

# **GULF COAST REGIONALLY COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE**



## **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH PLAN**

**July 2016**

**DISCLAIMER:** Funding for the development of this planning document was provided by a grant from the Federal Transit Administration through the Texas Department of Transportation Public Transportation Division (TxDOT-PTN). The contents of this plan reflect the views of the authors who are responsible for the opinions, findings and conclusions presented herein, and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Federal Transit Administration or the Texas Department of Transportation.



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## **Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan Public Engagement and Outreach Plan**

### **Introduction**

This Public Engagement and Outreach plan for the Gulf Coast Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP) update presents some of the options and tradeoffs for various public outreach strategies and activities including but not limited to the following:

- Facilitated public meetings
- Open Houses
- Workshops
- Webinars
- Focus groups
- Strategic surveys

The results of this activity will include some recommendations that will inform the public about outreach activities in subsequent phases of the development of the Gulf Coast RCTP update.

### **Background**

The purpose of the RCTP 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.

The RCTPs were originally developed in response to new requirements for planning for special needs transportation in the 2005 Federal Transportation Law, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) and Texas House Bill 3588. Updated requirements and guidance are contained in the 2012 federal transportation law – Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21) and incorporated into the new 2015 transportation bill, Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act.

The Gulf Coast RCTP describes a coordinated planning process that includes the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation – Public Transportation Division (TxDOT-PTN), the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS) members, Health and Human Service agencies and other stakeholders.

A comprehensive public involvement program is an important component for developing a RCTP. A major goal of the public outreach effort is to reach out to nontraditional as well as traditional audiences to include them in the transportation planning process. A good public involvement plan requires continuous feedback and explicit responses from agencies to foster meaningful dialogue among all stakeholders.

## **RCTP Public Outreach Program Goals**

**Goal 1: Inform and educate the public** – increase awareness and understanding of the RCTP. Educate the community to allow equal participation and to provide a means to influence decision making. Connect with organizations and community leaders who can help reach more persons, and engage those individuals that need transportation services.

**Goal 2: Reach out and build connections** – encourage active participation of a broad range of stakeholders including elected officials, business leaders and non-profit agency representatives in the planning process.

**Goal 3: Engage diversity and inclusiveness** - build new relationships with organizations and communities that will serve groups that have been traditionally under-represented. H-GAC will also make information available to Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons.

**Goal 4: Evaluate Public Participation Strategies** - review how public input influences transportation decision-making.

## **Public Outreach Strategies**

Several public outreach strategies were considered for the Gulf Coast RCTP update. Each of those strategies are discussed briefly below to emphasize the advantages and disadvantages of each option. In addition, for a planning project like the RCTP which includes a very large geographic area that includes the 13 counties in the H-GAC region, multiple meetings would have to be coordinated so that residents from the north, south, east and west would have an opportunity to participate in a meeting near their homes. Other complicating factors relate to the chosen meeting venues and whether or not those facilities included audio visual equipment that could be utilized or if staff needed to bring the equipment with them.

Other challenges relate to the scheduling of public meetings during times when various community events occur at the same time such as sports events, council meetings, other community events and church activities.

Other factors to be considered include the meeting logistics which include the location, the timing and the coordination required for the public meetings as outlined below.

### **Public Meeting Logistics:**

1. Where:
  - Meetings should be accessible to all who wish to attend (for example, access for persons with disabilities). Meetings must be held in an adequate facility (size and accessibility conditions must be considered).

2. When:

- Time of day of the meeting should accommodate the needs of affected communities. Evening and weekend meetings accommodate working people and careful scheduling can avoid conflicts with other community or cultural events.

3. How:

- An atmosphere of equitable participation must be created.
- Technologies should be used to allow more effective communication (teleconferences, adequate translation, audio visual equipment and other factors).
- The community and the government should share leadership and presentation assignments.

## Facilitated Public Meetings

The standard general public meeting format usually included a speaker with information to share in a presentation to a potentially large group of people. Opportunities for public comments have included question and answer sessions during or after the presentation and the options to fill out a comment card or to complete a brief survey. Some of the underlying concerns from past experiences with traditional public meetings included a lack of active public participation in those meetings (low turnout) unless there was a controversial project being considered which directly affected residents or their property in a particular area. In those instances the residents who were opposed to a particular project had come out to voice their opposition- not in my backyard (NIMBYs).



## Open Houses

The format for some recent transportation planning open houses has included a series of display boards arranged around a large room with basic information for participants to read as they moved around the room. Staff and consultants were usually present to answer specific questions from individuals. The open house meeting format reduced the potential for outspoken residents to gather an audience for their specific concerns. The open houses are informal and allow the public to get information from exhibits and staff and are encouraged to give opinions, comments, and preferences either orally or in writing. Since there are no fixed agendas, these meetings are scheduled for substantial portions of a day or evening, so people can drop in at their convenience. Possible drawbacks would be that participants do not hear opposing views first-hand nor have the opportunity to clarify their stances or raise questions about the opposing viewpoints.



## Workshops

Transportation planning community based workshops have engaged residents more directly in some of the details of the planning process. Many projects have benefited from that type of involvement because diverse viewpoints were discussed. One type of workshop format encouraged participants to consider various options and tradeoffs within a small group discussion and present the results of their small group to a larger audience. Those types of workshops have required significant preparation and coordination usually over an extended time period.



Specially scheduled workshops with elected officials as part of city councils or commissioners courts have been successfully coordinated in the past and allowed adequate time for presentations and question and answer sessions. Those workshops were also attended by concerned and civic-minded residents, but not necessarily by members of the general public, unless there was a controversial or “hot-button” issue being discussed.

Another strategy that was considered involves piggy-backing onto another organization’s meeting as a guest speaker, such as at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon, a city council meeting or a community based organization’s regular meeting. One advantage is that those meeting already had a larger group of people assembled together as a captive audience. One disadvantage was that the meeting agenda and control of the meeting is up to the organization that set it up and

if the transportation planning discussion is one item on a long list of items to be considered the timing may be less favorable.

## **Webinars**

The concept of a webinar (or webex) involves a presentation of information that could be broadcast online from a central location over a large geographic area. That format allows the potential for simultaneous participation by residents in various parts of the region. That format also allows for participants to submit questions and get answers quickly. A potential disadvantage to the webinar format would be for those residents who would not have access to a personal computer or other devices (such as smartphones) that could display video information. That disadvantage could be reduced if the webinar (or webex) is video recorded and made available through YouTube, public broadcast television (TV) outlets such as community based or municipal access TV stations.

## **Focus Groups**

“The purpose of conducting a focus group is to bring together a small number of individuals, approximately 10-15 persons, to have an in-depth discussion of the needs of the community and of the contributing factors related to the needs”, (TDHCA-CSBG Community Needs Assessment). Focus groups are designed to facilitate that dialogue between people with similar characteristics around a specific topic of interest or area of concern. In a face-to-face setting the facilitator probes the participants to better understand the underlying causes of a particular problem or situation and to also identify potential solutions from the participants’ perspectives.

## **Strategic Surveys**

Two types of strategic surveys were considered for the development of the RCTP. The first type is designed to collect information from a representative random sample of the general population and is also known as a scientific survey. The results of a scientific survey are considered to be representative of the general population and are therefore statistically reliable. A non-scientific survey can also be used to collect information from various groups of people however the results cannot be generalized to the total population. Non-scientific surveys have been conducted recently using online survey methods that may be biased in favor of those respondents with internet access.

## **Social Media**

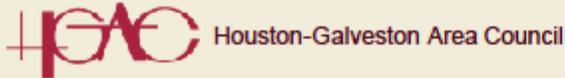
Recent improvements in various communication technologies have resulted in new social media options available to share and collect information using personal computers, tablets, smartphones and other devices. The use of social media was identified as an opportunity to reach some of the younger and more tech-savvy residents of the region.

## Website

The RCTP background information, documents and meeting materials are available on the project website at [www.ridethegulfcoast.com](http://www.ridethegulfcoast.com). The following graphics show the RCTP webpage and the flyer that is being used to advertise the community transportation Suggestion Box that is The Suggestion Box has recently been added to provide another method for members of the public to provide information to be considered in the RCTP update. It is intended to reach out to younger and more tech-savvy members of the general public. It is open-ended to request ideas to improve the community transportation options defined as alternative modes of travel other than single occupant vehicles.

Suggestions, comments and ideas can be submitted using Facebook, Twitter or email through the Suggestion Box. A toll free telephone number is also available to receive voicemail messages from those who may not have access to the internet.

About H-GAC



SEARCH

# Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan (RCTP)

## About the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan

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.

Updated Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan	County Transit Plans	Suggestion Box (English)
Suggestion Box (Spanish)	Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee (RTCS)	Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

<http://www.h-gac.com/taq/regionally-coordinated-transportation-plan/default.aspx>[3/29/2016 4:17:20 PM]



**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](#)

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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

## Essential Stakeholders

TxDOT-PTN developed a list of “essential stakeholders” which includes organizations and individuals to be included in the development and approval of the RCTP. Letters of commitment were requested from those organizations and persons as shown below:

### Essential stakeholders include:

- Representatives of public, private and non-profit transportation providers, including recipients of Section 5307 funds (small urban transportation providers), Section 5311 funds (rural transportation providers) and Sections 5310 (Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities)
- Representatives of human services providers
- Representatives of metropolitan planning organizations (unless in a planning region with no MPO)
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals 65 and older
- People with low incomes or representatives of/advocates for individuals with low incomes
- Veterans
- Workforce agencies
- Advocates for children
- Other members of the public

Many of the RCTP Stakeholders provided letters of commitment to participate in the development and approval of the updated RCTP. The organizations and individuals who provided the RCTP letters of commitment are listed in the Stakeholder Commitment Checklist below. Those will be the initial points of contact for the planned public outreach activities in the RCTP update.

Regionally Coordinated Transportation Planning Stakeholder Commitment Checklist  
 Planning Region: 16 Lead Agency: Houston-Galveston Area Council

Stakeholder Category		Stakeholders who have provided letters of commitment to participate in the process to develop & approve the regional public transit-human services transportation plan during the period Sept. 2015 through Feb. 2017
<b>Representatives of public transportation providers</b>	<b>5307 ( urban transportation providers)</b>	Island Transit  Fort Bend County Public Transportation  Harris County Community Services Department  City of Conroe-Conroe Connections-Ms. Shawn Johnson  Connect Transit  Ms. Melanie Beaman  Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO)
	<b>5311 (rural transportation providers)</b>	Colorado Valley Transit, Inc.  Brazos Transit District  Connect Transit  Island Transit
	<b>5310 (Enhanced Mobility of Seniors &amp; Individuals w/Disabilities)</b>	Island Transit  Fort Bend County Public Transportation  Harris County Community Services Department  Connect Transit  Colorado Valley Transit, Inc.  Brazos Transit District  Meals on Wheels Montgomery County – Senior Rides Greater Houston Transportation Company—Yellow Cab
<b>Representatives of private transportation providers</b>		Greater Houston Transportation Company—Yellow Cab

<b>Representatives of non-profit transportation providers</b>	TREK HK Express Transit
<b>Representatives of human services providers</b>	Gulf Coast Center United Way of Greater Houston United Way of Galveston County Mainland Meals on Wheels Montgomery County – Senior Rides Family Services of Greater Houston Texas Dept. of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
<b>Representatives of metropolitan planning organizations</b>	Houston-Galveston Area Council
<b>Individuals with disabilities</b>	Gulf Coast Center Houston Center for Independent Living (Petition with 84 signatures) Mr. Roland Sanders Ms. Anabel Rios Ms. Carol Staten Ms. Gretchen Stockstill Texas Dept. of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
<b>Individuals 65 and older</b>	Area Agency on Aging Harris County Meals on Wheels Montgomery County – Senior Rides Ms. Kathy Renfrow
<b>Individuals w/low incomes or representatives of/advocates for individuals with low incomes</b>	Island Transit Fort Bend County Public Transportation Harris County Community Services Department City of Conroe-Conroe Connections Connect Transit Family Services of Greater Houston Brazos Transit District

	<p>United Way-Greater Houston</p> <p>United Way Galveston County Mainland</p>
<b>Veterans or representative of veterans groups</b>	<p>Texas Veterans Commission</p> <p>Harris County Community Services Department</p> <p>GCC Connect Transit</p> <p>Brazos Transit District</p>
<b>Workforce agencies</b>	<p>Gulf Coast Workforce Board</p>
<b>Advocates for children</b>	<p>Texas Southern University-Summer Youth Program</p> <p>United Way-Greater Houston</p> <p>United Way Galveston County Mainland</p> <p>Family Services of Greater Houston</p>
<b>Other members of the public</b>	<p>Janis Scott- Bus Rider/Advocate</p> <p>City of Conroe-Administration</p>

## Recommendations

A combination of multiple public engagement and outreach strategies are recommended for the RCTP update to increase the likelihood of collecting representative information from the diverse public audiences identified as stakeholders. The strategies include but are not limited to the following:

- Transportation Resources Inventory
- Stakeholder Survey(s)
- Webinar (webex or symposium)
- Focus groups with essential stakeholders
- Interviews with elected officials and business leaders
- Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment

The transportation resources inventory is designed to augment the statewide inventory that was recently updated by TxDOT-PTN for the urban and rural transit districts. The transportation resources inventory will reach out to other transportation service providers including private, non-profit organizations and other agencies that either purchase or arrange for transportation for their clients such as Health and Human Services Agencies.

A Stakeholders Survey is planned to solicit information from the Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee members and others to better understand some of the challenges, opportunities and barriers to regional transportation coordination.

A webinar is envisioned to include 3-4 key leaders or stakeholders in the community transportation field to explain the RCTP update, why it is being done, why it is important and how people will be able to participate in the process. The webinar will be an important kick-off event for the first phase of the RCTP public engagement process. A refined version of the webinar concept is also being considered that would utilize a symposium format for a coordinated community transportation event that would be simulcast to reach audiences throughout the region. The symposium would include presentations from panelists with different perspectives of the issues and also provide a forum for questions from the public.

Focus Groups will be used as a strategy to collect detailed information from some of the essential stakeholders in the RCTP update including but not limited to seniors (65 and older), persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, youth, veterans and others. An experienced consultant team will be hired to facilitate the focus group meetings, document the information shared during each meeting and prepare a final report on the outcomes. H-GAC staff will secure releases from the focus group participants (if feasible) to allow video-taping of the focus group meeting and record the meetings. If videotaping is not feasible H-GAC staff will secure the services of a court reporter to transcribe the meetings.

Video taped interviews are planned to include local elected officials and/or local business leaders who have been part of the coordinated transportation planning efforts in the past to establish and maintain community transportation options in their areas. The idea is for them to

share their personal experiences relative to what has been done, how it is proceeding, the associated benefits and costs of previous efforts, what they would do differently and the challenges ahead, from their perspectives. Some of the taped interviews could be used in the development of a new RCTP video which is being planned for the second phase of public outreach during FY 2017.

A scientific random sampled bilingual telephone survey of the general public is planned to collect information about unmet community transportation needs in the region. The survey is being designed to use a home-based telephone interview questionnaire and the results will be representative of the general population. A professional services firm will be contracted to complete the regional community transportation needs assessment survey.

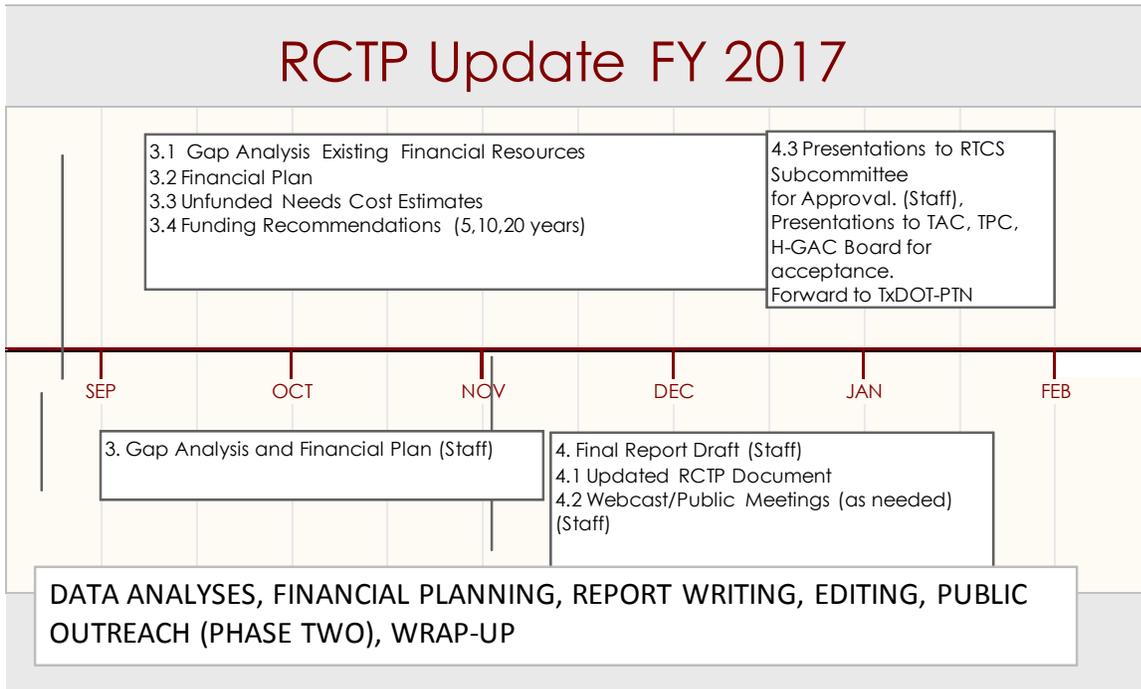
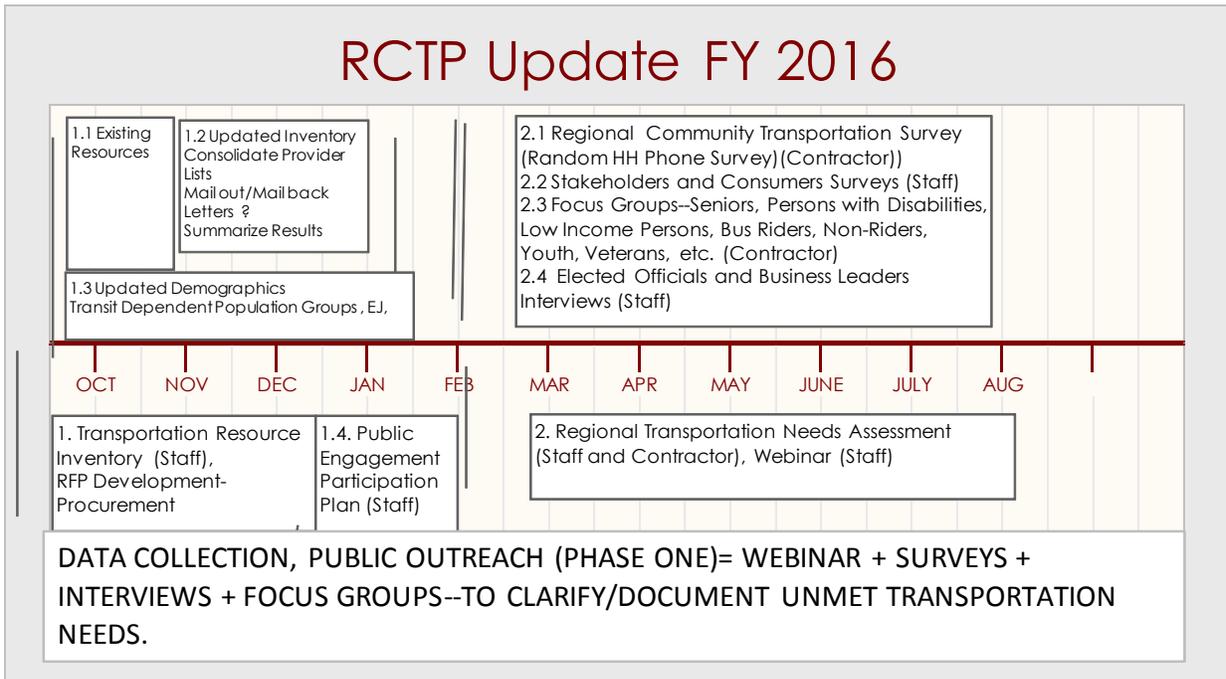
A preliminary timeline of the Phase One public outreach activities to be completed in FY 2016 is summarized in **Table 1**. Public Outreach activities are also planned for a second phase in FY 2017 as shown in **Table 2** under a subsequent agreement with TxDOT.

**Table 1-RCTP Phase One Public Engagement and Outreach Timeline\***

Public Engagement Tasks	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Community Transportation Suggestion Box	*	*	*			
Transportation Resources Inventory/ Stakeholder Survey	*	*	*			
Webinar/Symposium			*			
Focus Groups and Stakeholder Interviews			*	*	*	
Regional Community Transportation Needs Assessment Survey			*	*	*	*

\*Note: The scheduled tasks and dates are preliminary for planning purposes and subject to change.

**Table 2- RCTP Project Timeline FY 2016-FY 2017**



## **H-GAC hosts "The Power of Transit 2016" symposium; dialogue focuses on solutions to regional public transportation**

Posted: Wednesday, June 22, 2016 3:55 pm

### **PRESS RELEASE**

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) hosted a symposium Wednesday (June 22) that gathered transit providers, experts and policy makers to discuss coordination of public transportation in a region that encompasses the thirteen county H-GAC Planning Region including: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller and Wharton.

"The Power of Transit 2016" 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 disabilities.

Brazoria County Judge Matt Sebesta, who chairs H-GAC's Transportation Policy Council, highlighted success stories in bringing transit to small and medium size communities. Disability policy expert Lex Frieden presented current efforts by Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) to remain in compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Panelist Linda Cherrington, head of the Transit Mobility Program at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, pointed at current gaps and challenges to a seamless operation of transit providers' region wide.

"Traffic congestion is the number one problem of our region," Judge Sebesta said, "offering a more coordinated transit system to residents is crucial to maintain productivity and quality of life now and in the future," he added.

"The Power of Transit" symposium included participation of over fifty attendees and was accessible live via streaming throughout the thirteen county H-GAC Planning Region.

H-GAC is currently developing the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan Update, a document that offers solutions for access and connectivity to the regional public transportation system in the years to come.

For more information about H-GAC's Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan Update visit [www.Ridethegulfcoast.com](http://www.Ridethegulfcoast.com), and to submit comments click on the Suggestion Box. Comments from the public are also welcome via telephone calling toll free at 1-855-363-2516, or mailed to Transportation Public Information, Houston-Galveston Area Council, P.O. Box 22777, Houston, TX 77227-2777.

