

CHAMBERS COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN

Background

The need for a transit plan to address the mobility challenges of residents in Chambers County (the County) was identified as a priority in the Gulf Coast Regional Transit Coordination Plan that was submitted to TxDOT in December 2006. Chambers County is in a unique situation because it does not have a designated public transportation provider. Due to its relatively smaller population size (28,771 in 2007, ACS) the County might not receive adequate funding for a comprehensive public transportation system from the State's allocation of the Elderly and Disabled (5310) and Rural (5311) transit formula programs. Therefore an incremental approach to enhancing the public transportation options in Chambers County is recommended that will coordinate available resources with innovative funding initiatives for future expansion. In addition there are some unique opportunities available today to form some strategic partnerships with various entities such as the Harris County Transit program, the petrochemical industry, the economic development councils and the regional vanpool program. The Chambers 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 Chambers County are:

SHORT- TERM

County-wide General Public Demand-Response Service. Chambers County's residents would benefit from a countywide general public demand-response program that would improve local mobility options for all segments of the population. *That expansion can be partially accomplished by the acquisition of a third transit vehicle to provide demand response services in the eastern portion of the county.* The formation of a public/private partnership including representatives of the Economic Development Councils, the business and industrial employment sectors and the Texas Workforce Solutions program could provide some other sources of transportation revenues (as matching funds) to support that transit expansion.

- 1) **Commuter shuttle Pilot Project between eastern Harris County and western Chambers County.** A commuter shuttle connection between the Baytown Park and Ride, the Wal-Mart/Cedar Bayou Distribution Center and other employment locations near Mont Belvieu is recommended as a starting point for the development of a more comprehensive express bus program along IH 10. Coordination with the Intercity Bus carriers along that corridor could provide another source of matching funds for further expansion in the future.
- 2) **Implementation of Commute Solutions Program strategies** including but not limited to the development of the following:
 - New vanpools, carpools through the NuRide program; and
 - Telework programs in coordination with the major employers in Chambers County (where feasible).

Initiate discussions to develop a **Car-Ownership Program** similar to the Ways to Work Program. That program provides low interest loans for used automobiles for low-income families to get to work and to rideshare with other employees. The program could be a cost effective option for a segment of the population in Chambers County.

- 3) Beyond the short-term project period, the County could consider either joining or creating a rural transit district. This option might include merging with the Harris County Transit Program, the Brazos Transit District (Liberty County), Connect Transportation (Galveston County), or a rural transportation program through the TxDOT Beaumont District.

MID-TERM

- 4) **Evaluate the Feasibility of Potential Park-and-Ride services in the following areas:**
 - Westbound towards Baytown, downtown Houston CBD and the Houston Ship Channel;
 - Eastbound towards Port Arthur and Beaumont; and
 - North-South connecting Chambers and Liberty Counties along the SH 146 corridor.

LONG-TERM

- 5) **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 location could become a strategic location to facilitate those transfers to intercity buses traveling the IH-10 corridor, as well as provide an access point in the area related to the future development of higher speed passenger rail services in that corridor.

Public Comments Summary (samples of elected officials' and stakeholders' perspectives) **Chambers County Judge Jimmy Sylvia:**

... With regards to a rural bus system that could operate within the sparsely populated towns that make up Chambers County. "I think this is very timely with the price of fuel."

Mike Shields, executive director of the West Chambers County Economic Development Foundation:

... said the system might inadvertently help the county on another economic front – rejuvenating the workforce. He is working with Harris County Transit to link the Baytown transit to Cedar Crossing for job related transportation.

"This would not only take people to the west toward Houston and out of Chambers County for work, but it will also tie the area together and bring people back here to work," he said.

Guy R. Jackson, Mayor of Anahuac:

... said he hopes the new system gets up and running as soon as possible and that a demand response system would work best for the county because of the low density.

“I do not foresee the price of fuel coming down in the near future and until incomes rise to meet that cost, we’ll have this need to move our workers,” he said. “We have this whole socioeconomic group who can’t afford to get to work and without them and their contributions, our economy will come to a screeching halt.”

Action Requested

Approval of the Chambers 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 Chambers County.