

# Walker County

## TRANSIT PLAN

September 2012



### **Disclaimer**

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### **Approval**

The Walker County Transit Plan was approved by the Walker County Commissioners' Court on September 10, 2012.

## **Walker County Transit Plan Executive Summary**

This Executive Summary provides a very brief overview of some of the key information that is included in the Walker County Transit Plan (WCTP). It starts with a series of questions and answers followed by the key recommendations which are discussed further later:

### **1. Are there unmet public transportation needs in Walker County?**

Yes, there are many mobility limited groups of people in Walker County including the elderly, disabled and low income persons that would likely utilize more public transportation options if they were available. Most of those persons do not have an automobile available or cannot drive. In addition, there are numerous students who live on campus at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) or within the City of Huntsville that do not have an automobile available for routine personal transportation needs. The number of people in Walker County that reported walking or riding a bicycle as their primary modes of transportation is higher than average for similar communities.

### **2. What options are available to address those needs?**

An incremental approach is recommended to inform people of the transportation options already available first, and then to coordinate existing public and private transportation services in Walker County to be more effective and more efficient. A longer term strategy would re-establish the local system of circulator bus routes that operated in Huntsville several years ago as more funding becomes available.

### **3. How much would those options cost and where would the money come from?**

Very preliminary budget estimates indicate that the value of the operating costs of the existing public/private transportation system in Walker County is roughly \$ 614,000 per year (does not include HHSC Transportation costs TBD). An expanded public transit system with the local circulator bus routes would cost roughly \$1.4 million. Those cost estimates do not include capital costs and are very preliminary and subject to change due to the variability of fuel prices and other key cost components. Considering the shortage of available funding to implement a significant expansion of the public transportation services/options in the near future, a *proactive* grants management process is recommended. That process could assist in bringing more transportation resources to Walker County. Several potential sources of local matching funds have been identified.

#### **4. What are the benefits of expanding the public transportation options in Walker County?**

A preliminary estimate is that an additional 42,000 transit trips could be added to the transit system in Walker County each year. There are many other benefits to society such as improved access to employment, shopping, recreation and learning opportunities which would improve the quality of life for many of those who are isolated today.

The **key recommendations** for the Walker County Transit Plan are outlined below and discussed further in the main document:

##### **Short-Term Recommendations (less than five years):**

- Implement a public information campaign regarding the Commute Solutions program including (but not limited to) information about the regional Carpool and STAR Vanpool formation and incentives;
- In coordination with The District, acquire one additional shuttle bus and driver for expanded demand response services countywide and for the Senior Center to expand its coverage area. Enable the Senior Center to become a sub-recipient of the formula allocation for elderly and disabled funds under the 5310 program;
- Negotiate with the apartment owners regarding the expansion of the apartment shuttles services to include evenings and weekend services that could also be accessed by fare-paying members of the general public. That negotiation could lead to the development of a Public Private Partnership (PPP);
- Coordinate the expansion of Express Bus services in the IH 45 corridor initially connecting Walker County to Montgomery County through a Public Private Partnership (PPP), coordinated with Greyhound Bus Lines and The District.

##### **Mid-Term Recommendations (5-10 years):**

- Develop a coordinated user-side subsidy transportation voucher program using prepaid transportation stored value smart/debit cards (Harris County RIDES model);
- Develop a Ways-to-Work car loan program in Walker County;
- Coordinate capital improvements for enhancing the TxDOT Park and Ride lot and the Greyhound Bus Terminal for coordinated multi-modal transfers (carpool and vanpool staging, local van to express bus transfers). Evaluate the possibility/feasibility of relocating the Greyhound Bus terminal. Identify and acquire land for a

park and ride system. Allow students to park off campus and access a shuttle to and from the University <sup>1</sup>.

**Long-Term Recommendations (more than 10 years):**

- Implement local deviated fixed routes in Huntsville;
- Implement intra-county connector routes between Huntsville, Riverside and New Waverly;
- Initiate planning activities such as corridor preservation and conceptual planning to prepare Walker County and the City of Huntsville for the implementation of higher speed passenger rail services in the IH 45 corridor between Houston and Dallas.

Figure ES-1 provides a conceptual graphic illustration of a potentially coordinated public/private transportation system in Walker County.

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<sup>1</sup> Comments about the relocation of the bus terminal and the acquisition of land for the park and ride system were provided by Aron Kulhavy, City of Huntsville, Public Works.

Figure ES-1. Conceptual Transit Coordination Plan

