

# Chambers County



## Regional Public Transportation Coordination Summary

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Detailed regional plan information can be found at  
[www.ridethegulfcoast.com](http://www.ridethegulfcoast.com)



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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Houston-Galveston region is home to 5.4 million people, including many persons who do not have access to an automobile or have other mobility limitations. For the most part, these people depend on public transportation to meet their transportation needs to employment, shopping, and medical trips. Certain parts of the region are served by public transportation providers, such as the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) whose service area includes two-thirds of Harris County.

Many other parts of the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning Region, however, have limited or no public transportation services. In some instances, basic transportation service is provided by social service agencies for clients that meet financial and/or medical eligibility criteria. In other cases, churches and private companies offer limited services. When considering all categories of transportation providers in the region, there are still unmet transit needs.

The leadership of the State of Texas realized that there were inadequacies in the area of public transportation and took action to rectify the situation with House Bill 3588, passed during the 78<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature. It includes a statewide mandate to coordinate public transportation services and funding among Health and Human Service agencies, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

Although this is a statewide mandate, planning and coordination take place at the regional and local levels. As such, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) was designated the lead agency for these coordination efforts in the 13-county Gulf Coast Region, which includes Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, Wharton counties. TxDOT has provided the following transportation goals:

- Reduce Congestion
- Enhance Safety
- Expand Economic Opportunity
- Improve Air Quality
- Increase Value of Transportation Assets

Transportation stakeholders, health and human services agency representatives and public transportation advocates convened at H-GAC for the first regional meeting on coordination in September 2005. More than 200 persons attended and expressed a desire to participate in the regional initiative to coordinate services among transportation providers. Since that time, H-GAC continued the coordination effort by developing a steering committee and hiring a consulting team to assist in developing the regional public transportation coordination plan.

The project team, consisting of The Goodman Corporation (TGC), Nelson | Nygaard, and the Center for Transportation Training and Research of Texas Southern University (TSU), pursued this initiative in several steps, as follows:

- Surveyed public and private transportation agencies regarding the types of service they provide;
- Interviewed social service agencies to determine the barriers that prohibit transportation coordination, which areas have transportation needs, and how to best serve the needs identified;
- Conducted public meetings in each of the 13 counties that offered the general public opportunities to comment on transportation services throughout the region;
- Conducted consumer and business surveys to receive additional input and comments from the public;
- Conducted a detailed demographic data analysis and transportation needs assessment;
- Compiled a package outlining barriers and constraints to effective coordination that was provided to TxDOT as an early indicator of key issues to be addressed by the Commission and the legislature in the coming 80<sup>th</sup> Legislature; and
- Worked with a steering committee including representatives from each of the 13 counties, key social services providers, key transit providers, TxDOT district representatives, and others to develop an action plan and proposed pilot projects.

The purpose of this report is to provide Chambers County stakeholders with information pertaining to public transportation coordination that was obtained during the plan development process.<sup>1</sup>

The development of the Chambers County Transit Plan will combine the information from the *Gulf Coast Coordinated Regional Public Transportation Plan* (H-GAC, December 2006) that was submitted to TxDOT and new priorities that will be identified by local elected officials and the general public in future meetings. Detailed plan information can be found at <http://www.ridethegulfcoast.com> .

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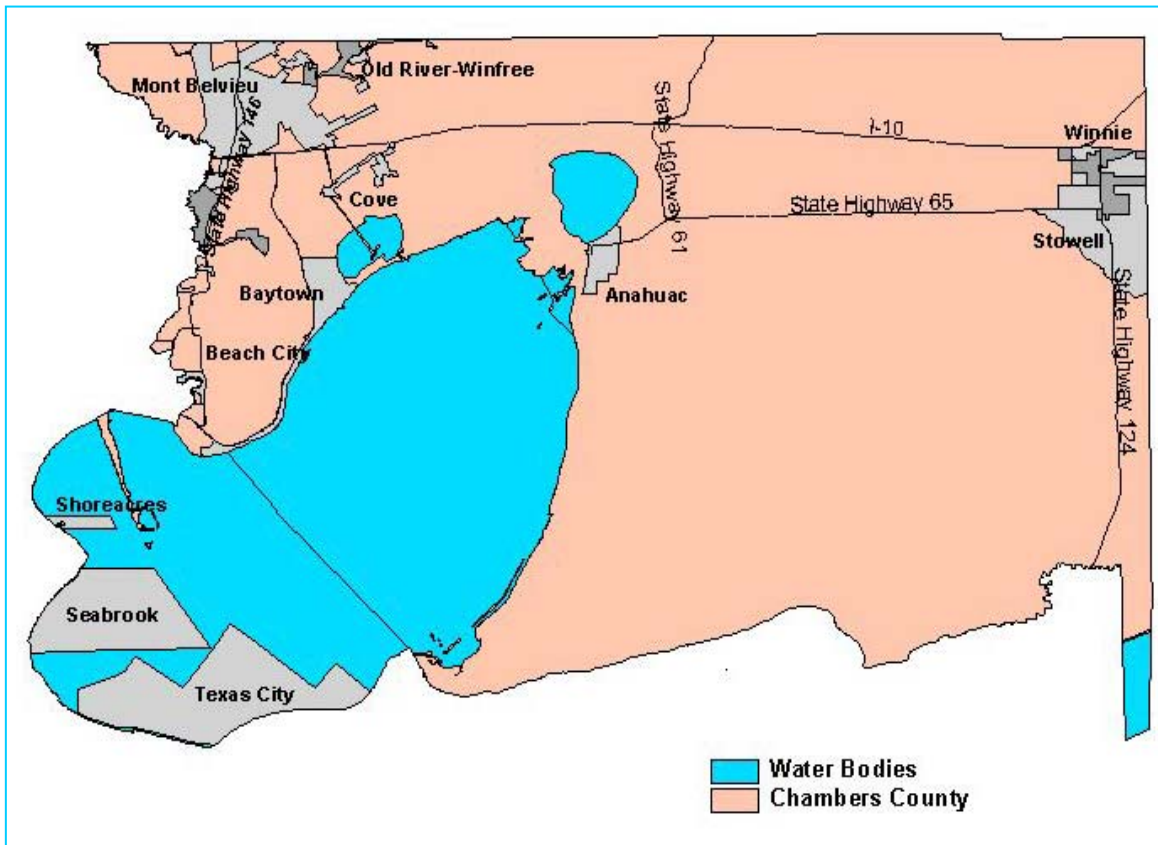
<sup>1</sup> Source: *Gulf Coast Region Coordinated Regional Public Transportation Plan*, December 2006, and *Gulf Coast Region Coordinated Regional Public Transportation Plan-Pilot Project Workshop Summary Report*, March 2007.

## Chapter 2 STUDY AREA PROFILE

### Background

Chambers County is located on the east side of Galveston Bay, and has a population of over 28,000 persons. Chambers County includes the eastern portion of Baytown (the western portion is in Harris County), as well as the cities of Mont Belvieu, Old River-Winfree, and Anahuac (the county seat) in the westernmost portion of the county. The communities of Winnie and Stowell are located in the eastern part of the County. IH-10 is the major east-west highway corridor traversing the county. Despite being located within the eight-county Transportation Management Area (TMA) for ozone non-attainment, there are no public transportation providers currently operating in Chambers County. Chambers County is located within the TxDOT-Beaumont District area.

*Figure 2.5 – Chambers County*



Chambers County experienced steady growth from 1990 to 2000 with a 29.6 percent increase in population. Other demographic characteristics include 9 percent of the population over 65 years of age, 16 percent with a disability, and 11 percent of the households have a language other than English spoken at home. Chambers County is relatively low density for a TMA county, with only 43.4 persons per square mile.

**Table 1 – Chambers County Demographic Profile**

	<b>Chambers County</b>	<b>13-County Area</b>
2000 Population	26,031	4,854,454
2004 Population Estimate	28,227	5,318,437
2000-2004 Change	8.4%	9.6%
1990-2000 Change	29.6%	24.6%
Persons over 65	9.0%	7.9%
Persons under 5	6.9%	8%
Persons with a disability	4,175	801,436
Persons with a disability (%)	15%	16.5%
Non-English Spoken at Home	11.7%	29%
Persons Hispanic or Latino	10.8%	28.6%
Households	9,139	1,702,792
Median Household Income (1999)	\$47,964	\$41,515
Person below poverty line (1999)	11.0%	13.5%
Households without an automobile	5.8%	7.4%
Private Non-farm employment (2001)	6,323	1,976,148
Land Area (square miles)	599	12,312
Density (persons per square mile)	43.4	394.3

*U.S. Census 2000*

**Chambers County Transportation Profile**

- Transit Provider: None
- Type of Services: n/a
- Targeted Transportation Services: Area Agency on Aging (with Chambers Co.)
- Type of Service: Senior Transportation  
 Medical Transportation for Disabled (private provider)  
 Veterans Transportation (VA Hospital)

## Chapter 3

### EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

Largely a rural county, the extent of public transportation services are limited to two elderly-disabled vehicles that were purchased through the TxDOT Section 5310 program and operated with financial assistance from the county and private sources. One vehicle is located in Mont Belvieu in the far western area of the county, while the second vehicle operates from the county seat, Anahuac, in the south/central section of the county. Even as *Figure 3.2* demonstrates an elevated Transit Needs Index (TNI) rating for portions of central and eastern of the Chambers County, the area currently does not have rural demand-response services, which affects both countywide and inter-county mobility for traditionally transit-dependent segments of the population. There currently are not any proposals by the county or by adjacent providers to initiate a universal rural demand-response service.

The western portion of Chambers County could also benefit from commuter park-and-ride services to the Houston Central Business District (CBD) via I-10, even if they were available just over the Harris County line (*the Baytown Park-and-Ride service is now in operation*). Chambers County could also benefit from ridematching and vanpool programs, for destinations in Houston to the west, and to the Beaumont area to the east. Promotion of such programs could also include designation of park-and-pool lots where available surplus TxDOT right-of-way exists.

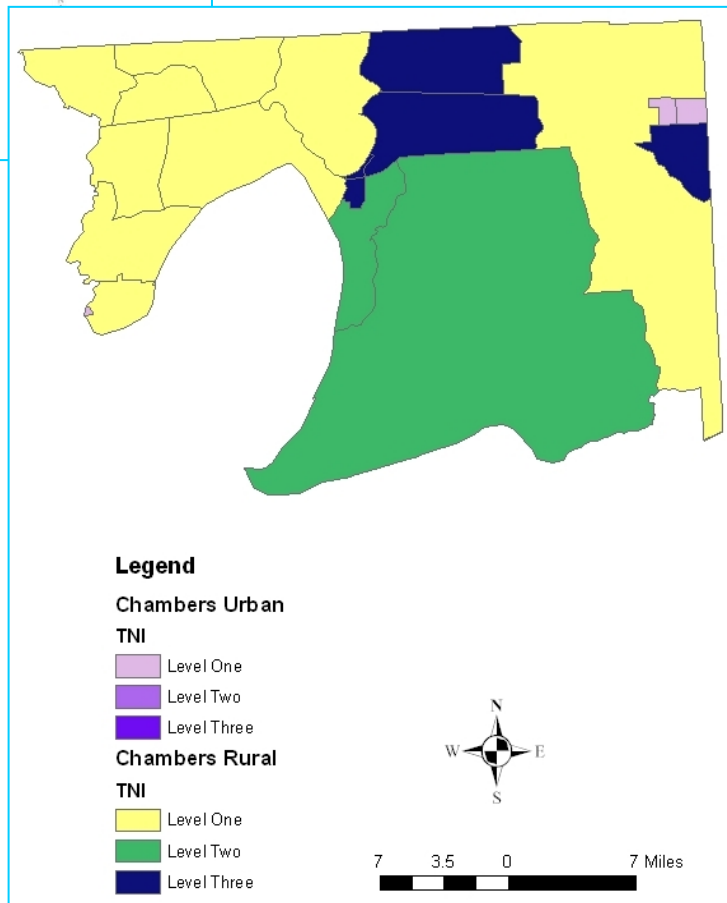
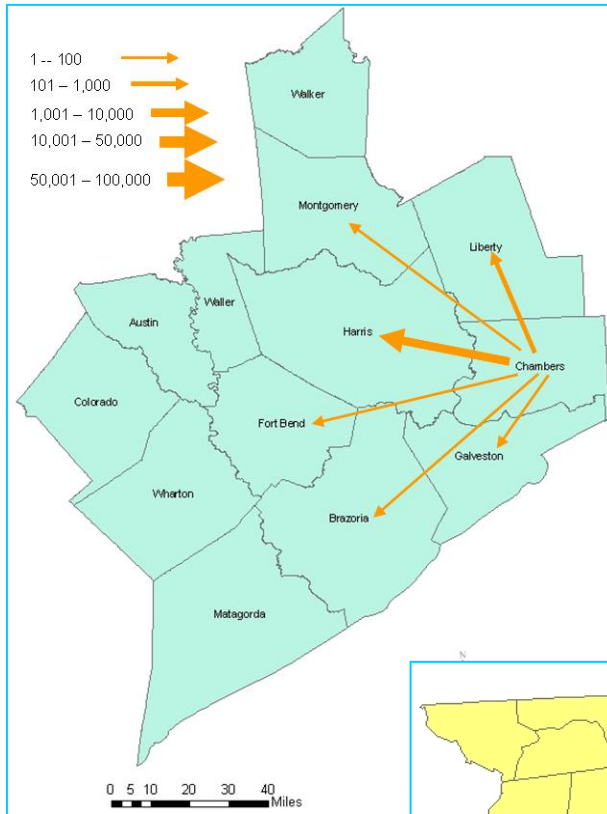
#### **Journey to Work**

In terms of the H-GAC region, workers from Chambers County mainly commute to Liberty, Montgomery, Harris, Fort Bend and Brazoria County. There are 5,375 workers commuting to Harris County daily but flows to the other counties are small. There are also some 4,555 daily work trips within Chambers County. (See *Figure 3.1*)

#### **Transit Needs Index (TNI)**

As depicted in *Figure 3.2*, the highest areas of transit needs are in central and far eastern Chambers County. The lack of a universal, countywide demand-response service in Chambers County could make trips for individuals in these areas difficult, especially if they lack a network of friends or family to assist them. The introduction of such a system, even on an interim pilot project basis could help determine long-term viability of such a service.

**Figure 3.1 – Chambers County: Inter-County Journey-to-Work Flow, 2000**



**Figure 3.2 - Chambers County TNI, 2000**

## **Chapter 4**

### **TRANSIT OPPORTUNITIES**

- 1. Chambers County/Wal-Mart Employees** – A potential Job Access-Reverse Commute (JARC) funded pilot project exists for the Wal-Mart/Cedar Bayou distribution center in Chambers County, for employees from far eastern Harris County (specifically the Baytown area). Chambers County has a relatively low population, and the majority of the employees at the Cedar Bayou distribution facility reside in Harris County. Employers at this facility have already identified the difficulty that many of their employees have difficulty reaching the site, especially with higher gas prices. Additionally, unemployment and lower income levels exist in far eastern Harris County and the Baytown area. A JARC Pilot Project would likely be mutually beneficial to all of the parties involved, and meet the express purpose of the JARC funding program.
  
- 2. Chambers County Rural Demand-Response Program** – Chambers County has two FTA Section 5310 funded seniors' vehicles operating within the county, but currently lacks a countywide demand-response service. If sufficient county funds are available, and if adequate Section 5311 funds can be secured, Chambers County's residents would benefit from such a pilot project. Beyond the pilot project period, the County could consider joining or creating a rural transit district, or merging with the Brazos Transit District, Connect Transportation, or even a rural transportation program through the Beaumont region to the east.

## **Chapter 5**

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SUMMARIES**

During the plan development process, many public meetings were held throughout the region. 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 meeting in Chambers County follows:

#### **Chambers County Public Meeting**

August 1, 2006

Nine (9) Attendees

#### **Strengths of Existing Services in Chambers County:**

- There is currently demand-response serving elderly and 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 the Brazos Transit District (BTD) 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

- Better plans (and awareness of plans) for emergency evacuations
- Need more coordination within the county
  - Current process of sharing records is inadequate and incomplete
- Medicaid transportation concerns:
  - Unclear exactly who qualifies for services (age, income, etc.)
  - No coordination with other services
  - Will not allow multi-purpose trips (go to doctor and stop by grocery store on the way home)
- Issues with Veterans Administration (VA) transportation:
  - Must go to Baytown or Beaumont to access services
  - 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:
  - 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
  - i.e. Mondays, the bus goes to Houston; Tuesdays – Galveston; Wednesdays – Beaumont; etc.
- Look at creating a vanpool program for Wal-Mart distribution center in Chambers County
- Possible pilot projects:
  - “Park-and-Ride” vanpool into Harris County
  - County-wide demand response; accessible to everyone

**Chambers/East Harris Counties Public Meeting**

August 1, 2006

Twenty-two (22) 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 the 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 under funded 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, Baytown
  - o Perhaps a deeper evaluation of proposed route to other areas of high density

**Chapter 6**  
**FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

**Funding Synopsis (TBD): A complete financial plan will be prepared based on the recommended public transportation improvements after local meetings with elected officials and citizens are completed.**

If its citizens and elected leaders so choose, Chambers County could consider the creation of a rural transit district, or merging with an adjacent rural transit district in order to apply for Section 5311 Rural funds from TxDOT.

As Chambers County is located within the eight-county Transportation Management Area, federal Congestion Mitigation/ Air Quality (CMAQ) funds can also be utilized for projects that contribute to air quality improvements and reduce emissions and congestion. JARC and New Freedom funding would also be appropriate funding programs to consider for Chambers County.

**Chapter 7**  
**Provider Survey Results**

**Name of Organization:** Senior Citizen Project – Chambers County

**Address:** 204 Trinity - Anahuac, TX 77514

**Phone Number:** (409) 267-3559

**Contact Person:** Carolyn Burkhalter

**Service Area:** Chambers County

**Description of Service:** Senior Transportation

**Type of Service:** Demand-response and subscription service

**Eligibility:** Ages 60+

**Hours of Operation:** M, W, Th; 8a.m.-6p.m.

**Fare Structure:** donations accepted

**Typical Destinations:** doctor, store, pharmacy, etc.

**Scheduling Requirements:** 1 day in advance

**Contact with Drivers:** cell phone

**Technological Capabilities:** none

**Passengers/Yr.:** 14,000

**Sedans:** 0

**Passengers per Sedan:** n/a

**Vehicle Idle Time:** n/a

**Vans:** 1 Avg. Age - 5 yrs.

**Wheelchair Accessible:** 1 Gasoline fuel

**Passengers per Van:** 8

**Vehicle Idle Time:** M, W, Th after 6p.m. and all Tu, F and weekends

**Mini Buses:** 1 Avg. Age - 5 yrs.

**Wheelchair Accessible:** 1 Gasoline fuel

**Passengers per Mini Bus:** 22

**Vehicle Idle Time:** variable; most weeknights after 5 p.m. and weekends

**Full-Size Buses:** 0

**Wheelchair Accessible:** n/a

**Passengers per Bus:** n/a

**Vehicle Idle Time:** n/a

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**Name of Organization:** Genson Transit Services

**Address:** 6250 Westpark Dr., Ste. 202 - Houston, TX 77057

**Phone Number:** (713) 255-2001

**Contact Person:** George Nwosuh

**Service Area:** Brazoria, Fort Bend, Harris, Montgomery, and Chambers counties

**Description of Service:** medical transportation for disabled

**Type of Service:** fixed-route in Harris County; demand-response in rest

**Eligibility:** pre-screened by agencies

**Hours of Operation:** M-F; 6a.m. - 6p.m.

**Fare Structure:** determined on contract basis

**Typical Destinations:** no exclusion; depends on contract

**Scheduling Requirements:** 1 day in advance

**Contact with Drivers:** cell phones and mobile data terminals

**Technological Capabilities:** automated routing/scheduling

**Passengers/Yr.:** 6000

**Sedans:** 20

**Avg. Age:** 5 yrs.

**Passengers per Sedan:** 4 Gasoline fuel

**Vehicle Idle Time:** M-F; after 7 p.m. and all weekends

**Vans:** 20

**Avg. Age -** 5 yrs.

**Wheelchair Accessible:** 1 Gasoline fuel

**Passengers per Van:** 7

**Vehicle Idle Time:** M-F; after 7 p.m. and all weekends

**Mini Buses:** n/a

**Wheelchair Accessible:** n/a

**Passengers per Mini Bus:** n/a

**Vehicle Idle Time:** n/a

**Full-Size Buses:** n/a

**Wheelchair Accessible:** n/a

**Passengers per Bus:** n/a

**Vehicle Idle Time:** n/a

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**Name of Organization:** VA Hospital

**Address:** 2002 Holcombe Blvd. Houston TX 77030  
PSSU/Erick Smith

**Phone Number:** 713-410-5713 Cell

**Contact Person:** Erick Smith, Patient Service Support Unit Supervisor /Business

**Service Area:** all of H-GAC

**Description of Service:** medical transportation - strict eligibility

**Type of Service:** demand response

**Eligibility:** Service injury 30% or more, aid and assisted, homebound, pension limit and medical review

**Hours of Operation:** 8 - 4:30 p.m. will pick up at 4 am and send home at 7 pm; 18 hours out of day

**Fare Structure:** free

**Typical Destinations:** VA Hospital

**Scheduling Requirements:** Call 2:00 p.m. day before

**Contact with Drivers:** Call engineering dept. in charge of drivers, cell phone accessible

**Technological Capabilities:** depends vendors

**Passengers/Yr.**

**Sedans**

**Passengers per Sedan**

**Vehicle Idle Time**

**Vans:** 3 but not solely dedicated to medical transportation

**Wheelchair Accessible:** yes

**Passengers per Van**

**Vehicle Idle Time**

**Mini Buses** n/a

**Wheelchair Accessible** n/a

**Passengers per Mini Bus** n/a

**Vehicle Idle Time** n/a

**Full-Size Buses** n/a

**Wheelchair Accessible** n/a

**Passengers per Bus** n/a

**Vehicle Idle Time** n/a

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