

2008: Chambers County Transit Plan Public Involvement Meetings, Briefings and Workshops

Presentation of findings and recommendations for the proposed Chambers County Transit Plan, accompanied by a public comment period that ran from July 7, 2008 through September 15, 2008:

- **Chambers County Courthouse/ City of Anahuac** (July 8, 2008): Workshop/ briefing for Commissioner’s Court, area officials, stakeholders, and citizens
- **West Chambers County/ City of Mont Belvieu** (August 14, 2008): Public meeting for area officials, stakeholders, and citizens
- **Chambers County Courthouse/ City of Anahuac** (August 26, 2008): Public meeting for area officials, stakeholders, and citizens

General Comments and Concerns on County Public Transportation:

Issues and concerns raised in the 2008 meetings held before Hurricane Ike’s devastating impact on the county in September 2008 were similar to the 2006 outreach efforts, with more emphasis added to the need to advance the proposed service expansion recommendations. Elected officials, economic development groups, transit officials, business people, and residents were more concerned about the higher price of gasoline and its impact on those less able to afford it.

A new focus addressed the emerging need to connect transportation systems in Chambers County with the planned expansions of the petrochemical industry plants along the IH-10 Corridor, particularly in the Beaumont/ Port Arthur area.

H-GAC Staff observations:

Chambers County does not have a county-wide demand response (or dial-a-ride) service for citizens today. The public transportation services that have been provided with funds from the Area Agency on Aging and the TxDOT 5310 program for the Senior Citizens Project have filled an important gap for a number of years. Ideally, public transportation linkages will be needed eventually to connect with new employment and other travel related opportunities along Interstate 10 toward the east and west in addition to connections for north-south travel within Chambers County and into adjacent counties.¹

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

¹ H-GAC Staff member K. J. Hackett, 2009

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.”

Comment:

Senior citizen transportation is a high priority.

Comment:

The Veteran’s bus going from Beaumont to the Medical Center in Houston needs to stop in Chambers County.

General questions and concerns:

1. What are the funding sources for the recommended projects? (Judge Sylvia)
2. Will the existing services (for seniors) be discontinued?
3. Have the Workforce cutbacks affected the transportation projects or plans?
4. How can Chambers County benefit from the transit services in Baytown (Park-and-Ride and new circulator services)?
5. What is the probability of obtaining a third vehicle for the elderly?
6. How do you arrange transportation after you arrive at the destination?
7. What about transportation to/from work destinations?
8. What about park and ride locations in Chambers County?
9. Can there be coordination for the Anahuac ISD student who is blind to travel to the School for the Blind in Houston on the bus from Beaumont? Currently the student must get on the bus in Beaumont because there is no stop in Chambers County.

From: Gene Harrington, Chambers County resident
Sent: Thursday, July 10, 2008

<http://baytownsun.com/story.lasso?ewcd=182d57801f868bd2>

I read the above, and it stresses "input is needed" from the public. If so, I offer mine. It appears to me CC is trying incredibly hard to become part of Houston. We welcomed the Houston Grand Parkway (and its traffic) into our county, we put up billboards on I-10 inviting "growth" into CC, and now we want to connect with two urban areas via busing. Do you feel the average resident of CC wants to become a resident of a Houston suburb?

I work in Mont Belvieu, 12 hr rotating shifts. Would the proposed busing be able to pick me up at 4AM, and drop me off before 5AM at the Enterprise parking lot? Would it then pick me up at 5PM, and return me to Winnie? When I go on night shifts, would it bring me to work by 5PM, and drive me home at 5AM? Would it function 24 hours and 365 days a year, holidays included, without fail? If not, this busing would not be suitable for shift working employees in CC, like the article says.

Our peaceful, quite, rural way of life in CC is *rapidly* disappearing. Some of this change is inevitable, but, sadly, much of it seems accelerated by design. The growth in MB is incredible. There is now a massive traffic pileup at I-10 and 146 that didn't exist until a few years ago. The Lanai subdivision is tightly packed (what happened to setbacks?), and the Houston Grand Parkway will certainly exacerbate the problem. Winnie has "growth", too, but it is of the wrong kind. 12-15 people (of dubious legality) living in a dilapidated mobile home use the school and utilities and county medical, yet pay almost nothing into the system. Our ECCISD classrooms are full of non-English speaking people as it is. What is attracting them en mass to Winnie? Who is bringing them in? I have heard anecdotal evidence of some of the mobile homes residents dumping raw sewerage into our community, although I cannot confirm this. I do know their little children walk unsupervised across the highway to Dollar General, a tragedy (and lawsuit) waiting to happen...

Winnie has RV trailer parks springing up *everywhere*! What do you feel they add to our community? Are they an addition to our tax base, or, just more traffic and drain of our systems? What would new busing bring? Where do we go from here?

When the four Commissioners, The Judge, the Mayors, and other officials meet, I strongly urge the will of the *average* Chambers County resident to be considered. We are rapidly moving into a near future where our former quiet, peaceful, rural lifestyle in Chambers County will be irreversibly destroyed.

Response to: Gene Harrington
From: Mark Huddleston, Chambers County Commissioner
Sent: Friday, July 11, 2008

I agree with much of what you have stated. Unfortunately, because we are situated next to one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country, both growth and change are inevitable. The Mont Belvieu area, being the closest to Houston, has seen the majority of the growth so far and there is still a lot of land available for development, both residential and commercial. However, much of Chambers County

east of the Trinity River is undevelopable because it lies within areas subject to inland and tidal flooding....and that will reduce the amount of growth here locally.

As elected officials and community leaders, we are charged with making sure that the growth that is coming is the kind of growth that we want for our rural communities. We have taken advantage of every law that is available to help but sometimes that's not enough...and in those instances we try to lobby the Legislators to pass laws that will allow Counties more authority. The Texas Legislature doesn't allow county government much authority when it comes to controlling development and zoning...RV Parks being one of those.

As for the busing issue, our Legislators passed House Bill 3588 in the 78th Legislature, which mandates the coordination of public transportation services "and funding" among Health and Human Service agencies, the Texas Workforce Commission, and TxDOT. Initially, it was developed to assist those persons that don't have access to an automobile or have other mobility limitations....but it also includes the goals to reduce congestion, enhance safety, expand economic opportunity, and improve air quality. Obviously not much of this is relevant in rural Chambers County, but because the County is adjacent to the Houston Metro area, we're included in the planning and coordination....and it may be that busing is not the answer or the need for us.

I appreciate your comments and I hope that I can count on you to participate in the development (or non-development as the case may be) of public transportation for Chambers County. I will keep in touch and may ask you to serve on a committee to formally express your opinions.

2006: Chambers County Transit Plan Public Involvement Meetings, Briefings and Workshops

During the plan development process, two (2) public meetings were held in Chambers County with stakeholders to gain input on the need for either an expansion of service or initiation of service in certain areas. A summary of each public meeting is provided below.

Chambers County Public Meeting - August 1, 2006

Nine Attendees

Strengths of Existing Services in Chambers County:

- There is currently demand-response serving elderly/disabled citizens in Chambers County
 - o There are 2 buses; one at each end of the county (east/west)
 - o Take passengers to Houston, Beaumont, Galveston and Baytown

Issues/Challenges affecting Chambers County:

- Other than service for elderly/disabled, there is no public transportation in Chambers County
 - o Need rural provider services
 - Talk to Brazos Transit District since they operate nearby about providing some level of services to Chambers County
- Concerns about existing services:
 - o Medical trips must take precedence over other trips
 - o There is not an established schedule for trip destinations
- Issues facing Chambers County as a whole:
 - o Need better public outreach and education about public transportation and its associated benefits
 - o Need help understanding funding processes; as well as raising local share match for transit projects
 - o Better plans (and awareness of plans) for emergency evacuations
 - o Need more coordination within the county
 - Current process of sharing records is inadequate and incomplete
- Medicaid transportation concerns:
 - o Unclear exactly who qualifies for services (age, income, etc.)
 - o No coordination with other services

- o Will not allow multi-purpose trips (go to doctor and stop by grocery store on the way home)
- Issues with Veterans Administration (VA) transportation:
 - o Must go to Baytown or Beaumont to access services
 - o VA buses take Beaumont veterans through Chambers County on the way to Houston
 - Why can't they stop in Chambers County and pick up their veterans as well?
- Other issues facing public transportation:
 - o Legislation at the federal level and the state level often conflict with Medicaid contracts
 - Some legislative changes are needed to fix these issues

Suggested Actions for Chambers County:

- Make a schedule for existing services that assigns particular destination to certain days
 - o i.e., Mondays, the bus goes to Houston; Tuesdays – Galveston; Wednesdays – Beaumont; etc.
- Look at creating vanpool program for Wal-Mart distribution center in Chambers County
- Possible pilot projects:
 - o “Park-and-Ride” vanpool into Harris County
 - o County-wide demand response; accessible to everyone

**Chambers/East Harris Counties - August 1, 2006
Twenty-two Attendees**

Strengths of Existing Services in Baytown:

- Harris County Rides program is operating in Baytown for medical trips
- Three “Park-and-Rides” are planned for area – Baytown Mall, Dayton and Crosby
- All “park-and-rides” will access Texas Medical Center (TMC) via light rail
- Harris County has planned a fixed-route circulator to serve the City of Baytown

Issues/Challenges affecting Baytown:

- Concerns raised about medical trips for those who are not elderly or disabled
 - o One citizen needs weekly trips to TMC for cancer treatments

- o Another concern was raised on behalf of a deceased citizen who advocated public transportation for similar purpose
- o RIDES does offer these trips, but system is overloaded
 - Program must focus its resources on areas of greatest needs
- Public transportation is underfunded and lacks political support in City of Baytown
- Existing forms of public transportation in Baytown do not operate on night/weekends

Other Discussion:

- Funding concerns for new services and improving existing services
 - o Discussion about federal funds including:
 - 5307 funding for capital purposes
 - CDBG funds for RIDES/taxi voucher programs
 - JARC funds for Baytown circulator
- Concerns about the proposed route for the circulator
 - o It will access the Baytown Hospital
 - o It will access Lee College
 - o Perhaps a deeper evaluation of proposed route to include other areas of high density