

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fort Bend Transit Plan



Prepared for **TxDOT** Texas Department of Transportation
H-GAC Houston-Galveston Area Council

Prepared by **The Goodman Corporation**

In association with
A & R Consulting
Texas Southern University

January 2005

Background

In 2003, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and The Goodman Corporation (TGC), along with A & R Consulting, and Texas Southern University (TSU) Center for Transportation Training and Research, began development of a comprehensive transit plan for Fort Bend County. Fort Bend County, located southwest of Houston, Texas, has experienced and continues to experience rapid residential and commercial growth. The resulting increase in congestion within Fort Bend County presents a challenge to enhancing mobility. The development of a comprehensive transit plan is an essential step in improving mobility within the county and providing connectivity to major activity centers outside the county.

Establishing and Meeting Plan Goals

In developing the *Fort Bend County Transit Plan*, five challenging primary project goals were established by the project Steering Committee and Advisory Committee. These goals, and how they have been addressed within the *Fort Bend County Transit Plan*, are listed below.

- **Assessment of Transit Needs within Fort Bend County.** An examination of the existing transit services within Fort Bend County, such as TREK Express from Sugar Land to Houston; Texana MHMR Center; and Fort Bend County Senior Citizens, Inc., was a relevant first step. A review of the demographic trends at the county and community levels was also important in determining existing “gaps” between current services and community needs. Two primary “service” gaps were identified:
 1. Persons with limited mobility resources often lack adequate access to jobs, education, medical services, and shopping; and
 2. Fort Bend commuters have inadequate transit options and, in most cases, must drive their personal vehicles on increasingly congested roadways.

In addition to an analysis of Fort Bend County’s level of transit service, a Peer Review was conducted based on the experiences of similar transit systems within Texas that provide public transit services. Fort Bend County’s current transit service level is lower than the other peer systems examined, including nearby Montgomery County, Brazoria County, and Galveston County.

- **Enhancing Existing Services through Coordination.** Existing services currently are provided in a fragmented manner through a variety of agencies and organizations. The provision of additional services, while at the same time coordinating existing services more effectively, may require a new organizational approach. TxDOT now requires social service transit coordination as a prerequisite to state funding assistance. In addition, continuation or expansion of turnkey services, such as the express service to Greenway Plaza, will require administrative oversight, federal grant management, and reporting requirements. The *Fort Bend County Transit Plan*

includes a comprehensive discussion on the organizational and management alternatives that are available to Fort Bend County.

- **Creating Cost-Effective Solutions for New Services.** The *Fort Bend Transit Plan* presents several potential transit mode and service alternatives in a practical and fiscally responsible manner. Included within the plan are “low,” “medium,” and “high” investment alternatives that explore various investment and service level options. Coordination of transit services is also essential in new service expansion and in maximizing the impact of local share expenditures. Examples of potential new services presented within the operating plan and financial plan include:
 1. Countywide Demand-Response Services;
 2. Expanded Park & Ride Services and Facilities; and
 3. Local Circulator and Connector Services, where applicable.

Both the capital and operating plans cover a 20-year period and present potential schedules for constructing new capital facilities and implementing new services.

- **Identifying Capital and Operating Funding Sources.** Fort Bend County currently contributes approximately \$585,000 to the provision of transit services. However, these local expenditures in the past have not been effectively leveraged against federal, state, and other available funding sources. Within the financial plan, various levels of leverage are explored and presented within the context of the low, medium, and high investment alternatives. In addition, the various investment alternatives are presented in short-range (2004-2009), medium-range (2010-2015), and long-range (2016-2020) timeframes. Through coordination between Fort Bend County and the social service providers within the county, additional funds for operating and capital costs can be realized through leveraging. Necessary utilization will include Federal and State funding programs such as the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Urbanized Program (5307), Elderly and Handicapped Transportation Program (5310), and Federal Rural Transit funds (5311). A proposed rule change to the FTA Section 5307 Program funding would permit use of these funds for 50 percent of operating costs. New transit services could also be funded through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program for the first three years of service. Additional incentives may be available, such as using private providers for turnkey transit service (Capital Cost of Contracting).
- **Creating a Consensus-Driven Transit Strategy for the Future.** Although total consensus on any plan is a challenge, the *Fort Bend Transit Plan* attempts to address the needs of the entire county, both urban and rural, low and high incomes. The Public Outreach Process for the *Fort Bend Transit Plan* has included a total of 11 Community Workshops/Public Meetings throughout the county. Several project Advisory Committee meetings with key stakeholders (social service providers, the elderly, unincorporated areas, cities, etc.), and an update to the Fort Bend County Mayors have also been held. Employees at the major employers within Fort Bend County were surveyed during the planning process. In addition, a project website (www.fortbendtransit.com) was established that will continue to serve Fort Bend into the future. The Public Outreach efforts undertaken during development of the plan

have been educational for elected officials, agency representatives, and the general public. Public input has resulted in many of the recommendations in the plan for specific transit services, which has additionally been bolstered by supporting demographic trend data. A Marketing Plan also has been developed that will serve as a guideline for continued public outreach, as the public, elected officials, and County staff move into implementation.

Plan Approval

A final Public Meeting to present an overview of the *Fort Bend Transit Plan* and receive final comments from the public and other interested parties was held September 22, 2004. The Fort Bend County Commissioners Court approved the *Fort Bend Transit Plan* unanimously in October 2004. Following adoption by Commissioners Court, the *Fort Bend Transit Plan* was presented to the Transportation Policy Council (TPC) of the Houston-Galveston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and approved by the TPC on January 28, 2005. Through approval at the MPO level, *Fort Bend Transit Plan* is adopted into the regional transportation planning process. This document ultimately will serve local, state, and federal authorities as a template in the planning, programming, and implementation of transit services within Fort Bend County over the immediate and long-term timeframes.