedical Informatics and Rehabilitation at UT Health and Director of Independent Living Research Utilization, Lalita Sen Ph.D., Professor Department of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy at Texas Southern University, Chuck Wemple, H-GAC Chief Operations Officer, and Linda K. Cherrington, Program Manager of the Transit Mobility Program at Texas A&M Transportation Institute. The event was moderated by Steve Wright, RCTP Program Manager at the Texas Department of Transportation-Public Transportation Division. Alan Clark, Director of Transportation with H-GAC was Master of Ceremonies. In case you missed it, a video-taped recording of the symposium is available on the project website at www.ridethegulfcoast.com.



Pictured from left to right: Lex Frieden, Honorable Matt Sebesta, Steve Wright, Lalita Sen Ph.D., Linda Cherrington and Chuck Wemple.

The Power of Transit dialogue focused on solutions to regional public transportation challenges and covered a broad spectrum of topics including local funding sources for transit, technology solutions and provider coordination in servicing seniors, veterans, students, low-income groups and people with mobility challenges (disabilities).

During his opening remarks, Jack Steele, Executive Director of 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...we are stronger and more creative when we come together in forums like this”.

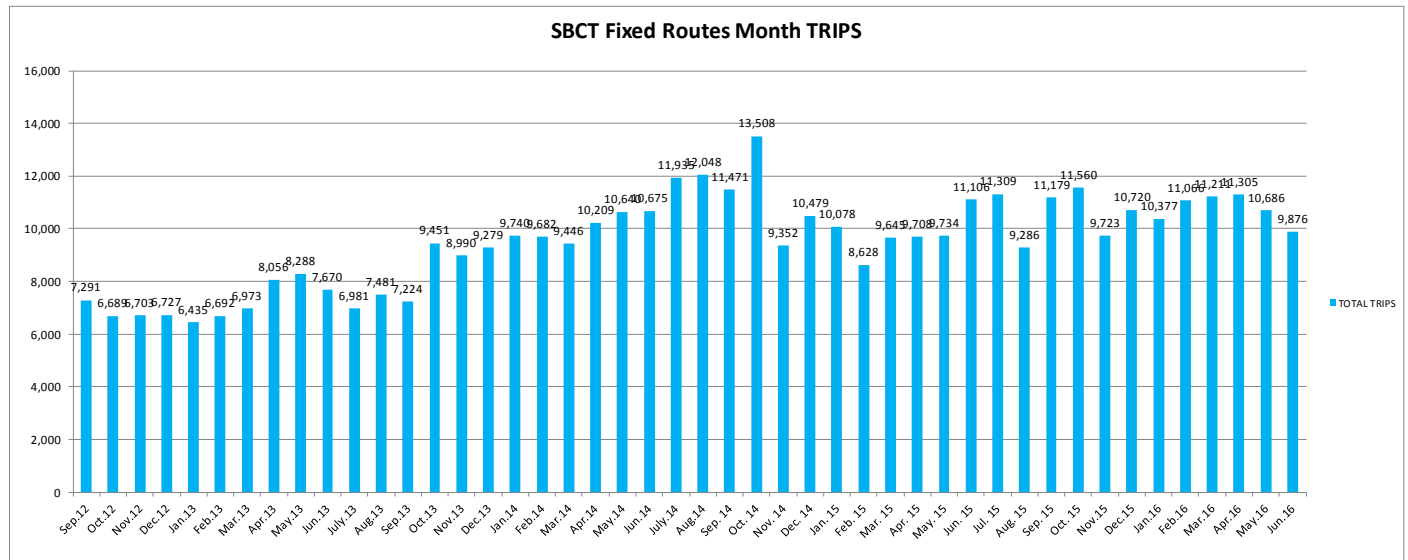


Steve Wright, the moderator for the RCTP panel discussion, called for more strategic planning designed to meet the public’s unmet transportation related needs and described the challenge to match needs with available resources because, “sometimes there is a disconnect between people who need resources and those who have them”. During his remarks Steve noted some of the challenges of meeting people’s transportation related needs and pointed out some related quotes from two of our nation’s leaders.

He asked: “Is it the right thing to do?” and quoted former President George H.W. Bush who said that; “America is not wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral principles. We are a people with such a purpose today, it is to make kinder the face of the nation and gentler the face of the world”. He also asked: “Who do we turn to?” and quoted President Barak Obama’s statement that “we are the people we’ve been waiting for”. Steve said that “we have the knowledge, expertise, creativity and resources to bridge the gap”.

One of the tasks identified in the 2015-2016 Action Plan for the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) relates to the need for more local elected officials to become involved in efforts to improve the transportation system options. A local success story was described by the Honorable Matt Sebesta, Brazoria County Judge. That project included elected officials from several cities in southern Brazoria County working together with the Gulf Coast Center -Connect Transit, the local transit provider and a local college. Together they helped to implement a coordinated system of bus routes that started several years ago and is still growing. That system connects people with social services offices, a local college and a regional mall. The chart below (Figure 3) shows the growth trend for that service in terms of monthly ridership from September 2012-June 2016.

Figure 3. Southern Brazoria County Transit Ridership



Mr. Lex Frieden noted the following during his presentation:

- “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.
- It will take public and private companies working together.
- There are many opportunities for coordination between people who build transportation systems and people who build sidewalks, the focus should be on the pedestrian.”



Lex also pointed out that in Texas 27 % of people with a disability have incomes below the poverty level compared to 15 % of the general population. In addition, 27.1 % of veterans also have a disability. He reminded the audience that infrastructure improvements that help people with mobility challenges also benefit others. As an example, curb-cuts are not only used by people in wheelchairs but also by parents pushing their baby strollers and business people pushing their carts. He mentioned a growing trend for technological improvements that will change the way medical services are delivered in the future so that instead of traveling to a doctor's office or a clinic, a patient could be evaluated remotely in their homes. Mr. Frieden outlined several mobility related issues for planners to consider as noted below:

Issues to Consider;

- Where do people live ?
- Where are people trying to go ?
- What are the transportation barriers ?
 - Inaccessible sidewalks and bus/transportation stops
 - Inaccessible transportation
 - Lack of audio and visual indicators and cues
 - Lack of travel training

These issues are considered as unmet transportation related needs. Potential Solutions include but are not limited to the following:

- Coordinated transportation infrastructure improvements towards broader compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. The City of Houston Public Works

Department has started initiatives to inventory sidewalks towards that end and to establish Complete Streets guidelines.

- The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) has initiated a pilot project to include devices on their bus stops that emit audible cues for bus riders with visual impairments.
- METRO has developed a Smartphone App for trip planning and fare payments that could evolve into a regional application.

Dr. Lalita Sen informed participants about a growing concern in Houston involving new residents from other countries as well as ADA accessibility challenges in some higher density neighborhoods near Gulfton.

She offered several recommendations including the following ideas:

- Focus on integration between fixed route and door-to-door feeder services
- Provide more information about coordination
- Set up transit information booths (or kiosks) in key locations and consider multi-lingual audiences
- Focus on last-mile connections.

Chuck Wemple noted three recent examples of partnerships and collaboration that helped to improve the transportation situations for some people in the Gulf Coast region. The first was developed in response to a local transportation need to continue a new rural transit service that was provided through the Colorado Valley Transit District in Austin County. That service was started with federal grant funds and a 20% local match was needed annually for the non-federal share of the costs. A challenge grant opportunity was started through the H-GAC local development corporation to facilitate transportation services to get people to jobs in rural areas. The challenge grant of \$25,000 was matched with local contributions from entities that included Austin County, Walmart and others on a dollar for dollar (one-to-one) basis up to the \$25,000. The funds were used to support that transit service which continues today.

The unmet transportation related need is to establish a local match development fund that could address similar challenges in other parts of the region. A potential solution is to reinstate the Transit Worker fund or a similar initiative.

Chuck also described another innovative approach that involved a federal grant that fostered a strategic planning process titled “Our Great Region 2040” that was a collaborative between the federal programs for Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Transportation (DOT). The results of that planning process included 5 Big Ideas, one of which is the development of a world class transportation system in Houston by 2040. That system would include a regional coalition to help vulnerable populations

with their transportation related challenges and to assist them with transportation for emergency evacuations.

As part of an initiative to better coordinate the regional planning for vulnerable populations several departments at H-GAC including the Area Agency on Aging (AAA), Transportation and Community and Environmental Planning collaborated under Chuck's guidance. A key factor is that the older population is growing at a faster rate according to recent data and the proportion of senior households is projected to double in the Gulf Coast region from 19% to 38% by 2040. In addition, approximately 6% of those households are carless. Recent AAA Listening Sessions with seniors identified mobility/rides as the number one priority and jobs through the workforce initiatives as a second priority.

The unmet transportation related need is for more options for seniors, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable population groups to travel for various trip purposes throughout the region. A potential solution is to increase the capacity and coverage areas of fixed routes and demand response services so that the general public has increased access to county-wide services (within each county) and also improved access to inter-county services that cross county lines. A local example is the Harris County RIDES program (recognized as a national Best Practice) that coordinates access to private transportation carriers (such as Yellow Cab) through an electronic fare card voucher system and is able to cross the county lines between Harris, Montgomery, Galveston and Brazoria counties.

Panelist Linda Cherrington highlighted the recent growth trends in Texas, within the Texas Triangle (Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth and San Antonio/ Austin) and particularly within the Gulf Coast Region's fast growing Fort Bend and Montgomery counties. Those growth trends are indicative of more urbanization beyond the METRO service area and will contribute to a higher need for expanded transit systems and better coordination. She also pointed out that more options are needed for local funding partly because the State of Texas has not increased funding for transit for several years.

Linda identified several innovative local governance arrangements in the Gulf Coast region that developed partnerships that included urban and rural entities working collaboratively including:

- 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 Vanpool

Ms. Cherrington highlighted an innovative technology application using smart cards that enabled the Harris County RIDES program to improve their non-traditional service delivery system which provides shared rides and taxi vouchers. Linda noted that advances in technology will open new doors in the transportation field relative to communications, information and coordination. Some opportunities include the following:

- One click information resources for all transit
- Coordinated fare structure
- Regional branding

Seniors

A local effort is highlighted below that describes a nationally recognized Best Practice to improve the availability of the public transportation options for seniors in the Gulf Coast region. In response to a call for projects from the National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST) Ladders of Opportunity Grant Program: Connecting Seniors to Public Transportation, staff with the Harris County Area Agency on Aging (HCAAA) reviewed information from the Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (2011). That RCTP included information which indicated the need to improve the transportation options for seniors, among other priorities. The HCAAA was awarded a grant to partner with local public transportation providers and the Care Transitions Program to identify available public transportation and mobility options and improve access and usage by older adults. The HCAAA targeted Care Transitions (CT) patients and seniors participating in congregate meals sites for outreach and education to increase the visibility, awareness, access and usage of public transportation options. Through the efforts of the project team approximately 386 seniors (19 CT patients and 367 forum attendees) received mobility counseling among other benefits.



Photo courtesy of Harris County AAA-Immaculate Conception Senior Group March 2015.

Through a collaborative effort between staff with METRO, Harris County RIDES and the HCAAA, partnerships were also developed between nurses, social workers and mobility managers that achieved the goals of the project. Two examples of the benefits of that project are described below:

“The patient {a 74 year-old female} was so excited and grateful when she was informed that the CT Program provided transportation. She stated that the coach was an angel sent from God. The coach completed the RIDES application at the patient’s home two days later and submitted it to RIDES the same day. The patient stated that she was not aware of the RIDES program until she enrolled into the CT Program. The patient was also looking forward to accessing RIDES for her future transportation needs.”

“In addition to the 6 forums, METRO joined the Project Transportation Navigator at a senior “Age Matters” Conference in April 2015 for transportation outreach activities, to distribute promotional materials and share information about available transportation options. Approximately 150 seniors attended the conference. METRO Q Cards and \$10 METRO Money cards were also distributed to seniors who expressed a willingness to use public transportation. Feedback from a senior who received a METRO Q Card: “I received my Q Card in the mail yesterday morning and I used it the very same day!” This senior is over 70 years old, which means she can ride the METRO Bus and Rail free with her new Q Card. She happily shared how the train stopped right in front of the hospital where she was visiting a sick Church member, and how much money she saved by riding the train since parking costs \$10 to \$14 each visit. She gleefully concluded with the pronouncement that now she would visit even more people.”¹

One of the transportation related needs that was identified is for security monitoring at covered transit stops to discourage loitering of non-riders (especially youth and young adult males), and homeless individuals using them as shelter. A potential solution may be increased resources for transit security at those locations combined with proactive efforts to mitigate the prevalence of homelessness in the greater Houston region.

Funding for better coordinated and more comprehensive transportation services is needed for the group of Senior Centers in small urban and rural areas throughout the region. Many of those centers rely on volunteer drivers for a large number of their transportation services which include non-emergency medical appointments, home-delivered meals and other routine travel needs. In some areas there is a public transportation provider available that may not be effectively coordinating its transportation services with the senior center. According to a recent report from the H-GAC Area Agency on Aging approximately \$1.5 million was budgeted in FY 2016 for those transportation and other related services as shown in **Table 1** which reflects an increase from \$1.4 million in FY 2012.

¹ Source: Harris County Area Agency on Aging NCST Ladders of Opportunity Grant Program: Connecting Seniors to Public Transportation, 2015)

Table 1. H-GAC Area Agency on Aging Funding to Senior Centers

Houston-Galveston Area Council				
Area Agency on Aging				
Planning Year 2016				
Title IIIB Funding By Transportation Vendor and Service Area				
Vendor Name	Service Area(s)	Title III Funding and Match	Title III Funding	Match
Colorado Valley Transit District	Austin County	\$ 101,989	71,333	30,656
	Waller County			
Actions of Brazoria County	Brazoria County	\$ 216,650	118,508	98,142
Senior Citizens of Chambers County	Chambers County	\$ 37,590	18,881	18,709
Wharton County Junior College - Senior Citizens Programs	Colorado County	\$ 35,586	18,672	16,914
	Wharton County	\$ 39,064	26,530	12,534
Fort Bend Senior Citizens	Fort Bend County	\$ 269,771	219,070	50,701
Galveston County Senior Citizens Program	Galveston County	\$ 159,079	143,200	15,879
Cleveland Senior Citizens Program	Liberty County	\$ 46,371	20,651	25,720
Economic Action Committee of the Gulf Coast	Matagorda County	\$ 29,787	24,484	5,303
Montgomery County Committee on Aging (Dba The Friendship Center)	Montgomery County	\$ 504,944	153,489	351,455
Senior Center of Walker County	Walker County	\$ 33,281	26,154	7,127
Grand Total		\$ 1,474,112	\$ 840,972	\$ 633,140

Source: Area Agency on Aging Vendor Agreements

Between May 4-5, 2015 two Town Hall Public Engagement meetings were coordinated by the Texas State Independent Living Council (Texas SILC) that included transportation service providers within the Gulf Coast Region as noted in **Table 2**. Brief summaries of the results of those meetings are included below.

Table 2. Texas SILC Town Hall Meetings- Gulf Coast²

Date	Location	Summary of Attendees/Representatives	Issues Identified
May 4, 2015	Conroe-Montgomery County Committee on Aging, aka Senior Rides.	Meals on Wheels, City of Conroe, Brazos Transit District, Area Agency on Aging (AAA), advocates, consumers and other transportation stakeholders.	<p>Lack of transportation service providers with ADA equipment available.</p> <p>New start-up of public transit services in Conroe.</p> <p>More vehicles are needed to meet the demand for the transit services.</p> <p>Incomplete infrastructure noted in terms of unpaved roads in some areas.</p> <p>AAA staff reported that 30% of their clients are individuals with disabilities under 65.</p>
May 5, 2015	Richmond-Mamie George Community Center	Fort Bend County (FBC) Transit, various transportation stakeholders.	<p>FBC Transit reported that 50% of riders are individuals with disabilities or seniors. Job access and reverse commute are 20-25% of riders. Transportation service providers are willing to meet at the county lines, suggesting that jurisdictional boundaries may be a barrier and that services are needed that cross county lines.</p> <p>Not enough demand for fixed-route services.</p> <p>The paratransit system is overburdened with approximately 600 trips daily. Concerns noted that reservations are required far in advance and trips are denied. Recommended an online scheduling tool for paratransit.</p>

² Source: Transportation Works: The Blueprint for Connectivity, Texas State Independent Living Council, Public Engagements by State Planning Regions 2015.

A public meeting was coordinated in July 2015 at the senior center in Conroe that focused on the transportation related needs for seniors and persons with disabilities relative to the development of their 5310 program.



Pictured are staff with the Goodman Corp. during a 5310 Program presentation in Conroe, photo by K. Hackett

Some of the key issues that were noted during that meeting are outlined below:

- Lack of adequate funding to address unmet public transit needs (county-wide) and to sustain them
- Needed intra-county and inter-county connectivity
- Needed infrastructure improvements near transit stops (sidewalks, ADA ramps) particularly in the faster growing and urbanizing communities
- A countywide transportation plan is needed
- One participant remarked that there seemed to be more “unobligated” funding available for the 5310 program in the Houston Urbanized Area than the total 5310 funding available to the Conroe-The Woodlands UZA. (Clarification was provided about the funding allocation process).

Persons with Disabilities

The following quotes are from individuals with the Houston Center for Independent Living who also provided letters of commitment to participate in the development and approval of the update to the Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP).

“Transportation is important for everybody in Houston, but especially so for people with disabilities for whom options are often limited due to lack of access, lack of financial resources, poor street conditions and other factors.” (Roland)

“Limited transportation options are disempowering and keep people with disabilities from fully participating in community life. Places like Fort Bend County need additional accessible vehicles and allow persons with disabilities the ability to be active members of society.” (Gretchen)

“I am a person with a significant disability who relies on METROLift to go to work every day. My day begins at 4:00 AM to make it to work by 8:00AM and sometimes I don’t get home until after 8:00PM. While I understand METROLift is a shared ride service, I also feel a better job with scheduling rides could be done so that people like myself don’t have to be driven all over town just to make it home after work. A ride home that an able-bodied person could make in half an hour, for someone like myself, can last three hours.” (Anabel)



“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)

Some of the highest priority unmet transportation related needs for persons with disabilities are outlined below from an email message sent by Maria Palacios, formerly with the Houston Center for Independent Living (2015) and past member of the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS):

- 1) “Street accessibility all over Houston-Complete Streets
- 2) Develop a more efficient way of routing METROLift trips.
- 3) Increase of accessible METROLift vans and cabs. (Metro currently has a little over 300 accessible vehicles which serve 19,000 subscribers in a city of more than half million people with disabilities just within Harris County.
- 4) More space for wheelchair occupancy in city buses. (Only two wheelchairs per bus at the moment.)
- 5) Improve METROLift eligibility process and eliminate the ridiculous practice of asking people with permanent and irreversible disabilities if they are still disabled.
- 6) Make EVERY bus shelter accessible.
- 7) Expand public transportation to areas which currently do not get service.
- 8) Offer training outside of the medical model of disability to all transportation providers.”



One of the local celebrations of the 25th Anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was coordinated by the Houston Center for Independent Living. Some of the highlights of that celebration are included in the following pages.



Pictured above are Sandra Bookman and others during the ADA Celebration at the Houston CIL, photos by K. Hackett

During that program a poem was recited that describes some of the historical and current challenges for persons with disabilities. The poem “A Declaration of Independence” is included as Appendix D, reprinted with permission of the author (M. Palacios). One of the key themes that was reinforced during the celebration is that disability rights are civil/human rights.

Several common themes and some specific needs emerged from several letters of commitment from regional stakeholders who agreed to assist with the development and approval of this update to the RCTP as summarized below:

“I am a resident of the Gulf Coast Planning Region and also a member of the group of essential stakeholders identified as those serving domestic violence and sexual assault victims...I am aware of some of the unmet transportation needs in our region, particularly the ability to seek

employment, get to and from work, look for a living situation and dealing with a myriad of challenges included in trying to establish a safe environment for themselves and their children”. (A. Parker).

“The Greater Houston Transportation Company is aware of the many transportation challenges in the Gulf Coast Region particularly for people with disabilities, low-income, and people that live in rural areas that do not have readily available access to public transportation.” (Michael Spears, General Manager, Yellow Cab).



Yellow Cab is one of the transportation service providers currently working with Harris County Transit to expand transportation access across county lines. One of the relevant unmet transportation needs is for private companies like Yellow Cab to be able to augment their fleets to include more ADA compliant vehicles through a public-private-partnership such as the H-GAC Buy Cooperative Purchasing Program. An excerpt from a recent News Release is reprinted below that is responsive to one of the transportation related needs identified above:

“Crisis Intervention of Houston, Inc. honors Yellow Cab Houston at its annual gala for the Crisis Hotline Emergency Transportation (CHET) Program (2014)

Yellow Cab Houston was honored to receive recognition from Crisis Intervention of Houston (CIH), Inc. at its annual Stewards of Hope gala...For the past 25 years, Yellow Cab has partnered with CIH to provide transportation to those who need it most during a time of crisis. The Crisis Hotline Emergency Transportation (CHET) Program primarily helps women and children escape domestic violence by transporting them to shelter and safety. A team of Yellow Cab dispatchers and independent contractor drivers who are well-oriented in crisis intervention procedures work closely with CIH staff. Since the program began, nearly 10,000 women and children have been provided reliable access to shelter. In addition to domestic violence situations, Yellow Cab Houston also works closely with Kroger to deliver groceries to families in need and aided in transporting those who were displaced during hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Ike. Yellow Cab Houston looks forward to continuing this valuable partnership with CIH through the CHET

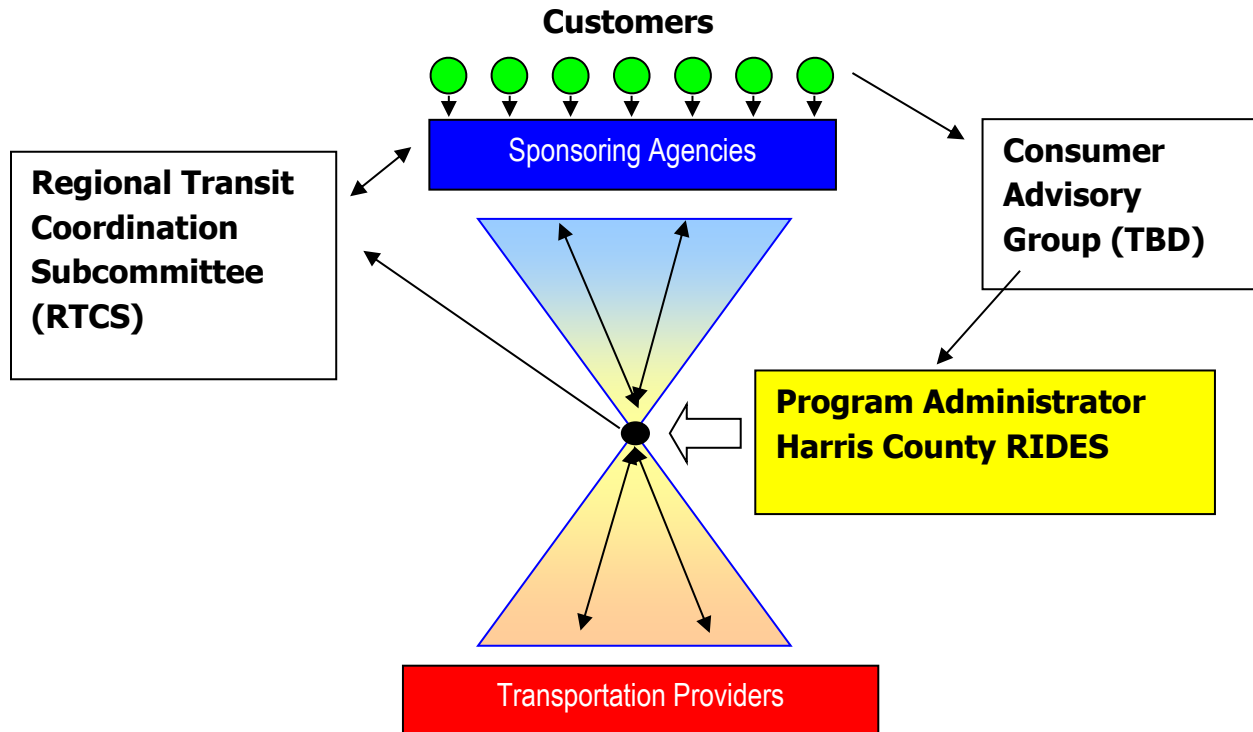
program... Yellow Cab believes that it is our duty to collaborate with community partners to assist those in a time of need.”³

Harris County Transit “through its RIDES Program is keenly aware of the demands of special needs populations and has become in essence, a regional provider/regional mobility manager of services through cooperative agreements with agencies in Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston and Harris County.” (Ken Fickes, CCTM, Director Harris County Transit)

“The United Way of Greater Houston has been a leader in providing the social safety net for our community for over 90 years. We firmly believe transportation is a critical factor in helping individuals rebuild their lives. Since 2003, we have supported the issues of mobility and transportation with investments for transportation initiatives in our outlying areas. Additionally, United Way of Greater Houston has committed matching funds for projects supporting transportation for the elderly, individuals with disabilities and to help low-income individuals achieve safe and reliable transportation to employment.” (Anna Babin, President and CEO, United Way of Greater Houston).

The unmet transportation related need identified by the respondents above is for expanded transportation capacity that would be available as needed twenty-four hours daily, seven days weekly, three-hundred and sixty-five days annually,(24/7/365). A potential solution could be to set up a Regional Mobility Manager (RMM) to coordinate the development of a Public Private Partnership (PPP) between cab companies, other transportation providers and local transportation agencies. The PPP could enable the reduced cost purchase of more ADA compliant vehicles through the H-GAC Buy cooperative purchasing program. It could also coordinate the expansion of the Harris County RIDES coordinated services model into neighboring counties utilizing the user-side subsidy concept with sponsoring agencies. An illustration of the coordinated model is shown in **Figure 4**.

³http://houstonyellowcab.com/press_release_Content.aspx?PressReleaseId=128#

Figure 4. Coordinated Transportation Model Concept⁴**Subsidized Transportation Program Organizational Structure**

That arrangement could be facilitated through the expanded use of the smart-card and/or smartphone technologies. Some of the potential benefits of the PPP include the following;

- More ADA compliant vehicles that are original equipment from the manufacturer instead of retrofits to provide more capacity,
- More vehicles with multiple wheelchair anchor points,
- More cleaner technology vehicles in fleets to help achieve clean air program goals.

Additionally, the pursuit of potential grant funding opportunities could be explored that would coordinate the participation of the H-GAC Workforce Solutions with local colleges for Commercial Driver License (CDL) Certification training and job placement.

A transportation related challenge is emerging relative to the recent implementation of the Mounting Horizons Center(s) for Independent Living (MHCIL) in Galveston County. The MHCIL is coordinating various activities including but not limited to the following:

⁴ Concept developed by Multi-Systems Inc. (2001).

- Increase demand response services in areas where public transportation is not adequate
- Improve coordination between providers
- Provide mobility management for seniors and persons with disabilities including young people transitioning from high school
- Utilize advanced technology as appropriate for trip planning and documentation.

The MHCIL operated in League City for several years before it relocated to a second location in the City of Galveston. State funds for Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) have been granted for Purchase of Services to transport MHCIL job- seekers to available employment opportunities. Some of those trips required crossing the Causeway from the City of Galveston to the mainland of Galveston County. Customers with the MHCIL learned mobility management skills and have not been able to connect effectively to employment opportunities in Galveston or on the Mainland at the relatively new Tangers Outlet Mall in west Texas City. Part of the challenge is because the Island Transit demand response vehicles are not allowed to leave the City of Galveston. In addition, the opportunity for providing reverse commutes with the Victory Lakes/League City Park and Ride service have not been considered to be feasible. The MHCIL director has been collaborating with Island Transit to seek to improve access to the transit services on the island and also re-evaluating other options including the potential to purchase and operate their own vehicles. Bolivar Island and West End Galveston residents are outside the service area of Island Transit and desired trips to-and-from Bolivar and the West End cannot be accommodated. Demand response trips connecting to Bolivar have the added uncertainty of variable ferry boat schedules. The MHCIL has also been working with local school districts and providing travel training for disabled high school students as they have been transitioning into adulthood. More recently the MHCIL has been providing transportation for some of those students from Galveston County into Brazoria County to the Alvin Community College.

Some of the unmet transportation related needs as noted above, are partly due to the geographic barriers and jurisdictional boundaries that restrict needed service flexibilities. A potential solution is to incentivize closer coordination between existing transit service providers to address emerging travel patterns in areas that are developing rapidly. In addition, the concept of providing transportation services across jurisdictional boundaries for the “public good” has been accepted with regards to the Harris County RIDES program and neighboring counties.

Persons with Low Incomes

Results from the 2012 United Way of Greater Houston Community Assessment indicated that 41% of respondents identified as low-income—having household incomes less than \$ 25,000—reported a time during the past month that they couldn't get to where they needed to go because of a lack of transportation. The top three desired destinations for those low-income respondents included medical service/doctor's office, work and the grocery store (in that order). That data suggests a current unmet need for more and better public transportation options for that segment of the population.

During that same time frame a 2012 study of the perceived needs of homeless persons indicated that the greatest unmet needs were permanent housing (70% of respondents), transportation(65%)and dental care (55%).⁵

Through the Coalition for the Homeless in the greater Houston region and the Continuum of Care, services are provided for persons transitioning from homelessness to obtain various resources for assistance. However, no formal agreement is in place to provide transportation for those persons. In the 2011 RCTP the Project Access bus was identified as one resource for transportation however the demand for the transportation service exceeded the capacity.

The Medical Transportation Program (MTP) provides transportation for low income (Medicaid eligible) seniors to doctor and pharmacy visits. An internal (H-GAC) briefing paper reviewed the usage and costs of the MTP in the Gulf Coast region in order to better understand the potential for the coordination of non-emergency vehicles with other transportation needs. Some of the key findings of that research are summarized below:

- More than 700 thousand annual trips were provided by the MTP in fiscal year 2008 and that number had almost doubled to more than 1.3 million by FY 2011.
- The costs for the MTP increased from less than \$15 million in FY 2008 to over \$25 million in FY 2011.
- Data shows an improvement in the efficiency of the MTP services provided as measured by the cost per trip.
- Approximately 76% of the Medicaid clients' trips did not have special needs relative to access to the transportation, such as accommodations for a wheelchair, walker or cane.

⁵ Perceived Needs of Homeless Persons in Houston/Harris County, 2012 , C.L. Troisi, et al. UT School of Public Health.

Based on the data that was reviewed the MTP ridership base and associated costs have grown significantly in recent years. Since that ridership and cost information had not been reported previously and had not been reflected in prior transportation coordination and planning activities this research effort may provide some useful information. However some questions remain to be answered relative to the potential for regional transit coordination activities that could utilize part of the apparently large fleet of non-emergency transportation vehicles.

According to staff with Medical Transportation Management (MTM) they now coordinate the MTP services in a larger service area which includes Houston and the Beaumont, Texas areas (20 counties). MTM subcontracts with transportation providers representing 450 vehicles, public transportation and mileage reimbursement services. They've scheduled approximately 1.1 million trips annually for that area. Urgent trips are provided 24/7/365. They are described as "mainly hospital discharges but also when a member needs to be seen within a short timeframe but it is not an emergency".⁶

More research is needed to better understand the mobility characteristics of the group of riders who did not have "special needs". The data indicates that 76% of the total trips did not require special needs to access the transportation such as accommodations for a wheelchair, walker or cane. It is presumed that those riders are ambulatory although they may also have a medical or mental condition that would prevent them from using a shared-ride vehicle for their transportation service. For example, it is understood that kidney dialysis and cancer treatment patients may require exclusive transportation to and from their appointment(s). At this time it is not known what portion of the MTP riders without special needs could utilize a shared ride vehicle if one was available.

Funding was granted through the TxDOT Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program to initiate a commuter bus service in Austin County which was scheduled to expire in May 2015. Funding will be needed to *continue* that service. Efforts are in progress to start a commuter bus service for Waller County that would also connect students at Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) with the retail centers and medical complexes in the NW 290 and IH-10 Corridors in Harris County.

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.⁷

The unmet transportation related needs from the information above are: 1) Lack of adequate local match funding. In order to sustain and expand the successful (fixed route) transit services in

⁶ Email messages from MTM staff July 2013.

⁷ Comments are summarized from a 5310 related conference call with TxDOT-PTN Public Transportation Coordinators.

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 similar to the Transit Worker Initiative. Another option would require a state constitutional amendment in order to utilize a small portion of the toll road revenues to dedicate to public transportation (as in some California counties).

A potential solution to the vehicle design challenge could be through the use of the H-GAC Buy Cooperative Purchasing program for specialized transit vehicles that can transport passengers using the larger mobility devices and also have more positions for persons in wheelchairs.

There has been an unmet transportation-related need for several years for some customers who visit the Workforce Solutions Centers to access employment and training opportunities. Two efforts were started in the recent past and were discontinued. The first effort was developed in partnership with Neighborhood Centers Inc. and Harris County (HC) RIDES to provide transportation vouchers for work-related trips. That effort was labor intensive due to the paper voucher system that was in place at that time and it also relied on the Workforce Center counselors to make referrals to HC RIDES for transportation services. It was easier for the counselors to provide those customers with gas cards which were available through the Workforce budget at that time. Approximately \$100,000 was budgeted for other transportation services and it was not fully utilized at that time according to V. Chambers.

The second effort was responsive to transportation related needs for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita evacuees who had relocated into the greater Houston area. That effort utilized approximately \$485,000 from a Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) made available through Disaster Recovery Funds. The transportation related demand for those services exceeded the funding that was available at that time. Subsequently that project was revamped to address that constraint and was discontinued later after one-year.

Current Workforce Solutions estimates indicate approximately \$200,000 per year has been used to purchase bus fares and tickets for job seekers and those seeking training opportunities from various transportation service providers (2014-2015) including METRO, Connect and Island Transit.

One way to address that unmet transportation related need is to provide more resources for transportation services to those low income customers with bus passes and travel vouchers that will allow them to access those priority destinations in a timely manner. The bus passes would provide access to the needed destinations near the METRO bus routes and light rail lines. The travel vouchers would be used for destinations beyond the geographic coverage or time schedules of the METRO bus system. Considerations would need to include various destinations including job readiness classes, job interviews and work schedules including 2nd and 3rd shift opportunities. There has been a working relationship with METRO and some local non-profit

organizations in the past to provide a temporary bus fare (METRO Money) for customers transitioning from homelessness or in need of transportation for life sustaining activities including but not limited to those noted previously. The feasibility of utilizing that working relationship as a means of distribution could be explored further.

Youth

As part of the 2016 Texas Southern University's Summer Youth program approximately 30 high school students participated in a half-day session at H-GAC that focused on transportation related initiatives including the development of the RCTP. During a question and answer session the students were asked if they had their own vehicles and none responded affirmatively. They indicated that they relied on family and friends, or METRO to get around.

Harris County Transit has been working with various community based organizations to provide more transportation options for students to get from their schools to jobs and other destinations.

During a preliminary RCTP interview in 2015 with the H-GAC Education Industry Liaison, a youth related initiative was described that was recently funded (\$1.8 M) through the Department of Labor for Disconnected Youth in the H-GAC Region. The Disconnected Youth Demo Project Proposed Model includes three phases:

1. Outreach, Recruiting, Intensive Engagement
2. Skills Training
3. Career Development

When asked if the proposed project budget included funding for transportation for those youth who did not have their own personal vehicles, it was reported that the proposal did not include a budget for transportation services. A limited budget for transportation services was added later.

One of the transportation related needs that was identified relates to school bus drivers. There is a shortage of certified drivers for school buses (and METRO buses) partly due to the higher salaries available to drivers with commercial drivers licenses (CDL) with the private trucking industry.

Another opportunity relates to the implementation of more fuel efficient vehicles into the fleets of the local school districts. That effort is already in progress through the Transportation Department's Air Quality program. There was also some discussion about the no-ride zones around some schools where the school buses do not pick up students within 2 miles of the schools. It was noted that the no-ride policy varies for local school districts.

When the possibility of forming a focus group of students to identify their transportation related needs was discussed it was recommended that such an activity should be scheduled around the end of course exams and before the semester breaks. It was also recommended that we look

closer at Genesys Works, a program which coordinates high school students' internships and also coordinates transportation.

Veterans

There are approximately 300,000 veterans living in the greater Houston area according to the City of Houston Office of Veterans Affairs. A six-month pilot project was initiated by the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) in April 2016 which provides free unlimited rides on local buses, Park and Ride and METRORail services for qualified veterans who are disabled or earned a medal of valor. More details are available at www.ridemetro.org.

There has been a network of volunteer drivers who donate thousands of hours each month to transport hundreds of veterans to-and-from non-emergency medical appointments at the VA Hospital in the Texas Medical Center. They travel from the outer counties in the region, logging close to 30,000 miles in a typical month to provide a transportation service for those veterans who otherwise would be left behind or stuck at home.



Prior information indicated the need for expansion of the VA transportation options to include other trip purposes such as access to work, education and training opportunities and transportation services during evenings, weekends and for social/recreational purposes.

Another documented need is related to the large number of veterans who need access to a one call/one click transportation resource center. An interim arrangement is available through the Texas United Way 211 HELPLINE which includes a veterans representative at the local call-center. Funding for ongoing operations and expansion of that center was previously identified as an unmet need. More resources are needed in the greater Houston area to expand the transportation options for our returning heroes to enable those without their own means of transportation to get to social services, work, school, shopping centers, recreational and other activities.

During a preliminary RCTP interview with the H-GAC Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Regional Vets Representative the following information was noted. That office serves multiple Department of Labor (DOL) regions in Texas including the Gulf Coast Planning Region (H-GAC), Deep East Texas and Southeast Texas.

A current Veterans Administration (VA) initiative with Houston Community College (HCC) was described to provide free job readiness training for potential applicants for jobs like welders and truck drivers (for a Commercial Driver License). The primary focus is for unemployed disabled veterans with barriers to employment such as the following categories:

- At Risk (age 18-24),
- Formerly Incarcerated,
- Substance abuser (alcohol, drugs).

Participants are required to have their own transportation. Those participants who live in the outlying areas have more limited transportation options.

One local example of a good transportation option is the Charles Wilson VA Shuttle bus service provided by the Brazos Transit District that connects veterans from Lufkin, Texas to the VA Hospital in the Texas Medical Center in Houston on a regular basis. That service has been privately funded and identified as a Best Practice.



Similar transportation services are needed from other outlying areas such as Columbus, Lake Jackson, Orange and Nacogdoches, Texas. Although outpatient VA clinics are located in some of the outlying areas in the region some of the veterans need access to the Regional VA Hospital for specialized tests (and procedures).

Several key Veterans Services Organizations were identified for further coordination including but not limited to the following:

- City of Houston, Office of Veterans Affairs
- Goodwill Industries
- SEARCH Homeless Services
- SER
- American GI Forum

- Career Recovery
- Lone Star Vets

Another potential resource for future collaboration included the Houston Community College veterans' programs there.

Recent information from the Harris County Veterans program indicated that Harris County RIDES is providing transportation for some homeless veterans as they are transitioning from homelessness.

A Houston Stand Down was coordinated by the VA Service Organizations in 2011 for homeless veterans. During that event some anecdotal information was collected that highlighted a few of the transportation related needs among veterans at that time.

A former Navy Seal was using a wheelchair to get around. He was dying from cancer, needed a stable home environment and access to dependable transportation to the VA center on a regular basis for early morning appointments. His experiences with using various bus services to get around Houston in his wheelchair resulted in multiple falls as he tried to navigate the incomplete or uneven sidewalks around town.

An elderly veteran with extensive training in electronics could not get a job. He'd been sleeping in his van and didn't have funds to renew his vehicle registration nor get insurance.

A disabled veteran needed transportation to get to a lawyer and a doctor to complete the paperwork for his disability status so that he can access his benefits. In the meantime he'd been sleeping under the Pierce Elevated and was discouraged because everyone he'd talked to had not been able to help him effectively. He didn't have the funds needed to purchase a bus pass to start going to the places he needed to go to.

Following is a very brief summary of some of the results of responses to an informal non-scientific transportation survey that was conducted during the Houston Stand Down. It is not representative of the general population of homeless veterans in Houston, but it reflects the information that was provided by the 33 individuals who responded to the survey.

When asked: Do you need a ride?

The majority 21/33(64%) said Yes. Where to? most responses were to get to the Veterans Administration office (12), other destinations mentioned included the Salvation Army, MHMR, doctor, lawyer, unemployment office, SW Transitional Facility, EAI, Dialysis, 2005 Jacqueline Street, 11911 MLK Blvd.

When asked: Where did you sleep last night ?

The majority said they slept in a Shelter/ Group Home (11). Other locations were noted (2005 Jacqueline, EAI, 2379 Fannin Domiciliary, Salvation Army, De George; Home (4), Family/ Friend (4), Others= Pierce (2), in van, on street, Star of Hope.

When asked: How do you usually get around ?

The majority (21/33 or 64%) used a METRO Bus, 11/33 (33%) walked and 9/33 (27%) drove or rode in a car with others.

When asked: Have you called 211 for transportation services ? 26/33 (79%) replied No. Most were not aware of 211 as a resource for a referral for transportation services, two of those who had called 211 were pleased with the results.

Several respondents provided comments which are summarized below:

Thanks for (211) Service, good if you in need for a ride; SEARCH denied Bus Pass; Need access to dialysis; 211 was great, thank you; Not working, have skills in electronics, employers not hiring older veterans, sleeps in van, needs money for registration, insurance; Need bus passes; METRO Bus stops, sidewalks not accessible by wheelchair, near S. Main at Rice. Some bus drivers not trained on routes or how to use wheelchair lifts. Needs daily, early trips to VA Hospital, tried TREK Commuter service from SW Houston; No bus passes; Has used Harris County Veterans Van service in the past, will call again.

Lack of income is a challenge for many veterans and other persons “in transition” from homelessness. Some mentioned that they did not have funds to purchase a bus pass or the organizations that they have been in touch with did not have bus passes or were out of them. Most sleeping arrangements with family or friends were described as temporary. Several persons mentioned difficulty in getting VA papers in order to receive disability benefits. Some seemed to be hopeless due to discouraging situations with no one offering real solutions. When asked about their experiences using the Project ACCESS bus, some mentioned the “smell”.

Project ACCESS was identified in the 2011 RCTP as a shuttle bus service for persons transitioning from homelessness. It has been funded by grants from the City of Houston and was in need of additional funding to expand its services because the bus was regularly over capacity.

Potential solutions to the unmet transportation related needs identified above include but are not limited to the following recommendations:

Work with the VA to become a partnering agency with the Harris County RIDES Transportation Voucher program.

Inform veteran advocates about the United Way Helpline 211 and the Transportation/Veterans specialist that is available there. Expand that capability so that more than one veterans’ specialist is available to receive incoming calls.

Implement a One Call/One Click Transportation System to facilitate access to needed transportation services 24/7/365.

Geographic Data Analyses

The following data and maps illustrate some of the locations of the highest unmet transit needs in the Gulf Coast region as measured by the Transit Need Index (TNI) and other factors. **Table 3** 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 (the Transit) with a TNI of 13 stands out as the highest area of need primarily because of the following factors:

- Lower than the regional average population density and median HH income
- Higher than average percentages of persons with disabilities, seniors (65+) and households without automobiles

Harris County is a close second regional priority with a 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. ⁸

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

⁸ H-GAC Demographic Profiles, July 2016

Table 3. County Level- Highest Ranked Transit Need Index Scores

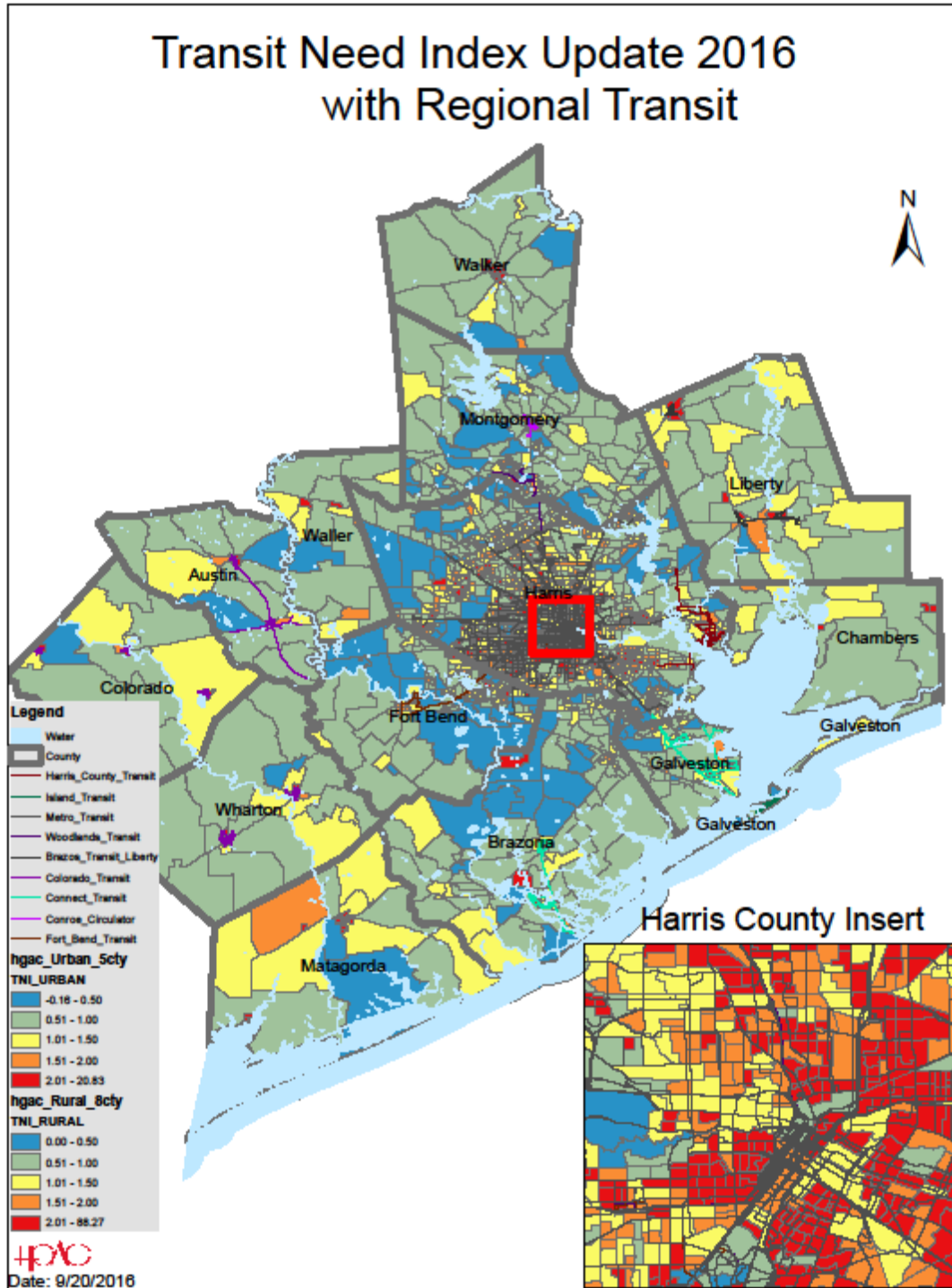
County	RCTP Classification	TNI Score	Comments
Wharton	Rural	13	Within Colorado Valley Transit (CVT) Service Area.
Harris	Urban	12.5	Large population base outside of the METRO Service Area.
Galveston	Suburban	11.75	Population reduced after Hurricane Ike 2009.
Liberty	Rural	11.25	Brazos Transit District provides limited services.
Colorado	Rural	11.25	CVT Service Area
Walker	Rural	11.0	Brazos Transit District provides limited services.

The following maps (Figures 4,5 and 6) are based on demographic data at the Census block group level of geography. The maps contain data for the Transit Need Index (TNI), individuals (or households) below the poverty level and persons (or households) with limited English proficiency (speak Spanish). Those demographic maps are overlaid with lines representing the regional fixed route transit systems. **Figure 5** indicates several locations throughout the region with higher than average TNI values (shown in red). A more detailed analysis is needed to distinguish areas with higher TNI values and prisons located in Walker County and Brazoria County.

The most significant areas with high TNI concentrations are shown within Harris County for the urban TNI values and those areas also have access to the extensive transit system coverage area for the METRO bus system. The usefulness of the 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. Other areas with higher TNI concentrations are near Huntsville, Conroe, Cleveland, Liberty, Dayton, Lake Jackson and Matagorda County among others. At a minimum those areas should have access to a county-wide demand response service that is available to the general public for various trip purposes. Although Chambers County did not have a high TNI score

because of a higher median income level according to the Census data, there isn't a general public transportation provider in Chambers County.

Figure 5. TNI and Regional Transit Coverage



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

A similar analysis of the Limited English Proficiency(LEP) population that is Spanish speaking (**Figure 7**) highlights more areas in the northwest, east and southeastern Harris, Waller, Fort Bend and Montgomery counties among others. 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 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.

Figure 6. Locations of Poverty and Regional Transit

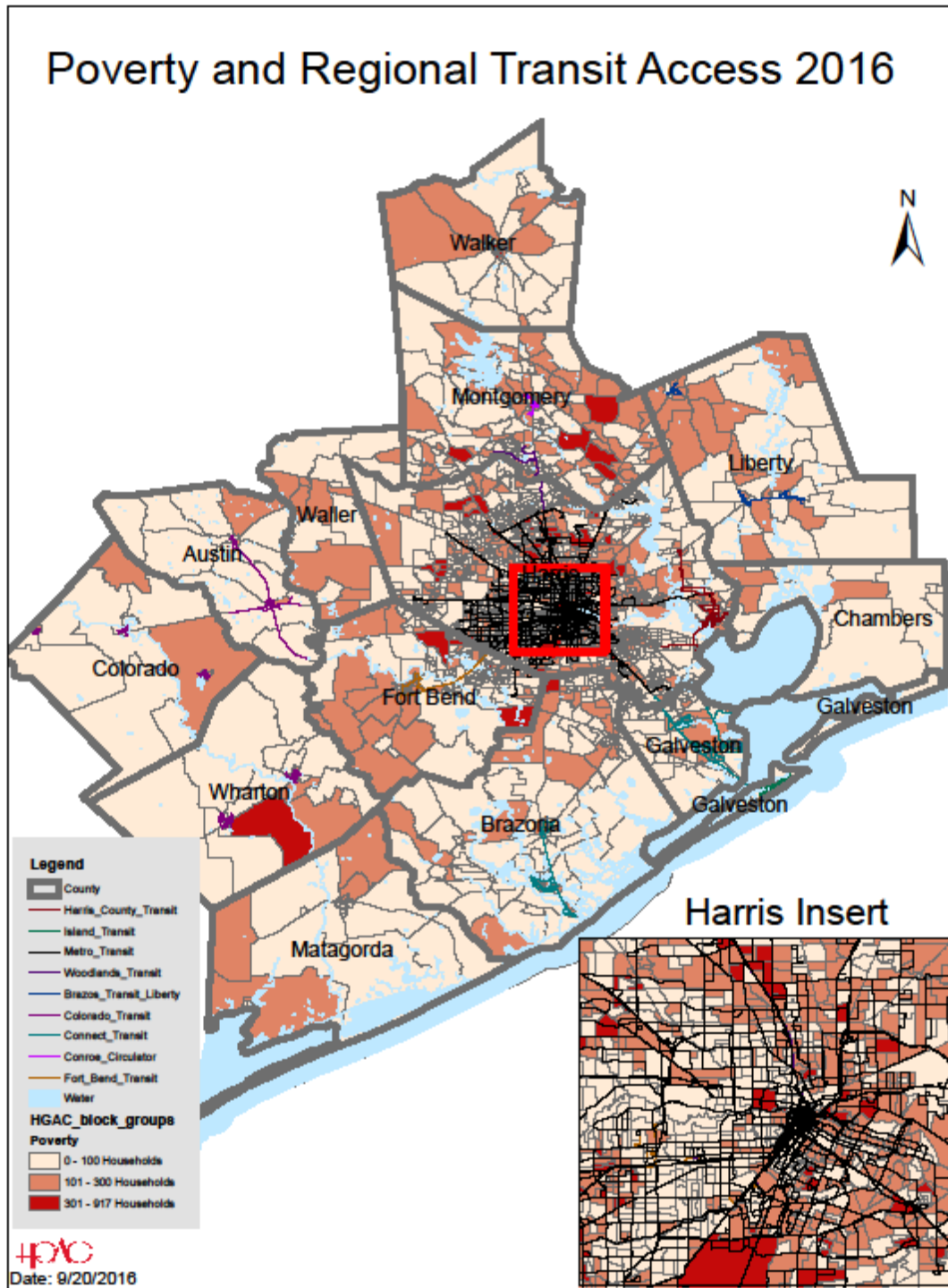
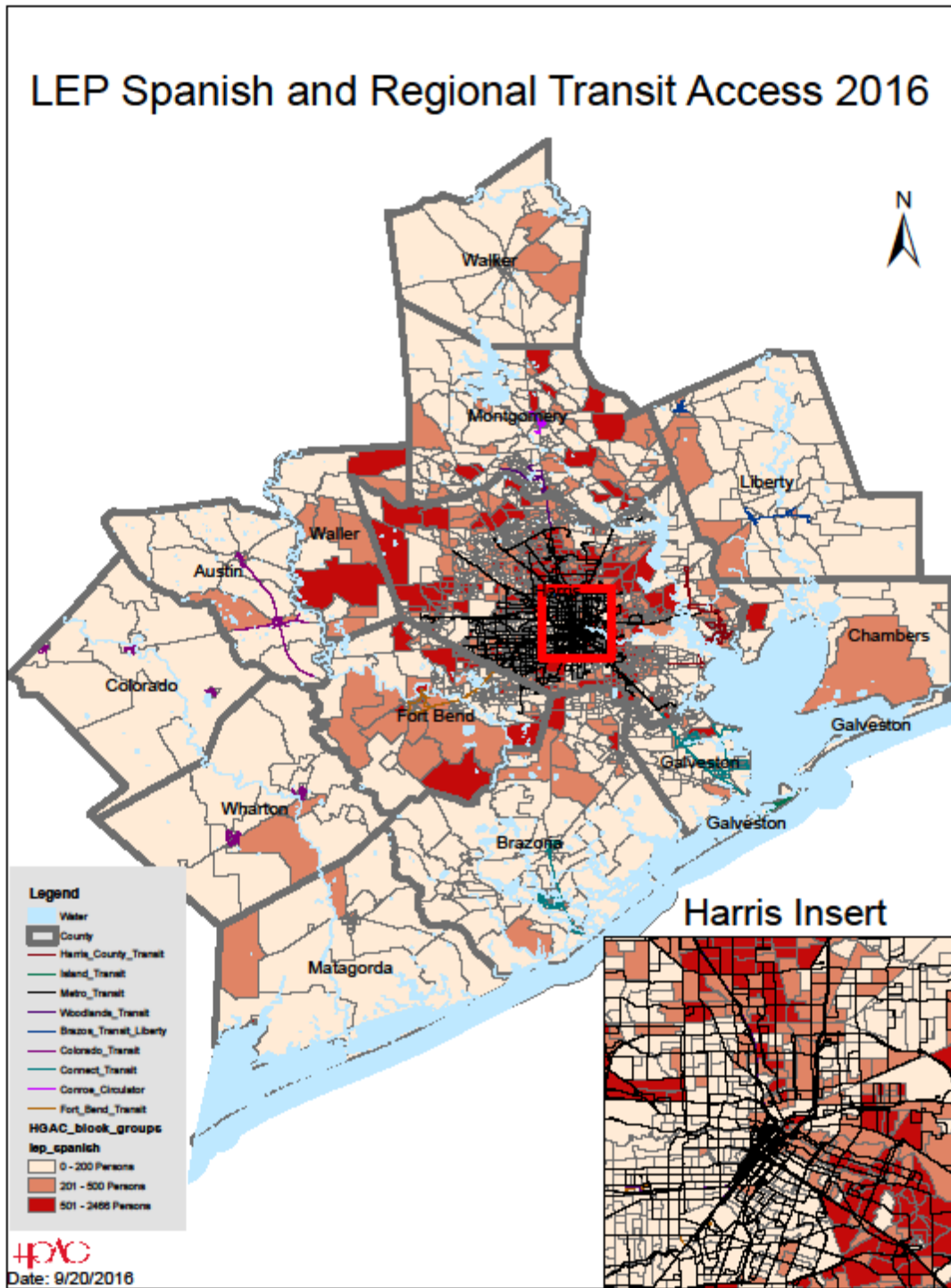


Figure 7. Limited English Proficiency-Spanish and Regional Transit



Funding Trends for Mobility Limited Groups

Below is a summary graph of the funding that was identified in the H-GAC Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) between FY 2006 and FY 2012 for mobility limited groups defined as seniors (Section 5310), persons with disabilities (formerly New Freedom, Section 5317) and persons with low incomes (formerly Job Access and Reverse Commute-Section 5316), see **Figure 8**.

That funding represents a small portion of the total funding that is available for transit services in the region. For example, it doesn't include funding that is available to Houston METRO. The graph indicates that there was an increase in the annual funding during that time frame from approximately \$9 million to \$12 million. A recent federal transportation reauthorization bill, MAP-21 consolidated that funding into fewer categories and changed the process for project selections. The level of funding needed to maintain those services and provide resources to expand them was previously estimated at \$15 million per year. That funding amount has been included in the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan as a placeholder for planning purposes.

Figure 8. Funding for Mobility Limited Groups

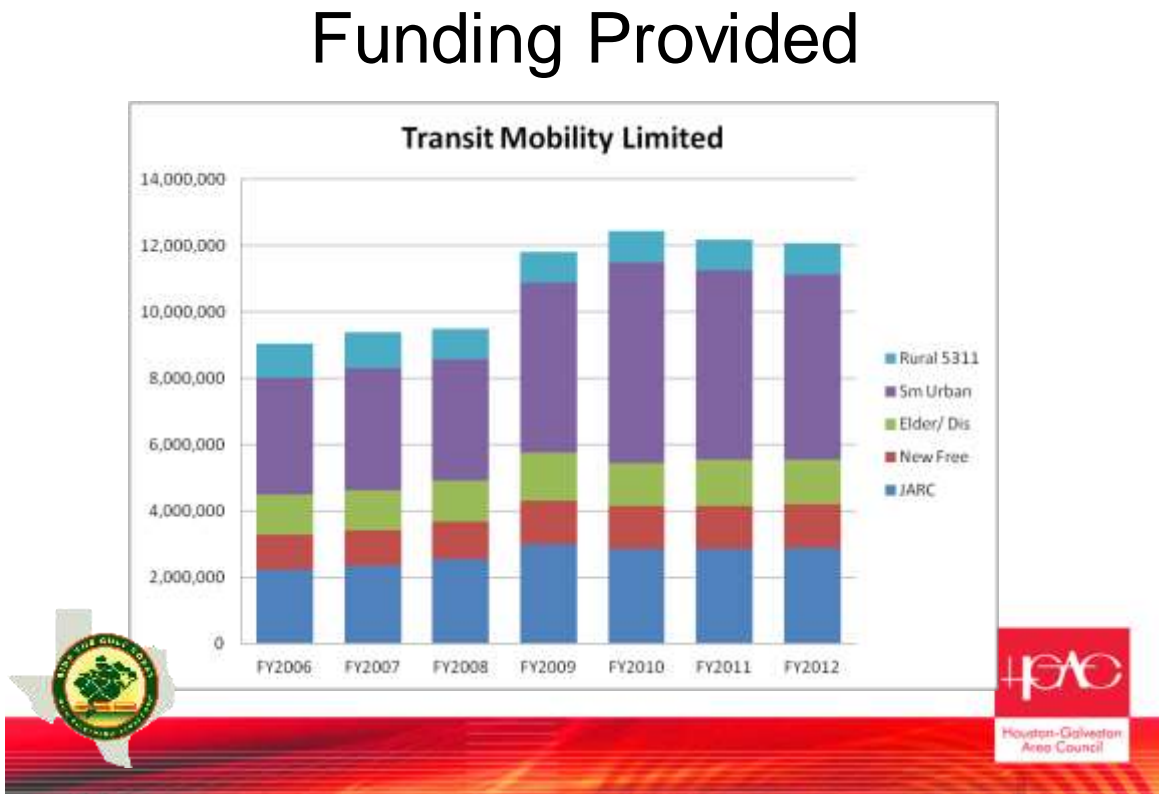


Table 4 below is an excerpt from the 2016 Regional Transit Framework Study ⁹ that provides an overview of the short term needs (S) and long term goals (L) for local transit providers. The needs were identified through a series of in-person interviews with H-GAC staff in 2015. Generally, the vast majority of the needs that were identified are for short term improvements with the highest priorities noted here:

- Expanded demand response services
- Coordinated regional fare system
- Expanded express and local bus services
- Transit facilities including park and ride lots, operations and maintenance facilities
- Technology and fleet upgrades
- Improved infrastructure that is ADA compliant.

Table 4. Needs and Goals Identified by Interviewed Providers

2015 Regional Transit Framework Study Update: Needs and Goals Identified by Agencies and Non-Profits														
Issue	Colorado Valley Transit	City of Conroe	Brazos Transit District	MOWMC-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			L	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

TBG
10/28/2015

⁹ More details are available in the 2016 H-GAC Regional Transit Framework Study (under development September 2016)

Another approach to estimating the unfunded need uses the data shown in **Table 5** which includes summaries of the annual growth rates for operations costs and projected capital costs (2012-2035) for the transit service providers that operate wholly or partially within the Gulf Coast Region. The data was developed by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute for TxDOT-PTN.¹⁰

That data will be used to develop a preliminary cost estimate of projected needs based on the baseline financial information as provided in Figure 7 above.

Table 5. Gulf Coast Operations and Capital Funding Needs (2012-2035)

TxDOT District/Agency	Operations Funding Average Annual Growth Rates (%)	Capital Needs (\$ millions)	Comments
Beaumont	4.26	22.23	Liberty and Chambers County are in the Gulf Coast Planning Region and in the TxDOT Beaumont District.
Bryan	6.98	163.57	Walker, Montgomery and Liberty counties receive services from the Brazos Transit District which is headquartered in Bryan, Texas.
Houston/ Fort Bend County Transit	9.73	33.87	
Houston/Gulf Coast Center	7.86	13.19	
Yoakum/Colorado Valley Transit	5.63	51.83	
Yoakum/Golden Crescent	4.62	36.89	Matagorda County is within the TxDOT Yoakum District and the Gulf Coast Planning Region
Average Annual Growth Rate (%)	6.51	Total: \$ 321.58m	Average annual capital needs: \$ 13.4 million.

¹⁰ Public Transportation Operating and Capital Funding Needs 2012-2035, Appendix D, by TTI for TxDOT-PTN (2016)

Assuming an average annual growth rate of 6.51% applied to the annual estimate of \$12 million per year in available funding (**Figure 8**) for existing services equates to approximately \$ 20 million per year. Approximately \$ 8 million of that annual need is considered to be unmet at this time. The total capital needs identified for the time period 2012-2035 are \$321.58 million which equates to an annual estimate of \$13.4 million. Funding to address those needs would be programmed in the appropriate grant funding programs over time.

Appendix A: RCTP Action Plan

Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) Action Plan Update FY 2015-2016 Priorities

The activities outlined below reflect the general prioritized recommendations made by members of the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) in June-July 2014 and some other regional transit coordination activities previously identified by H-GAC staff.

1. Regional Public Transportation (PTN) Alliance
2. Regional Mobility Manager
3. Seamless Fare Policy
4. Regional Maintenance Program
5. Regional Transit Information-Google Transit
6. Local PTN Match Fund-Transit Worker Initiative-Local Development Council
7. Baseline PTN Services-Development of Regional Volunteer Driver Voucher Program

The following narratives discuss each activity in terms of the background information, updated purpose and need and next steps.

1. Regional Public Transportation (PTN) Alliance—Public Information Campaign for Elected Officials and Business Leaders.

Background:

The research for the 2006 coordination plan found that business leaders, employers and public officials were uninformed about the transportation services that affect them, their employees and their constituents. In addition, they were uninformed of the advantages and benefits associated with utilizing public transportation. A potential pilot project to address this need includes developing a regional transportation alliance to identify transit champions and share information.

Updated Purpose and Need:

Since that time several transit champions have emerged to support new transit services that have been developed and are expanding in eastern Harris, Galveston, southern Brazoria, Montgomery and Fort Bend counties. Local officials in those areas have been involved and have provided local funding for the development of new services and the expansion of other services into new areas. During the same time-frame public transportation services have been curtailed in the Pasadena area due to economic concerns. For those public transportation services which are considered to be successful a strategy is needed to provide the financial resources to sustain and expand them.

Next Steps:

The recommended strategy involves recruiting local elected officials and business leaders as transit champions to speak to other leaders and to share information about the benefits of public transportation relative to economic development, air quality improvement and reduced traffic congestion. Some of the local Transit Champions in the Gulf Coast Region that have provided leadership roles for some of the transit projects are listed below:

Champion	Project
Judge Carolyn Bilski	Austin County JARC Commuter Route
Commissioner James Patterson	Fort Bend County Transit
Judge Robert Eckels Judge Ed Emmett	Harris County RIDES+, Harris County Transit
Judge James Yarborough	Galveston County Transit District
Gary Beverly, Clute City Manager	Southern Brazoria County Transit

To facilitate future discussions with other local leaders a draft transit brochure that identifies the benefits and advantages of public transportation was developed for Montgomery County which can be revised and expanded to be used as a regional transit brochure.

Next steps include refinements to the draft brochure, the identification and recruitment of local transit champions and the development of a strategy for them to share relevant information with other regional leaders.

2. Regional Mobility Manager**Background:**

The Regional Mobility Manager (RMM) was previously identified as a liaison between public transportation providers, health and human service agencies and the general public. Staff with the Harris County RIDES program partly fulfills that role today in the core of the region. RIDES staff receive transportation related calls from residents in the counties adjacent to Harris County through the United Way 2-1-1 Helpline and refer them to nearby local PTN service providers.

Updated Purpose and Need:

Unfortunately the local PTN service providers are not allowed to or do not have the resources to transport customers across county line boundaries routinely which is a significant barrier for PTN customers wanting to travel into Harris County to access the Texas Medical Center, the METRO transit system, regional airports and other facilities.

For several years the Harris County RIDES program has staffed a Consumer Mobility Coordinator (CMC) who oversees the HC RIDES + Ambassador Program. That CMC position performs the same basic function as a mobility manager. The Ambassadors provide trip assistance/escort services to elderly and disabled patrons in a door-to door and through-the door (when needed) service concept. An Ambassador Program has also been implemented recently in the Fort Bend County transit system. It is desirable to have a centralized RMM office or staff person with access to the PTN information for the 13 county H-GAC region. That RMM function could become part of the Regional Transportation Authority that has been recommended in the Our Great Region collaborative planning process.

Next Steps:

Potential next steps include a review of other communities where a similar Regional Mobility Manager coordination function has been established to better understand the options, benefits, costs and tradeoffs involved. Based on the results of that review, if feasible, a pilot project could be developed for implementation in the greater Houston area.

3. Seamless Fare Policy and Phased Implementation Plan**Background:**

Several different yet similar fare media technologies have been implemented in recent years in the greater Houston area including the METRO Q-Card which uses a smart card tap-and-go technology which can be updated similar to a debit card. Variations of that smart card technology have been implemented that use a similar magnetic smart-card-swipe technology which is less expensive and is also more compatible with the swipe card technology used by local cab companies, which are key partners in coordinating trips in Harris County that cannot be accommodated by traditional METRO bus services. Because of the variety of fare media systems in place today there is a technological barrier to achieving a regional seamless fare system quickly. In addition to the technology challenge there is a higher cost to incorporate the METRO Q-Card system technology into the smaller transit systems' bus fleets.

Updated Purpose and Need:

It could be years before the technology is made available to coordinate all of the fare systems of the various PTN providers in the greater Houston region. In the interim, it is feasible to pursue the development of a *Seamless Fare Policy* that would allow passengers from the various PTN systems to travel from one service area to another by simply allowing free transfers between the various systems.

As it becomes more feasible to implement a regional seamless fare system the initial fare paid at the origin end of the trip would be calculated using a distance- based formula to reach the final destination. Given the recent advances in the online Google-Transit Trip Planner application and

the rapidly emerging smart phone technology that platform might provide a more universal option for further development.

Next Steps:

In the short term (1-2 years) pursue the development of a regional seamless fare policy in coordination with members of the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS). An agreement could be initiated within the terms of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Cooperative Planning Agreement with local transit operators.

For a longer term solution (2-5 years) explore the feasibility of a coordinated cooperative purchase agreement to equip the vehicles of the smaller fleet operators with METRO Q-Card readers and to place the Q-Card infrastructure (value loaders) in strategic locations throughout the region, such as at local grocery store chains (HEB, Kroger, Randalls, etc). For longer range planning purposes a review of the next-generation of regional transit fare smart-card technologies should be completed to highlight best practices in other regions.

4. Regional Maintenance Program**Background:**

The basic premise behind a regional vehicle maintenance program is that the smaller transit systems could utilize the mechanical shops and expertise of the larger transit systems at a lower cost than commercially available maintenance services. That cooperative arrangement would lead to lower maintenance costs for the smaller providers.

Updated Purpose and Need:

A draft Regional Maintenance Plan was briefly presented and discussed at the July 2014 meeting of the RTCS and there was some consensus expressed to continue that effort.

Next Steps:

A follow-up task was identified to review relevant research about similar regional maintenance facilities in Texas to get a better understanding of the benefits and costs.

5. Regional Transit Information—Google Transit**Background:**

Several years ago a concept was discussed to develop an online resource for regional transit information for trip planning purposes, so that potential customers could get access to the bus route maps and schedules for any of the service providers in the region. A GIS based transit network was developed that included links to the METRO bus routes and schedules and maps for the other transit providers in the region. The result of that effort was the first regional (13

county) map that displayed all of the PTN services. Unfortunately, the smaller transit service providers did not have their local bus routes digitized. In addition, at that time the bulk of the services that were provided by the smaller service providers in the small urban and rural areas were in the demand responsive service category meaning that they did not follow specific routes and timetables. During the last 5 (or more) years several new fixed service bus routes have been implemented in several parts of the region which could be added to Google Transit after those routes are geo-coded into GIS format.

Updated Purpose and Need:

During the last year (or so) Google Transit was updated to include the information for the Harris County METRO transit system and its upgraded Trip Planner application is now available online. However detailed information about the smaller transit service providers is still not available through that application for transit trip-planning purposes.

Next Steps:

Efforts were started with the H-GAC Air Quality group to expand the Google-transit application so that it includes the routes and schedules of the smaller transit providers. Those efforts have been delayed recently partly due to some staff turnover and other higher priorities, however those efforts should be continued in the future so that the regional transit system which will be included in the Google-Transit application is more comprehensive and inclusive of all the service transit providers.

6. Local Match Fund –Transit Worker Initiative-Local Development Council

Background:

One of the most difficult financial challenges for the smaller transit service providers in the Gulf Coast Region (outside of the METRO Service Area) has been a lack of local funding that could be used to leverage more federal transit funds. A Local Development Council was initiated at H-GAC (circa 2007) to establish a Worker Transit Fund for counties outside of Harris County. That effort included challenge grants from local governments, small businesses, economic development corporations, chambers of commerce and other community development organizations. That fund was terminated after a year (or two) because the participation based on the number of transit riders was lower than anticipated. A rural transit commuter project benefited from that coordinated local match effort. It started in Austin County (2008) with funding from the Federal Transit Administration Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program and continues today.

Updated Purpose and Need:

Obtaining local matching funds is still an ongoing challenge for small urban and rural local service providers. Several recent examples relate to the reduction in services when more federal funds were available but local matching funds were not available to leverage them.

Next Steps:

Revisit the process that was used to set up the Local Development Council-Worker Transit Fund and clarify what worked and what didn't work with the intent to consider enhancements and document options to implement a more successful project in the future.

7. Baseline PTN Services- Development of a Regional Volunteer Driver Voucher Program**Background:**

Several counties in the H-GAC Region do not have a county-wide public transportation system in place that is available to the general public for routine trips (a baseline level of service). Most of the counties have some form of demand- response service for seniors and persons with disabilities to access non-emergency medical trips. The need for county-wide *baseline* general public transit service has been documented in several county-level transit plans that were completed between 2007-2012. The same type of transportation related need was highlighted in the more recent 2014 regional planning project, Our Great Region 2040.

Updated Purpose and Need:

There are some opportunities to improve the coordination among existing transit service providers and local senior centers' transportation projects as more funding becomes available. The group of mobility limited persons that would benefit from the development of a baseline level of transit services include and are not limited to the following:

- seniors,
- persons with disabilities,
- youth, college students
- low income persons,
- veterans.

A new and innovative Pilot Project, Transportation Resources for Independent Persons (TRIP) was initiated in the Houston Urbanized Area in 2013-2014 with New Freedom funding for seniors 60+ with disabilities. The pilot project had some unique features including staff for Transportation Options Counseling (Mobility Management) and a volunteer driver voucher program. The volunteer drivers were selected by the TRIP program participants and were reimbursed for their mileage. During the first 18 months of operation the TRIP program had documented over \$280,000 worth of value for the volunteer drivers' time. That value could have been counted as local match to leverage more federal funds for the region in the future.

Unfortunately the TRIP Program was terminated unexpectedly partly because of uncoordinated regional stakeholder efforts to implement the new MAP-21 guidelines to sustain New Freedom funded projects under the 5310 Program for Enhanced Transportation for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities.

Next Steps:

H-GAC staff should explore the options to seek funding *on behalf of* the residents of the H-GAC region to:

- Develop a regional baseline transit service program;
- Develop a regional volunteer driver voucher program similar to the TRIP model for mobility limited groups who would not be able to utilize the baseline services due to timing or geographic constraints.

Appendix B: RCTP Online Resources

The screenshot shows the H-GAC website with the following elements:

- Header:** Houston-Galveston Area Council logo and navigation icons for Residents, Business, and Government.
- Search Bar:** A search box with the placeholder text "Enter keyword(s) to find what you are looking for on our website." and a "SEARCH" button.
- Main Content:**
 - Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP):** A large heading.
 - About the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan:** A sub-heading followed by a paragraph explaining the purpose of the RCTP: "The purpose of the regionally coordinated transportation planning effort is to provide more efficient and effective public transportation services, especially for priority populations including seniors (65 and older), persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, veterans, youth, and others. This effort includes developing, adopting, implementing and updating a coordinated public transit/human services plan as well as assessing progress of activities called for in the plan. The coordinated plan provides strategies for meeting the public's transportation needs, and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation."
- Resource Grid:** A grid of six blue buttons with white text:

The Power of Transit 2016 - Advancing Regional Coordination Panel Discussion Video	The Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (Video)	Updated Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan
County Transit Plans	Suggestion Box (English)	Suggestion Box (Spanish)
Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS)	Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)	

NOTE:

The webpage for the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP) can be accessed through the H-GAC website (www.h-gac.com/mobility) or through the project url which is www.ridethegulfcoast.com.

The tab for the Updated RCTP currently contains the 2011 RCTP documents and the 2014 Regional Transit Guides for various sub-regions in multiple languages (English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese). The 2016-2017 RCTP is under development.

Appendix C: RCTP Summary of Public Comments-2016

Below is a copy of the bi-lingual (English and Spanish) flyer that was distributed by email and used to advertise the availability of the RCTP Community Transportation Suggestion Box to receive comments by email, Twitter, Facebook, or through a toll-free phone line. Following that is a listing of the RCTP comments received through the online Community Transportation Suggestion Box between February and May of 2016. Also included are other comments received on RCTP Comment Cards.



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! Our new Suggestion Box is now available through the end of May for you to submit your comments and ideas on how to improve community transportation options.

The purpose of the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan is to provide more efficient and more effective public transportation services, especially for seniors (65 and older), persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, veterans, youth, and others.

Let's talk transit, carpooling, bicycling and everything in between! We want to hear from you!

Use #RctpHearMeOut on Facebook and Twitter
 Call toll free 1-855-363-2516
 Visit our [Suggestion Box](#)

Español

QUEREMOS OIR DE USTED! Nuestro nuevo Buzón de Sugerencias ahora está disponible hasta finales de Mayo para que usted pueda enviar sus comentarios e ideas sobre cómo mejorar opciones de transporte comunitario.

El propósito de el Plan de Transporte Coordinado Regionalmente es proporcionar servicio más eficientes y más eficaces de transporte público, especialmente para personas mayores (65 años y más), personas con discapacidades, personas con bajos ingresos, veteranos, jóvenes, y otros.

Hablemos de transporte público, compartir el coche, usar bicicletas y todo lo de más! Queremos oír de usted!

Utilice #RctpHearMeOut en Facebook y Twitter,
 llame al número telefónico gratuito 1-855-363-2516
 Visite nuestro [Buzón de Sugerencias](#)

#RctpHearMeOut

Houston-Galveston Area Council | RCTP

“METRO needs to expand local service to the west of State Highway 6. They collect huge amounts of tax revenue out there, I have been paying for 20 years, but no local service. No way to get from my house in 77095 to HUGE employment destinations like the Energy Corridor District. No way to get to the existing Park and Rides. No METRO LIFT. This "pay taxes, get no service" situation is intolerable. It's worthy of some kind of a revolution. That's why small cities want their 0.25% sales tax money back... at least they can do a little bit of road building with the money, instead of getting nothing.” (Peter Wang)

“Increase park and ride options for Fort Bend County, Katy, Texas and Cypress, Texas residents working in The Energy Corridor District. Provide a circulator transit service in The Energy Corridor District to connect local residents and employees and METRO and Fort Bend County transit users to the Energy Corridor District employment centers and destinations. Provide a bike share program connecting transit routes and destinations in the Energy Corridor, City Centre, Memorial City and Westchase. Construct a pedestrian bridge over IH 10 connecting the Addicks Park & Ride Lot to the Grisby Square Restaurant District. Construct multi-use pathways along Barker Cypress, SH 6 and Eldridge Parkway connecting parks in the Addicks and Barker Reservoirs. Construct 10'-0" wide shared-use pathways along both side of IH 10 in the Energy Corridor District.” (Clark Martinson)

“Put rail along major freeways. Like down 288, instead of HOV! Like on I-10, especially heading westward from downtown. Although this makes so much sense, politics spoils the day. :-(-)” (Lynn)

“I live and work in the Clear Lake area and there is little or no public transportation. As a citizen 60+ years old, the walking/bike paths just end or are not well maintained in connecting areas. Where I work, (Armand Bayou Nature Center), it would be great if there was a bus line that dropped and picked up nearby so that people could enjoy the 2500 acres of refuge we have here-but no, you have to drive here or bike. I have lived in many cities where a bus or other transport came every few minutes and the cities were walkable/bikeable.” (Heather Millar)

“For METRO: Metro's Rideshare / Vanpool is good except that policies should be created/enforced so that drivers DO NOT use local streets as cut-through traffic lowers safety of bike-ped, lowers walkability of a neighborhood, lowers property valuations, lowers incentive of neighbors to invest time and energy into their neighborhood which produces an eroding effect of a neighborhood. In their 2011 released book, Making Healthy Places, three medical doctors, Andrew Dannenberg, Howard Frumpkin, and Richard Jackson make this strong statement; The trouble is that in the last half century, we have effectively engineered physical activity out of our daily lives. Health is determined by planning, architecture, transportation, housing, energy, and other disciplines at least as much as it is by medical care. The modern America of obesity, inactivity, depression, and loss of community has not happened to us; rather we legislated, subsidized, and planned it.” (Doug House)

“I favor high speed rail and would like to see it link up the Houston Metropolitan area with Dallas/Ft. Worth and San Antonio.” (J. Rice)

“Communications need to improve. When I talk to seniors about metro rail or buses . Most don't know how to catch a bus or metro rail. Need more marketing on what's available, Example: how would you get from park and ride to the medical center How much does it cost , websites , schedules . etc etc... Thanks , I hope this helps.” (David Noffsinger)

“Elderly and Disabled Persons - 1) Only transportation to medical appointments are provided through government and non-profits and availability on those trips are greatly limited. Sadly, many elderly and disabled lose their contact with the community and ability to be independent in running non-medical errands, like runs to the grocery store or social outings. Incentivizing taxis, Uber and Lyft to provide more wheelchair accessible cars could possibly help with this isolation. Uber does have the Uber ACCESS program but it is limited and not enough vehicles to be widely publicized. 2) Developers of nursing homes and large assisted living facilities should be asked to collaborate with local government to ensure there are safe sidewalks and routes for wheelchairs and walkers to go to bus stops, and stores. As an advocate for nursing home residents sometimes the sidewalks are non-existence, too narrow or in poor repair preventing a resident from going 2 blocks to a grocery store. Wider sidewalks should become standard everywhere for wheelchairs, walkers, bikes and pedestrians to all share.” (Lisa Hayes)

“I would like to express my concern for transportation here in the areas of Galveston, Texas City, Santa Fe, Dickinson, San Leon, Hitchcock and League City. There is a lack of community outreach and advertisement for what is available, there is no representative or spoke person to consistently engage the community or local schools and businesses. The fleet of current buses is scattered and has limited ranges and traveling time that can become a mathematical problem that test makers would love to institute on their math test. I am being facetious about the latter but i would like to offer a alternatives. Work with city officials to create safe pathways for alternatives modes of transportation such as bicycles, a mode that is often discounted but many young people use is skate boards. A hybrid for these alternatives at cities would be a nice addition. Provide shorter routes to main condensed (population density) areas, get local business involved. Provided a line of buses for local colleges and schools, it is difficult for students to navigate directly to their colleges or schools without having to take a tour of their local cities. Invite local health care provider to see ways to manage patients into their offices in a more convenient manner, split transportation cost or provide a means for voucher purchases and the like, Car Pool, let's find community members that have the time to transport people on their way in or out from work. Screen them as support them, if they drive Hybrids the better right. A city trolley system to population dense areas would be ideal, it would create jobs and it can be a starting point for bus connections. Those are some of my thoughts on this topic. Thank you for your attention.” (Roger Mora)

“1) See Mayor Sylvester Turner's recent remarks to the Texas Transportation Commission for why we need to consider options other than expanding freeways, in order to address congestion in this region. 2) Consider that the reason most trips in this region are in single-occupancy vehicles is because we, the transportation public, have so few other options. 3) Adopt a policy of "complete streets" for all transportation projects, to accommodate all users, not just cars.” (Linda Shead)

“We will like to see these improvements to the transit services here in Baytown: 1 Extended service hours at least up to 9:00 p.m. 2. Additional bus routes 3. More Para transit for the seniors who cannot access public transportation Thanks for the opportunity to voice our suggestions/concerns.” (Feni Green-Small)

“If I work and live in the Bay Area there is no way for me to get to work other than a car or rides with others. If I live in the Bay Area and work in one of the other cities in that region I have the same issue. HELP” (Lynn Lohr)

“I strongly suggest that the German-designed AutoTram (a flex bus that carries up to 256 passengers) be immediately road-tested in the Houston area. The AutoTram uses existing highways and streets and requires NO modification of existing infrastructure. Please see the website: <http://www.autotram.info/en.html>” (Michael Newton)

“We need to treat all Houstonians as first class citizens, regardless of whether they drive a car, which means Complete Streets, things like comfortable bus shelters, and meaningful, simple multimodal connections. - The modal allocation percentages established about six years ago are detrimental, inequitable, and costly. They should be thrown out. Mode share targets should be established closer to the clear citizen desires for more balanced approach articulated in the Our Great Region survey and the Kinder Houston Area Survey. Funding should be closer to the mode share that we want, not the mode share that is a result of our mistaken spending of the past. H-GAC is not a fairly representative agency by race, ability, lifestyle (urban v. suburban), and class. The persons for whom the RCTP is intended to serve are not fairly represented on the TPC or the HGAC board. This should be remedied. - We need a regional Complete Streets plan that prioritizes projects that consider all potential road users in all projects. A portion of project metrics should be dedicated to whether or not a project uses Complete Streets principles for all projects considered in the TIP. - We need a much higher ratio of transit funding to car funding. - We need much greater investment in walking and biking and ADA accessible infrastructure. - The region should prioritize fixing the moral failing of our missing sidewalk network. H-GAC should assume a long term goal of accessible sidewalks and safe ADA intersections on all streets where humans live or where. Ideally, this would take the form of a regional ADA transition plan that honestly sought to provide ADA access to all of our citizens to most locations over the next couple of decades. - All road projects should assume heavy transit use in the future. For freeways or toll roads, this means assuming prioritization of HOV Bus service and making direct connections into dedicated on street lanes into major centers. For arterials and other non freeway

projects, this means assuming future dedication of lanes to transit upon reaching appropriate density.” (Jay Crossley)

Public Comments Received on Comment Cards

(RCTP Symposium)

“The local governments in this region should pursue commuter benefit ordinances individually & collectively. Commuter benefits can support all modes of public transportation from all transit providers. Offering pre-tax benefits puts dollars for transportation to work in the hands of working families while also saving employers more in taxes than the cost to administer. The Association for Commuter Transportation (actweb.org) is leading an initiative to support cities in the pursuit and I am a local contact point for this effort. Giving employees option of paying for public transportation with pre-tax dollars encourages more to use the systems that encourages more to use the systems that already exist. In turn, more riders enable the providers to expand their service offerings, including their ability to coordinate with neighboring providers.”

(David McMaster)

Appendix D:**A Declaration of Independence**

Maria R. Palacios

I was not abandoned at birth
for being deformed
or abnormal.
My differences never entertained a circus audience.
I was not locked away
in a mental institution
for not being able to see,
or hear,
or walk.

My body
was never sterilized without my consent.
I was never accused
of being possessed by demons
after experiencing a seizure.
My body was not used
as a guinea pig for medical experiments.
I was not burned at the stake as a witch
for being physically or intellectually
different.
I was never
hidden from society, used
as an object of pity, a poster child,
or forced to use my body
in self-demeaning ways.

Yes, we have come a long way
since those dark moments in our history
but it had been a lifetime,
a lifetime of silence and invisibility,
a lifetime of isolation
and a lifetime of battles leading to the birth
of our Disability Rights Movement
which paved the road to a promised land
of access and equality.

Yet, it has only been twenty-five years
since the Americans with Disabilities Act
was signed into law
giving us a voice and liberating us

from the chains of oppression
that had imprisoned us.

We MUST know and must remember
that true equality is something
we continue to fight for,
and must still demand
and create
on our own.
We must carry the torch
passed along
by previous generations of heroes with disabilities
without whose courage and determination
we would not be here today
celebrating our differences,
proclaiming our freedom,
soaring above the painful memories of our past,
and rising above the still existing social and attitudinal barriers
we continue to face.

That's why today
twenty-five years since the signing of the ADA
we come together
with a new declaration of independence,
a declaration of self-worth
a declaration of community responsibility
and collective empowerment,
a declaration of personal accomplishment
and acceptance of our definition
of beauty, happiness and success.

Our declaration of independence today
demands
that our people get released
from the prison walls of nursing homes.
Our declaration of independence today
demands
true access to every single existing public place.
Our declaration of independence today
demands
integrated, affordable, accessible housing,
efficient public transportation, affordable attendant care,
available employment opportunities,
disability friendly health care services,
and most of all:

the opportunity to be contributing
members of society
worthy of respect
worthy of love,
worthy of equality at every level.

We will not settle for less.
In reality
we never have.
We have always fought
The monsters of oppression...
The monsters of ableism.
That is why this time,
we dedicate our re-declaration
of independence to the memory
of those before us who fought fiercely for our rights and our freedom
because twenty five years
Is just the beginning of the journey.

We must continue to work
with the same vision of the Ed Robertses of our movement,
with the same passion of the Justin Darts of our past,
with the same strength of the disability advocates of our local communities
and with the same voice
of the many other fallen heroes
whose hard work and activism laid another brick
toward the foundation of today.

Yes, my brothers and sisters,
this is a journey
we must continue to travel together
remembering that we have
the strength of our past
as well as the hope
of a new generation of advocates with disabilities
who, twenty five years from now,
will be looking back upon us
celebrating the history of back then
and of right now
and passing this torch
of empowerment and activism...
this flame we keep alive through the realization
that our inner advocate must stay awake and vigilant
because it is our responsibility
to foment the continuation of positive change,

the legacy of independent living,
the freedom to choose for ourselves,
follow our dreams
and take charge of our destiny
letting the world know
people with disabilities
are far away
from the era of shame and segregation
and have surfaced and blossomed
into a community rich in diversity,
wealthy in culture
and alive
through the heartbeat of collective activism.

Yes, brothers and sisters.
It is up to us to make a difference,
to empower ourselves and one another
for it is only then
that we will know the power
of who we are
as ONE.

Appendix E. Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan-Focus Groups Summary Report

Background

Houston Galveston Area Council on behalf of the *Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS)* engaged United Way Nonprofit Connection(NPC) to secure feedback from diverse stakeholders in order to guide RTCS planning and coordination of activities needed to address currently unmet transportation related needs. Nonprofit Connection conducted a series of seven (7) facilitated focus groups for the purpose of identifying current transportation obstacles and opportunities. Participants in the focus groups represented a broad spectrum of the target population to ensure that all constituent groups were well represented. Such representatives included:

- Seniors
- Persons with disabilities
- Persons with low-incomes
- Youth/students
- Veterans
- Low English proficiency populations
- Users of public transportation

Project Overview

United Way Nonprofit Connection staff planned, coordinated and implemented a series of seven focus groups comprised of participants in each group of essential stakeholders. Focus groups ran approximately 90 minutes in length and were hosted at participating social service provider locations. This provided a familiar and trusted setting for the focus group discussions.

The goal of the focus groups was to identify and document participant transportation-related needs, perceptions of the underlying causes of barriers encountered, and recommended solutions to address those needs. Where appropriate, discussions were conducted in both English and Spanish. Demographic information sheets, comment cards, and video release forms were available in English and Spanish.

NPC staff facilitated the focus group meetings and documented the information shared during each meeting using large flip chart Post-It pads so that participants could see that their comments were captured accurately. Notes were transcribed and results incorporated into a final report. This report provides an integrated summary of all focus group discussions, and identifies overarching themes to be considered for planning purposes. The narrative reflects the contributions of focus group participants. There is no editorial or opinion content contained herein.

In addition to their contributions to focus group discussions, participants were invited to provide individual observations via comment cards prepared by HGAC. Further, HGAC offered videotaping to focus group participants who were willing to share their personal comments on video. HGAC release forms were provided to secure appropriate permissions for taping.

Participants

Nonprofit organizations serving target demographics were identified. Focus groups were hosted at these locations since clients were accustomed to visiting these sites and were more likely to be comfortable in familiar settings. Groups were mixed and typically contained several of the demographic categories identified by HGAC. These organizations included:

- Career and Recovery Resources

- Community Family Centers
- Houston Area Urban League
- Neighborhood Center – West End Senior Center
- Santa Maria Hostel
- The Houston Center for Independent Living
- University of Houston – Downtown

Several other groups were identified as potential partner organizations but their participation did not materialize. Local Initiatives Support Corporation/LISC declined as they were conducting their own series of transportation focus groups in conjunction with a large planning grant. Veteran-serving organizations including Combined Arms, Goodwill Industries, Grace After Fire and Lone Star Veterans were invited to participate, but timing did not work for their constituents. However, veterans did participate in other groups, making it possible to engage a meaningful number in the discussions.

Timing

Nonprofit Connection conducted all focus groups during the month of September 2016.

Introductory Observations

It should be noted that focus groups fall into the category of qualitative research. Purposive samples were used to ensure inclusion of desired target demographics. Information gathered represents the perceptions, beliefs and experiences as reported by focus group participants. At times, data may appear to contradict policy or practice intended by transportation service providers. Nonetheless, participant feedback represents information perceived to be accurate based on their personal experiences.

This report has captured themes and dominant content areas. Individual focus group transcriptions included in the appendix include the detailed commentary provided by participants.

Summary of Focus Groups by Topic

The following provides an overview of responses.

Question 1: When you think about the places you need to go on a regular basis – doctor, grocery store, physical therapy, pharmacy – what obstacles get in your way?

Consistently, travel to outlying areas ranging from Channelview and Deer Park, Humble, Missouri City, Webster, Galveston, and The Woodlands proved extremely difficult for focus group participants. Those seeking employment in the energy industry cited lack of transportation to these industrial areas as a major barrier to job opportunities. Medical appointments were difficult, as erratic bus schedules resulted in late arrivals. Shopping choices were constrained by METRO stops that were not near preferred retailers such as Walmart and Kroger. Entertainment and recreational activities were limited. Boarding public transportation with bags and packages was difficult and drivers were described as impatient with passengers whose packages slowed the board process; mothers with young children and strollers encountered similar problems. Park-and-Ride lots were not convenient and often required a lengthy bus ride to get there. The recent changes initiated by METRO resulted in an array of challenges for frequent bus patrons. Routes were moved out of neighborhoods, focusing on major thoroughfares, resulting in long walks, often on busy streets with heavy traffic patterns, to reach a bus stop. It is often necessary to cross major thoroughfares to access a stop. Car traffic is not sensitive to pedestrians, creating significant safety concerns for those trying to access a bus or transit stop. Many stops lack shelters; long waits between buses are especially difficult in Houston's

unpredictable weather. Some stops are inclined to flood when it rains. Both cars and buses race through pooled water, splashing those waiting for a bus. Lack of sidewalks, or poorly maintained sidewalks create dangerous conditions, especially for the elderly or those with disabilities. Safety concerns were raised, especially in the evening where long walks to or from a bus stop require passing through unsafe areas.

Bus schedules were described as erratic. Buses that run late were cited frequently as a significant problem. A missed bus results in long waits and increases the likelihood of missed connections at other points in the system, resulting in tardiness at work, or inability to get to medical appointments or job interviews in a timely fashion. Drivers sometimes drive past waiting passengers, failing to stop even when hailed. Bus service was described as unreliable. Driver transfers cause delays. Some drivers appear to be unfamiliar with the new schedules; this seems especially likely with new drivers. Drivers are not consistent on routes. There is the expectation that printed bus schedules will be available on buses, but that is not often the case. While schedules are available online, not all riders have a smart phone or the technical expertise required to take advantage of the new technologies.

Bus connections are complicated, requiring excessive amounts of time to navigate from one bus route to another, or from bus to train. The bus transfer system is confusing. The three-hour time window between transfers was considered insufficient, especially when patrons were facing multiple transfers that could require substantial amount of time. Criteria determining number of METROLift transfer tickets required does not seem to follow an understandable pattern based on distance or destination.

There were many concerns identified with respect to payment of fares. In order to secure a discounted pass (students, seniors, those with disabilities), a trip to a Transit Center is necessary. Q-Cards should be available from the drivers and from approved retailers, but that is not always the case. While some drivers will allow a passenger to ride for free in the event they have no money, that is not typical. A debit card approach was suggested as a possible solution for these emergencies.

Sanitation on buses and trains was described as poor. Vehicles do not appear clean and the smells can be quite unpleasant. There are no restrooms available at transit centers or Park-and-Ride facilities; this could contribute to the unhygienic conditions found on vehicles.

Question 2: How does cost influence your transportation decisions?

Lower gas prices have made car travel more affordable for those who have vehicles, although maintenance, registration, insurance and parking costs are factors considered in weighing options. For those who don't have cars, access to free gas cards would make it more comfortable for riders to ask a friend or family member to drive them where they need to go. Taxis are described as expensive, but there is a growing interest in using Uber as a lower-cost option where available.

In general, bus and train fares were considered reasonable. Some social service programs do provide free fares for those receiving services. For those on fixed or limited incomes, reduced or free fares are important. In those cases, cost may force choices between visiting the doctor or attending Sunday services, and may limit access to preferred retailers if one requires a less expensive trip than another.

It was suggested that free rides could be provided on weekends and holidays when traffic is light; and free or courtesy rides could be offered to those seeking employment during their job search.

The idea of a debit card that would allow those with no money to ride for free until they could replenish funds on their card had strong appeal.

It should be noted that the array of fare options can be confusing: bus travel is free for those over 70; half-fare is available for seniors at 65, students and those with disabilities; free fares are earned intermittently when more than \$50 is loaded on a Q Card monthly. Passengers must have cash or a credit card in order to purchase the multi-ride passes. Day passes are available only at Transit Centers. Lost passes must be replaced at a Transit Center for a \$10 fee. Cost of individual tickets is the same for bus or train. Published METROLift base fares are the same as the cost of individual tickets, although a number of respondents thought that the cost of METROLift was higher. It is clear that heavy users of public transportation have spent a good bit of time studying the most effective choices for their needs. It was felt that broader public education about the system and its many permutations would be quite helpful.

There was a general consensus that the way in which fares are calculated does not follow a logical pattern. A ride to a particular destination may cost more for the return trip. A transfer is good for one change, but if a third bus is required, a new ticket is required. Distance does not appear to be a factor in setting fares: some short trips cost more than longer ones; routes do not appear to be the most direct and efficient.

Question 3. If you have no other transportation methods available, who would you call in an emergency to get where you need to go?

For some who have no transportation alternative, they simply don't travel. Others will call a friend or family member. Uber was an option for several participants who noted that it is cheaper than a traditional taxi and is a better option for getting to the suburbs. Students in particular favored biking as good alternative, though noted that bike routes focused on leisure rather than economic zones. It was noted that there are not enough bicycle-sharing BCycle bike stations. The zip car station at University of Houston Downtown has been removed, eliminating a useful alternative.

Question 4: How has your use of available transportation methods changed in the past several years?

The question was answered from two perspectives. A few participants spoke about the ways in which their personal mode of transportation had changed (from bus to their own vehicle or from car to bus and rail). However, most participants were users of public transportation and described the ways in which they believed the system has changed. In general, the new routes were seen as confusing, making it difficult to plot out destinations. Based on the comments shared, using public transportation requires a great deal of study to determine how to arrive at the desired destination. New routes following the recent changes require longer rides, more bus transfers. One participant described taking the bus as a "humbling experience." Travel time seems longer and more complicated. Drivers are not always familiar with the routes. In general, rail is well thought of, although a lot of walking is associated with getting from one train to the next.

Question 5: What is your favorite method of transportation? Why do you like it best?

Car travel was not identified as the favorite means of transportation. On balance, Metro buses and trains appear to be the preferred options for most participants, particularly from a cost standpoint. The train is perceived to be faster, more likely to be on schedule and offers a

smoother ride. However, it was noted that the train can be crowded and some passengers can be aggressive. Without the presence of security officers, safety can be a concern.

In certain parts of town, the bus can be quite convenient, delivering passengers to doctors, parks and museums. Bus riders would like to see more connected stops, perhaps using a shuttle system to carry riders to shorter destinations. Schedules are likely to be a determining factor in the ultimate choice of travel method. Biking and walking were other preferences cited by some.

Question 6: What do you like best about public transportation?

For the most part, the system gets travelers where they need to go in a comfortable, cost-effective manner. The hybrid vehicles do not pollute. The air conditioning is a plus. Regular schedules can make traveling quick and easy.

However, the limited service to outlying areas such as Pasadena, Humble, and Baytown is a frequently mentioned negative aspect of public transportation.

Question 7: If you could improve public transportation in Houston, what options would you like to see? and Question 8: If you were in charge of updating Houston's transportation, what changes would you recommend?

With respect to general vehicular traffic, focus group participants recommended greater use of car pools, road construction that takes place at night rather than during peak driving periods, expanded use of HOV lanes; EZ Tags are considered expensive. Bike riders wanted to see an increase in bike lanes that focused on practical rather than leisure destinations.

There were many suggestions for improvements in the public transportation system. Riders would like to see a mixture of options readily available including large and small buses, taxis, bikes and cars. A return to the former routes that were more neighborhood-centric had strong appeal. More frequent stops and shorter distances between bus stops would minimize need to walk long distances. Observing published schedules with on-time arrivals and departures would allow passengers to schedule appointments with more confidence. Schedules should be posted. Well-maintained signage that identifies stops and route numbers would minimize uncertainty for riders. Smoking prohibitions should be enforced. Priority boarding for the elderly and disabled should be ensured, as should access to priority seats for those who need them.

Solutions to safety concerns include better lighting so that drivers can see passengers waiting at stops, seat belts, extra personnel on trains and buses to address disruptive behavior, more shelters that offer protection from sun and rain. Additional safety precautions include working call boxes and intercoms. Improved driver attitudes would minimize the potential for conflict.

Acrimonious conversations between the driver and dispatch should not be audible to passengers as they are often offensive.

Better sanitation on buses and trains was an important issue. Lack of restrooms creates significant difficulties for passengers, especially those who are elderly or disabled, and families with small children.

Improved public education about all aspects of travel including schedules and fares was recommended. For example, students may not be aware of the half-price fare available to them. There was consistent interest in expanding locations where passes, Q-cards, tickets and transfers could be purchased, with an emphasis on the ability to make these purchases on the bus. Many participants cited their desire for expanded train service to other large cities. It was also suggested that train lines should parallel every major freeway.

Question 9: What city that you know about has very good public transportation? What makes it very good?

Cities that were identified as having superior transit options included:

- Austin : on time, polite drivers, day pass available, other fares paid on bus
- San Diego: connects to outlying areas
- Sacramento: less traffic
- El Paso: priority for seniors, disabled
- Atlanta: Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority/MARTA: controlled access, travels farther out of the city, connects to airport
- New York: subways, buses, train systems
- Chicago: Chicago Transit Authority/CTA
- Dallas: Dallas Area Rapid Transit/DART
- Japan/China: buses run over streets, straddle roads
- Mexico: priority lane for buses

Other cities mentioned included Denver; Washington, DC; Charlottesville, VA; San Antonio, TX; Munich, Germany. Additional features admired in other cities included digital boxes that display bus arrival time at each stop; buses that run from downtown in all directions; frequent schedules; front entrance, rear departure process.

Question 10: What questions have we forgotten to ask?

This question elicited a number of themes captured throughout the discussion. It was felt that Houston's public transportation had not kept up with the current century. Maintenance of older systems was viewed as costly. Lack of weekend transportation and service to outlying areas was an often-repeated concern. There is a desire to see cities connected across Texas by rail or other public means of transportation. For many, there is no transit option that would facilitate a visit to recreation and entertainment centers like Galveston or The Woodlands, nor is it possible to take public transportation to either major airport. More bike racks and hooks on buses and trains would encourage biking.

New users find the system confusing in its present state. From a service perspective, passengers are seeking more direct routes with schedules that are consistent and dependable. Employees in all sectors also need schedules that run early and late to accommodate workers in the many different industries that support the area. Drivers should be familiar with their routes. Route changes were initiated without consideration of the elderly or those with disabilities. Access to paper maps and schedules on the bus and elsewhere are important to those without smart phones, apps and computer skills.

It was recommend that Harris and outlying counties work together to create a regional access plan that includes rail. Smaller, intermediate systems could supplement zones for longer routes. A desire for systems that cross boundaries and provide broad regional access was expressed frequently. Community development should be based on transportation needs and use of mass

transit should be incentivized. Increasing awareness of environmental impacts would support these concepts.

Other suggestions included light rail on Richmond and Westheimer and a second level on the I-10 corridor. Cars could be taxed based on distance traveled rather than by tolls.

Focus on Special Needs

Because the needs of the elderly and individuals with disabilities are unique, this section is intended to highlight the distinctive requirements of that population. These observations were captured principally in the focus group held at the Houston Center for Independent Living.

Ability to access transit stops is often dependent on the placement of curb cuts in relation to bus stops. Poorly maintained sidewalks, overgrown landscaping, haphazard placement of lighting, telephone poles, sewer caps and other utilities can represent a serious safety hazard. Location of bus stops can require traversing multiple traffic lanes on busy thoroughfares.

Wheelchairs and walkers are a particular challenge for boarding and exiting buses and trains.

Accessible spaces may be occupied by those not needing special accommodations and drivers seldom enforce restrictions. Wheelchairs are not properly belted to the floor, putting occupants at risk during bumpy rides. While there are kiosks at the rear of the bus for purchase of tickets, it is not possible to navigate the narrow aisles with walkers or wheelchairs.

METROLift requires advance scheduling and is viewed as undependable when it comes to honoring time commitments. Drivers are frequently late, causing riders to be late for or miss important medical or occupational appointments. However, if the client is late, drivers may leave without them. Cumulative missed healthcare appointments can have serious medical consequences. Long waits for pick-ups are not uncommon.

Drivers should receive customer service training to reinforce the practices mandated for those serving clients with disabilities. For many, METROLift may be their only travel option. It was suggested that all METRO board members should be required to ride METROLift to fully understand the experience of those dependent on the service. In contrast, Medical Transportation provides clean, dependable service.

In summary, as one focus group participant stated quite eloquently: “We want to be able to go where everyone else goes.”

Conclusion

The seven focus groups conducted provided a broad representation of target populations.

Participants were very forthcoming with their comments, complaints and suggestions. Members of all groups welcomed the opportunity to express their views. They appreciated the fact that they were listened to, that their opinions were heard and captured formally, and that they were part of the formal planning process designed to enhance local transportation options. All were interested in receiving a copy of the final report when it is available.

Appendix F-New Transportation Initiatives METRO and Harris County Transit

New Transportation Related Initiatives

METRO

Over the past few years, METRO has engaged in an extensive program, METROLift Moving Forward that has assessed possible changes which could enhance the program.

- METRO's Board of Directors have considered and have adopted many of the recommended changes or modified changes in an effort to improve paratransit service.
- Likewise, there were three major fare initiatives during FY2016: 1) reintroduction of the Freedom Pass, allowing eligible paratransit customers to use the fixed-route bus / rail system for free in lieu of METROLift; 2) the institution of a three-hour non-directional transfer when using Q Card, which greatly reduces costs for many riders; and 3) implementation of a pilot MVP pass for eligible veterans.
- Likewise, at its September 2016 meeting METRO's Board of Directors adopted its Fiscal Year 2017 Business Plan and Budget with the top two goals being universal accessibility and enhancing the customer experience.

Accessibility Improvements

- Improve transit amenities at bus stops by:
 - Installing 100 bus shelters at prioritized locations throughout METRO's service area
- Improve pedestrian accessibility to our stops by:
 - Identifying stops with accessibility issues in our System
 - Develop prioritization criteria
 - Develop scopes of works and estimates
 - Driving projects to correct at least 200 of them in Fiscal Year 16
 - Create multi-year plan to bring entire system into full compliance with ADA
- Improve Regional Coordination by:
 - Ensuring bus stop design information is available to all
 - Coordination of projects impacting our bus network is in place
 - Leveraging other agency and private projects
 - Seeking any grant opportunities to improve accessibility

Technology related improvements

- TRIP App – Mobile app that provides trip planning and real time arrival information for bus service. In a soon-to-be-released upgrade, the app will visually show where the bus is.
- Q Mobile Ticketing – Mobile app for purchasing METRO fares for local single rider and day pass. November 1st Park and Ride fares will be available.

- METRO App – Mobile app that provides links to all METRO tools and apps in one place.
- MPD Connect – A web app that is mobile friendly and provides customers a way to report safety/security issues they see on our service including the ability to attach photos. Live chat is available during peak hours.
- Public Comment System – A web app this is mobile friendly and provides customers a new interface to report comments, complaints and compliments. It provides automatic updates to customers on the items they submit and allows photos to be attached.
- Interactive Service Map – A web app that provides pinch and zoom map based information on METRO's service. It includes detailed bus route and stop information, HOV lanes and ramps, Transit Centers, Rail lines and platforms, METROLift Service Area, and more.

METROLift Supplemental Information

METROLift is a complementary paratransit service offered by the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). METROLift provides transportation for people with disabilities who cannot board, ride or disembark from a METRO fixed-route bus, even if that bus is equipped with a wheelchair lift or ramp.

METROLift provides service using wheelchair lift vans and ramp-equipped minivans that accommodate persons using wheelchairs and scooters. Boarding chairs are available to assist any patron who is unable to access the van using the stairs. METROLift is a curb-to-curb service with assistance beyond the curb provided when needed or requested due to disability. METROLift cares about its riders and will place riders with special needs in the hands of their caregivers upon arriving at a destination.

To schedule transportation, customers may speak to a live agent by calling the METROLift Reservations Center at 713-225-6716, Monday - Thursday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. for next day trips, or Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., for trips on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Riders can use METROLift's Automated Calling System (MACS). Riders call one day in advance (713-225-6716), press 1, and simply follow the prompts. Or riders can use MACS-WEB (www.RideMETRO.org). To use MACS and MACS-WEB riders need their client ID and password. MACS and MACS-WEB are available seven days a week, 5 a.m. – 5 p.m. Scheduling assistance and trip time negotiation are available through the Dispatch Center on weekends and holidays by calling 713-225-0410.

METROLift transports thousands of patrons each day and we rely on our patrons to immediately inform our Dispatch Center when service issues occur. A strong partnership with our patrons enables METROLift to respond quickly to service issues, reducing wait time for our patrons. METROLift provides origin-to-destination service. All customers may request assistance at the time of scheduling their trip or on the day of service by calling the METROLift Dispatch Center at 713-225-0410 or by asking the driver at the time of pick-up or drop-off. Assistance beyond the curb will be provided at both the pick-up and drop-off as requested or as required due to

unforeseen circumstances. For safety reasons, we encourage drivers to be mindful of not losing sight of their vehicle while providing customer assistance.

METROLift is a shared-ride service. This means that each vehicle makes several stops to pick up and drop off other passengers along the route. All trips are treated with equal priority. Examples include, but are not limited to, traveling to/from work, a medical appointment, a shopping trip, a sports event, a restaurant, etc.

The current METROLift service area encompasses 772 square miles and is composed of the 557 square mile ADA required service area (base service area) and a 215 square mile non ADA required service area. METROLift's 557 square mile ADA required service area encompasses areas within 3/4 mile of bus and rail routes. Origins and destinations within this area have paratransit service that is comparable to bus and rail times.

As the largest paratransit transit provider in the state of Texas and one of the largest in the nation, METRO is committed to ensuring riders receive safe, reliable transportation and excellent customer service. In addition, METRO is also committed to continuing to find innovative ways to serve our riders with disabilities. We look for ways to broaden their transportation options and increase their independence.

Bluetooth Beacon Pilot Project

In a unique partnership with Texas A&M Transportation Institute, METRO is exploring Bluetooth technology to improve mobility options for older adults and people with disabilities by removing barriers to riding transit. Using a cell phone application developed by METRO, the technology will enable bus stops to "call out" to riders with information about the bus stop location, routes servicing the stop, bus arrival times, and amenities at the stop.

Riding transit in an urban environment can be daunting. Transit riders must find the nearest bus stop, understand the routes to take to get to and from their origin and destination, know how long they will have to wait until the next bus comes, and understand the fare system. For riders with disabilities, navigating the transit system can be nearly impossible, especially for those with visual impairments. At times, finding a bus stop in the maze of street signs and corners may even require help from a Good Samaritan.

Through thoughtful and meaningful collaboration with older adults and people with disabilities, METRO will use Bluetooth and Google technology in a pilot demonstration project to help customers in these groups navigate to METRO bus stops. METRO is currently in the proof of concept phase of the project.

Feeder Service Pilot Program

The Feeder Service Pilot Program will begin January 1, 2017. The program will allow METROLift riders to take METROLift (fare-free) to a nearby transit center, Park & Ride lot, or rail station. From there, they can ride the bus or rail service to their destination. The bus and rail rides are also fare-free with a METROLift Freedom Q®Card.

Pedestrian Accessible Review (PAR) Program

METRO is working in partnership with the City of Houston to help improve infrastructure accessibility. The Pedestrian Accessible Review (PAR) Program is administered by the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). Sidewalks and curb cuts/ramps are provided to improve sidewalk accessibility for people with disabilities. A citizen with a disability is considered eligible to participate in the PAR Program when there is no safe accessible path of travel to:

- Grocery Store/Pharmacy
- Financial Institution
- Place of Employment
- Medical Facility
- Bus Stop/METROLift
- Educational Facility
- Place of Worship
- Any facility/structure deemed necessary to provide quality of life

METRO has dedicated staff to help riders with disabilities participate in the City's PAR Program.

METROLift Freedom Q®Card and Travel Training

METRO introduced a METROLift Freedom Q®Card for all METROLift riders. The METROLift Freedom Q®Card offers:

- FREE rides on fixed-route bus service
- FREE rides on rail
- FREE on Park & Ride service

In addition, METRO offers free travel training to riders with disabilities who want to learn how to ride METRO's accessible local bus and rail services. During travel training, riders will learn how to plan trips on METRO buses and trains, get on and off the bus, and use vehicle accessibility features. Upon completion of travel training, riders will possess the skills and confidence to ride METRO fixed-route services on their own.

For more information, riders should call METRO's Travel Training group at 713-750-4234.

Harris County RIDES

Transition to Tomorrow

“Transition To Tomorrow” is a new Harris County RIDES mobility management program that provides transportation education and support to local Public Independent School District ‘s Transition Coordinators and their families. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires public school systems to develop an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for every student with a disability who meets the federal and state requirements for special education. The role of RIDES is to support the Coordinators in developing the plans to include and identify alternative transportation options to enhance the success of each student’s IEP. Many IEP plans identify work programs and training centers to prepare students as they transition out of public school systems for life beyond age 22. This is a daunting task if resources are not known, or, is readily available. Target school districts that RIDES provide education and support for are in areas within Harris County that are primarily without public transportation. In the Baytown and La Porte areas where Harris County Transit has fixed route service RIDES staff will work with internal agency staff to offer Travel Training when needed. The RIDES Mobility Coordinator and Consumer Assistance Specialists participate in School District’s Transition fairs to educate and meet parents of special needs children. This is an example of mobility management, to find transportation solutions to meet the needs of this specialized population into the future.

Transportation for Disadvantaged Youth

Harris County Transit through partnership with The Houston Area Women’s Center and Genesys Works, provide transportation for low income youth traveling to and from work. Funding is provided by Houston Area Women’s Center’s METRO Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) grant. Genesys Works provides meaningful paid internships for disadvantaged high school students at major corporations during their senior year in high school. Many entry-level jobs go unfilled because companies struggle to find qualified candidates. The Genesys Works program bridges that gap between real job opportunity and motivated youth. Nearly 100% of Genesys Works students go on to college, most with scholarship awards. RIDES transport the students from their home campus and take them to their corporate office and return them to their home campus at the end of the work day. This service is provided by taxi companies to meet the flexibility needed for the students schedules and work hours.

