

LIBERTY COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN

Background

Reduced state funding levels for rural public transportation expansion has delayed the implementation of transit expansion projects in Liberty County for several years. The need for a transit plan to address the mobility challenges of residents in Liberty County was identified as a priority in the Gulf Coast Regional Transit Coordination Plan that was submitted to TxDOT in December 2006. A transit workshop was held in Liberty County in March 2007 to focus on specific transit pilot projects that could be implemented. Several public meetings and briefings with elected officials were conducted to refine the needs and to ascertain the public support for the recommendations outlined below. The Liberty County Transit Plan was developed by H-GAC staff in association with the URS Corporation. A copy of the plan is available at www.h-gac.com/transportation under the "What's New" tab.

Recommendations

The recommended transit projects for Liberty County based on recent public input include the following short-term (1-2 years) and mid-term (3-5 years) projects. The long-term recommended project is presented here for future consideration.

SHORT TERM

(1) Continue to refine the plans to implement a county-wide general public demand response (dial-a-ride) system. The development of a public transportation coordination Action Plan is needed to guide that implementation process. One of the primary advantages of a coordinated county-wide system would be better efficiencies through centralized dispatching and resource sharing with the Brazos Transit District, the three senior citizen centers and other transportation providers in the County. Projected ridership estimates are 95,000 annual trips for the countywide demand response and local circulator routes (combined) at maturity. Current ridership levels are at 62,000 annual trips. Approximately \$800,000.00 in additional funds would be needed for the county-wide demand response services which could be implemented incrementally at lower costs.

(2) Continue plans to implement the Park and Ride service and transfer center in Dayton with commuter service to the Houston CBD (with an interim stop in eastern Harris County in the future). Projected ridership for that service was estimated between 400 and 600 daily riders in the year 2020 based on a demand analysis that was completed in 2003. ¹That demand analysis is being revisited due to higher growth projections for Liberty and adjacent counties. Funding for the construction of that park and ride facility has been committed and land acquisition is in process.

(3) Continuation of the Liberty County/University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) /BTD transit pilot project for medical trips.

(4) Implementation of Commute Solutions Program strategies including but not limited to the development of an employee shuttle to the Wal Mart Distribution Center in Cedar Bayou and

¹ Liberty County Park & Ride Facility Advanced Planning Report, May 2003, The Goodman Corp.

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the formation of new vanpools and carpools (through the NuRide program). In addition the development of Telework programs should be encouraged by working with the major employers in Liberty County. The Telework programs would be most effective if higher speed internet services were available to the residents of Liberty County.

(5) Development of a car-ownership program similar to the Ways to Work Program. That program provides low interest loans for low-income working families to purchase used automobiles to get to work and to share rides with other low income workers. That program could be a cost effective transportation option for a segment of the population in Liberty County.

MID-TERM

(6) A Transit Feasibility Assessment (Phase 2-Transit Plan) of a proposed park and ride route from Dayton/Liberty along SH 146 to IH 10 then eastward to Port Arthur and Beaumont.

(7) A Transit Feasibility Assessment (Phase 2-Transit Plan) of a Park-and-Ride service in Cleveland, Texas with connecting routes along US 59 North, southbound to the Townsend METRO Park and Ride lot and a cross-county connecting route to Dayton/Liberty along SH 321.

LONG TERM (5 or more years)

(8) A Transit Feasibility Assessment of an Intermodal Transfer Center near the intersection of Interstate 10 and SH 146. Based on the apparent need to enhance transit services in the IH 10 Corridor between Houston and Beaumont/ Port Arthur it would be prudent to explore the development of transfer capabilities between the local transit services in Liberty and Chambers counties that could connect with express bus routes and the Intercity bus carriers operating along IH 10 today. An Intermodal Center could become a strategic location to facilitate those transfers as well as provide space for the future development of higher speed passenger rail services in the IH 10 corridor. There could also be important economic development opportunities that would emerge in the vicinity of such a center.

Public Comments Summary

Similar issues and concerns were raised in the 2008-2009 meetings compared to the 2006 outreach efforts with more emphasis added regarding the need to advance the proposed service expansion recommendations. In addition cross-county connecting services and linkages to Montgomery County were identified as priorities. Elected officials, economic development groups, transit officials, business people, and residents are more concerned about the higher price of gasoline and its impact on those less able to afford it. One additional focus has been added regarding the need to connect transportation systems in Liberty County with the planned expansions of the petrochemical industry plants along the IH-10 Corridor, particularly in Beaumont and Port Arthur.

Action Requested

For approval of the Liberty County Transit Plan by the Technical Advisory Committee, with a recommendation for approval by the Transportation Policy Council to enable the use of federal and/or State funds to support the transit system improvements in Liberty County.