

Matagorda County



Matagorda County Transit Service Plan

September 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by **The Goodman Corporation**



Sponsored by **Texas Department of Transportation
Houston-Galveston Area Council**



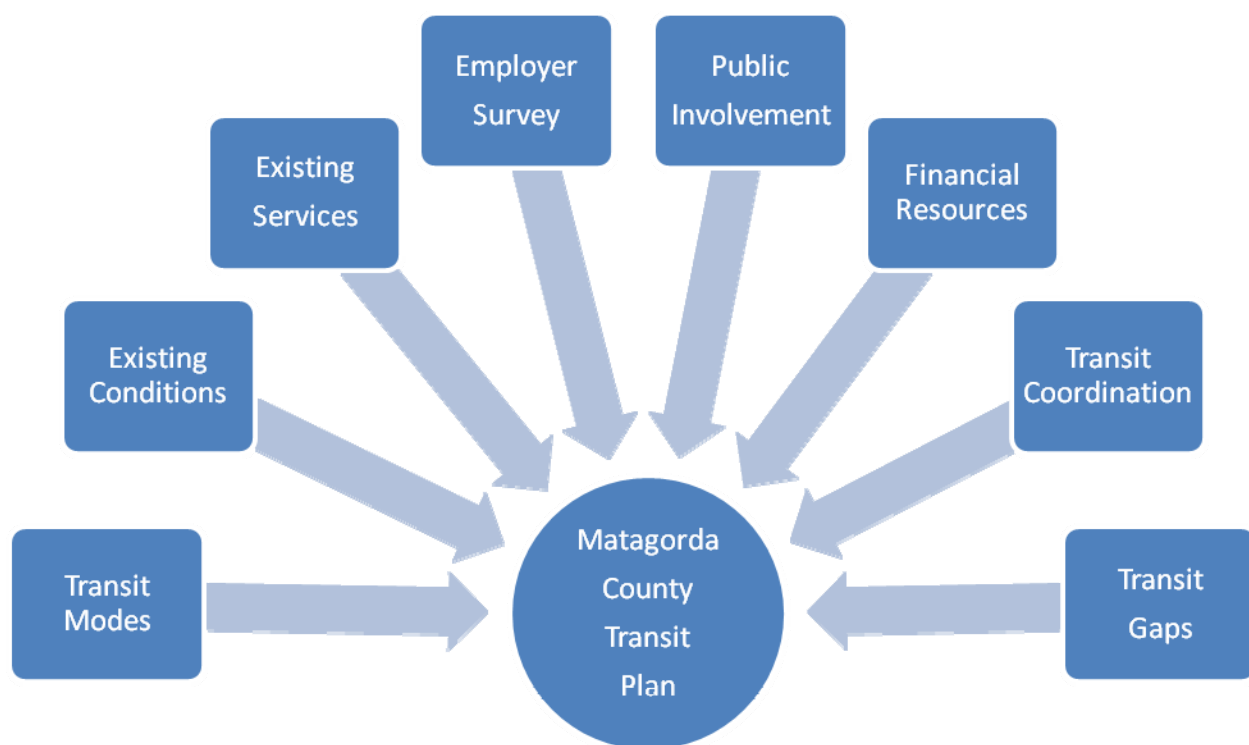
Executive Summary

Introduction

In February 2010, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) contracted with The Goodman Corporation (TGC) to complete a Matagorda County Transit Service Plan. The purpose of the plan is to identify transit needs and service gaps in Matagorda County and develop an operations and five-year financial plan. The transit needs for Matagorda County are varied, extending from demand-response service for rural areas and small municipalities, to a peak period flex-route service for Bay City, to job access and commuter options for workers.

Transit Plan Inputs

These recommendations are based on public input, demographic, employment, and transit data, and best industry practices regarding appropriate modes for small urban and low density rural areas. The impact of several key findings is briefly discussed in the following section. See Figure ES.1 for an illustration of the inputs used to develop the plan's recommendations.



ES.1: Matagorda County Transit Plan Inputs

Transit Need: Matagorda County is under-served for transit. A quick rule-of-thumb to measure the level of service is trips per capita, or how many transit trips are provided given the area's population. Compared to regional peers, there is a gap of almost 20,000 trips annually – almost double the 29,000 trips currently being provided. If service delivery were compared to all Texas rural providers the gap expands to 140,000 trips.

Demographic Characteristics: The majority of Matagorda County land mass is characterized as low-density rural. However, most of the population is located within the small municipality of Bay City. The demographic characteristics point to a substantial transit need based on the population's age, incidence of disability, and income. This need was further reinforced during four public meetings and within a general public survey in which county residents expressed their frustrations at the lack of options and their hopes that more transit services will be developed in the future.

Transit Modes: The Matagorda County Transit Service Plan includes a general review of transit modes and then an application of appropriate modes to Matagorda County. The transit modes reviewed include demand response, fixed route, flex route, and commuter options such as vanpools and carpools.

Existing Transit Provider: Friends of Elder Citizens (FOEC) is a 501c(3) nonprofit that delivers demand-response transit services to the general public under a contract with the Golden Crescent Regional Planning Commission (GCRPC). The FOEC is also under contract to American Medical Response for trips under the Medical Transportation Program of Medicaid. The FOEC's primary mission is to provide services to the elderly and it views its transit programs as a mechanism to help achieve that mission. Given that, the FOEC's interest in expanding its transit role in Matagorda County is limited.

Service Plan Recommendations

Demand Response: The study recommends an additional vehicle and driver for demand response. The additional vehicle will support more general public transit and facilitate regularly scheduled weekly connector service between Bay City and Palacios with future expansion to the cities of Matagorda and Sargent.

Ride Voucher Program: The study recommends development of a ride voucher program for difficult-to-serve demand-response trips.

Flex Route Service: The study recommends the implementation of a peak period, flex route service for Bay City, to be funded for three years under the Section 5316 Job Access/Reverse Commute program. This will allow time for the service to demonstrate its performance and allow stakeholders the ability to reassess future funding, depending on ridership.

Commuter Services: The low level of interest in this study displayed by most industrial employers leads to a recommendation that stakeholders continue to work with employers to educate them about commuter services options. In the short-term, the plan recommends the promotion of carpooling, which is a low- to no-cost option, or alternative programs such as the low-cost car loan program, Ways to Work (www.waystowork.org). Long-term options, such as vanpools, are recommended only after buy-in from local employers has been achieved.

Budget and Implementation

Table ES.6, Matagorda County Transit Plan Federal and Local Share, reflects a five-year snapshot of federal and local share for the recommended transit services. Services are implemented over a five-year period to allow stakeholders to gain support and financial commitments for the expansion.

Table ES.6: Matagorda County Transit Plan Federal and Local Share					
	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
	1	2	3	4	5
Gross Op					
DR	\$ 360,000	\$ 370,800	\$ 381,924	\$ 393,382	\$ 405,183
Voucher	\$ -	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 35,000
Flex	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 180,000	\$ 185,400	\$ 190,962
Van Pool	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000
Total	\$ 360,000	\$ 400,800	\$ 591,924	\$ 628,782	\$ 651,145
Fares					
DR	\$ 11,500	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,500	\$ 13,000	\$ 13,500
Voucher	\$ -	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,500
Flex	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 15,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 21,000
Van Pool	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,250	\$ 5,250
Total	\$ 11,500	\$ 15,000	\$ 30,500	\$ 39,250	\$ 43,250
Net Op					
DR	\$ 348,500	\$ 358,800	\$ 369,424	\$ 380,382	\$ 391,683
Voucher	\$ -	\$ 27,000	\$ 27,000	\$ 27,000	\$ 31,500
Flex	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 165,000	\$ 167,400	\$ 169,962
Van Pool	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 14,750	\$ 14,750
Total	\$ 348,500	\$ 385,800	\$ 561,424	\$ 589,532	\$ 607,895
Fed Sh.	\$ 174,250	\$ 192,900	\$ 280,712	\$ 297,766	\$ 306,198
LocalSh.	\$ 174,250	\$ 192,900	\$ 280,712	\$ 291,766	\$ 300,198

Cost and Transit Benefit

The cost/benefit for each type of recommended service is as follows:

- **Demand Response:** It is assumed that the additional resources invested in demand response service will deliver trips at a rate similar to historical levels, or 3 passengers per hour. Assuming an additional vehicle was added for eight hours for a 250-day service schedule, it would generate about 6,000 additional trips at \$10.00 per trip.
- **Ride Voucher Program:** The cost per trip for the ride voucher program can vary depending on the contract negotiated with the private provider. Furthermore, the effect on transit funding is also dependent on the funding provided by partnering agencies.
- **Flex Service:** At implementation, the flex route service is estimated to provide five trips per hour, or 15,000 trips annually. Assuming the cost of service is \$180,000 annually and only six hours of peak-period service is provided per vehicle, the cost is estimated to be \$12.00 per trip. However, it is expected that the number of riders will increase as the service matures, and if the service is to be considered successful, it should improve upon the cost per trip provided by demand response. To achieve this, the flex route will need to deliver more than six trips per hour.
- **Van Pool Program:** Considering only operating costs, it is estimated that a van pool program will cost approximately \$20,000 annually. Assuming that the program provides rides to an average of seven commuters daily, this equates to \$5.71 per trip.

Transit Agency Choice

This study considered the advantages/disadvantages of migrating the transit authority to a new agency. TGC recommends the migration of transit agency authority from the Golden Crescent Regional Planning Commission to the Gulf Coast Center/Connect Transit. This change is recommended for three reasons.

- First, it will facilitate the delivery of future flex route service. In discussions with FOEC, it indicated that it did not have an interest in expanding its services to include flex route. Discussions with GCRPC indicated a low level of interest in providing these services as well. However, Connect Transit indicated that there is interest if there is sufficient funding to support operations.
- Second, the transfer may support future directly-operated transit services. The FOEC has indicated that it considers its provision of public transit service as secondary to its core mission to serve the elderly. Furthermore, the FOEC has also indicated that it will likely cease to provide general public transit services should it no longer hold a Medicaid

transportation contract. An agency, like Connect Transit, which directly operates demand response service, is in a better position to fill FOEC's role should that become a need.

- Lastly, the transfer will align Matagorda County's planning area with its service area. As mentioned previously, this alignment can help ensure that plans, goals, and programs which are within H-GAC's program benefit Matagorda County.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the planning process, the Matagorda County Stakeholder Committee stated the following goals for the plan: 1) make people's lives better; 2) get people to jobs; and 3) relieve congestion. A long-term goal is to attract and retain new residents for the county through the provision of needed services, like transit.

Beyond these goals, the Matagorda County Transit Plan attempts to accomplish the following:

- Increase transit capacity of the FOEC to deliver more general public trips: The plan recognizes the opportunity and the challenge created when the transit provider is also the Medicaid contractor. The contract generates much needed revenue; however, it can make considerable demands on an agency. The Matagorda County Transit Plan recommends additional resources for the FOEC and that these resources focus on increasing general public transit trips, particularly through the initiation of regularly scheduled connectors between Bay City and smaller municipalities like Palacios, Matagorda and Sargent.
- Expand the pool of transit providers: The migration of transit agency authority from the GCRPC to Connect Transit will facilitate the direct provision of flex services in Bay City. The development of a ride voucher program will add an additional resource for hard-to-serve demand response trips that cannot be filled by the FOEC.
- Increase the pool of interested stakeholders: The Matagorda County Transit Plan is implemented over a five year period. This will allow interested stakeholders the time to develop partnerships and secure local financial commitments for these transit initiatives.