

Regional Transit Framework Study

The purpose of the Regional Transit Framework Study (RTFS) is to develop a high-level framework for comprehensive public transportation services and policies that serve diverse needs, enhance quality of life, and support economic vitality within the rapidly-growing eight-county H-GAC region. The RTFS is intended to be a consensus articulation of regional transit priorities, be a basis for cooperation between regional providers, and contain general transit concepts that could potentially be included in future regional plans.

The RTFS is developed in coordination with the planning efforts of regional transit providers, including METRO. As the RTFS is conceptual in nature, it is not intended to be prescriptive or compulsory. The services, facilities and policies it articulates require further analysis and study, and their implementation is at the discretion of the region's transit providers and the local governments and citizens who support them. The RTFS does not rank potential transit services by priority or set a timeline for their implementation. The RTFS, furthermore, is not a static document; it is intended to be updated on a regular basis as the region's transit needs grow and evolve.

A Regional Challenge

The H-GAC region faces significant transit need. However, transit funding and supply lags this need. METRO is currently the only area transit service provider with a dedicated funding source, and some parts of the region have significant need but little or no transit service at all. This situation will only worsen as the region continues to grow and add jobs and population:

H-GAC Eight-County Region Estimated Growth 2015-2040

| | 2015 Estimate | 2040 Forecast | 2050 |
|------------|---------------|---------------|--------|
| Population | 6.5 M | 10.1 M | 11.4 M |
| Employment | 3.2 M | 4.5 M | 5.0 M |

Source: US Census Bureau, H-GAC mid-range forecast

As the overall population increases, so will subsets of the population for whom the automobile is of limited use: disabled, elderly, low-income and youth. These groups will need opportunities for mobility. Traffic congestion will increase as well, especially during commute periods, because employment growth is not expected to match household growth patterns, but rather continue to agglomerate in major activity centers and along major corridors.

Components and Concepts

The RTFS has three main components:

- A financially-constrained “Incremental Expansion” scenario of services based on current revenue projections;
- A broader, unconstrained “Vision” scenario of additional services that could be implemented as new funding sources become available; and
- A set of policy concepts that supports either scenario, improves the usefulness of regional transit, improves access to transit, fosters regional cooperation, and leverages new technologies to expand the reach of transit.

Some of the services and policy concepts included in the RTFS include:

- Increased coverage and availability of demand-responsive and ADA Paratransit services;

- New targeted demand responsive services, similar to METRO’s Community Connector concept, which operate in smaller towns, suburban communities and other areas that are difficult to serve with traditional fixed-route buses;
- Increased frequencies and hours of service on existing transit services, including local and express bus routes;
- New or expanded local, express and “signature” bus services throughout the region;
- New Regional Bus services which connect outlying communities to each other and to the region’s core;
- Expansion of the region’s High Capacity Transit (HCT) network;
- Promotion of “seamless” services throughout the region through initiatives such as regional fare media, a single point of information and uniform service standards;
- Use of new technologies and innovations to expand the role of traditional transit services;
- Strategies that benefit encourage transit use, such as parking management, transportation demand management (TDM), transit-friendly design and transit priority infrastructure; and
- An emphasis on “universal accessibility” to transit, regardless of geography, mode of access or physical condition.

In order to explore the benefits of expanded transit services, the service concepts examined are not necessarily constrained to historical or current funding sources.

Current Status and Next Steps

The RTFS service concepts and time frame are being revised to include updated (2045 or 2050) population and employment forecasts. As part of the development of the next regional transportation plan, an extensive public outreach will further inform this work, which is intended to support the formation of transit recommendations by the Transportation Policy Council and its High Capacity Transit Task Force.