WISE COUNTY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Access North Texas is to document the public transportation needs for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. These populations can have difficulty finding public transportation options that connect them to doctor's appointments, work opportunities and education or job training. This plan identifies where these transportation connections do not exist or could be improved within Wise County. (Figure 1.1) This chapter will give an overview of existing services, research conducted and collected, the public outreach meetings, the transportation poll used to collect individualized input on public transit needs, and the prioritized strategies for Wise County.

EXISTING TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

Texoma Area Paratransit System (TAPS) is the primary public transportation provider in Wise County. TAPS serves the general public, including seniors and individuals with disabilities. Operating within six counties including Clay, Cooke, Fannin, Grayson, Montague, and Wise County, TAPS offers demand response curb-to-curb service that is scheduled on an on-call basis. To schedule a trip, riders must call 48 hours in advance and between the hours of 7:00 am to 3:00 pm Monday through Friday. Service is priced based upon trip-distance. For the general public, trips cost $2.00 one-way to travel within city and town limits, $3.00 to travel outside the city and town limits, and $4.00 to travel out of county within the TAPS service area (six-county region). Seniors, individuals with disabilities, and students qualify for discounted rates.

The Wise County Committee on Aging also provides limited transportation services to seniors in the county. In addition to other transportation options and services, the Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) and Trinity

Wise County Persons with Disabilities

Legend:
- 0% - 6%
- 7% - 10%
- 11% - 13%
- 14% - 18%
- 19% - 26%
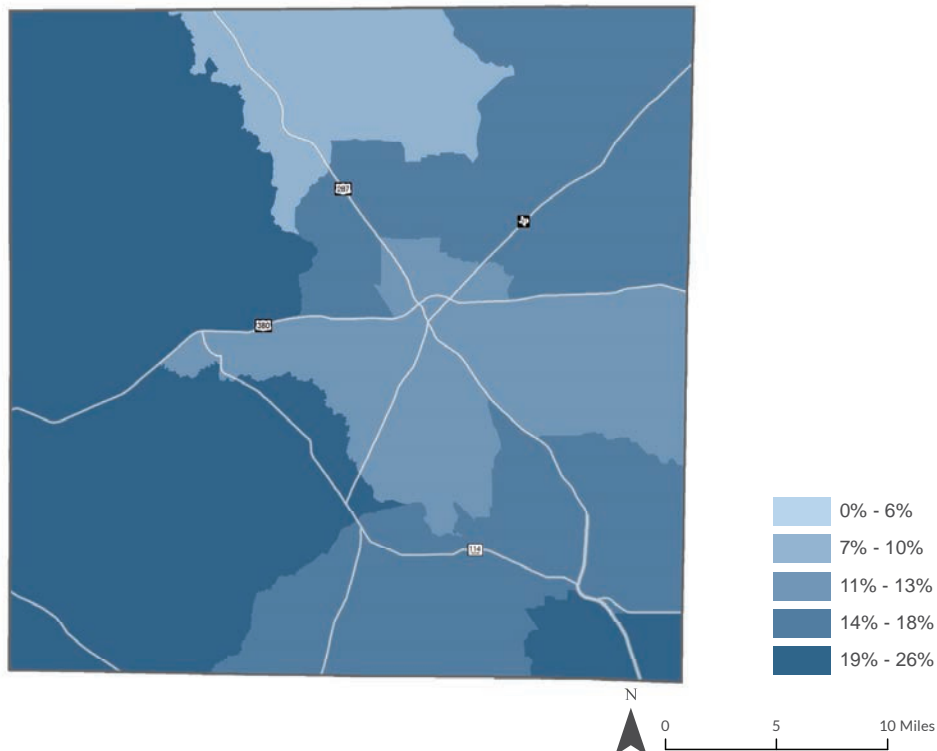
Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
Data aggregated to the Census tract level

Metro operate a commuter vanpool program within the North Central Texas region. As of May 2022, DCTA operated up to 2 vanpools with origins in Wise County and Trinity Metro operated up to 6 vanpools with origins in Wise County. The number of vanpools may change month to month as the program expands offering shared commuter transportation opportunities.

Finally, see Appendix B, for a list of private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These private providers offer additional transportation options that individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective), or organizations can contract with to provide specific services for clients.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Demographic data in Wise County was used to identify populations that may have a high potential need for public transportation. The population of Wise County has increased by 8.2% between 2015 and 2019, which is similar to the 16-county region growth of 8.0% in that same time-period. In accordance with ACS 2019 5-year estimate data, Wise County currently has a total population of 66,290 people with a total of 22,369 households. As the population continues to grow, transportation options will need to adapt to meet the needs of an aging and diverse population.

Of the total population of Wise County, 9,851 people are the age of 65 and over, which is 14.9% of the population and higher than the regional percentage of 11.1%. Wise County also includes 11,081 people who identify as having a disability, which is 16.7% of the total population and higher than the regional percentage of 9.5%. In addition, Wise County has 9,549 people who identify as low-income, which is 14.7% of the total population and lower than the regional percentage of 16.0%.

Wise County's racial composition is majority white at 93.5% and 19.3% who identify as Hispanic or

Wise County Population Over 65
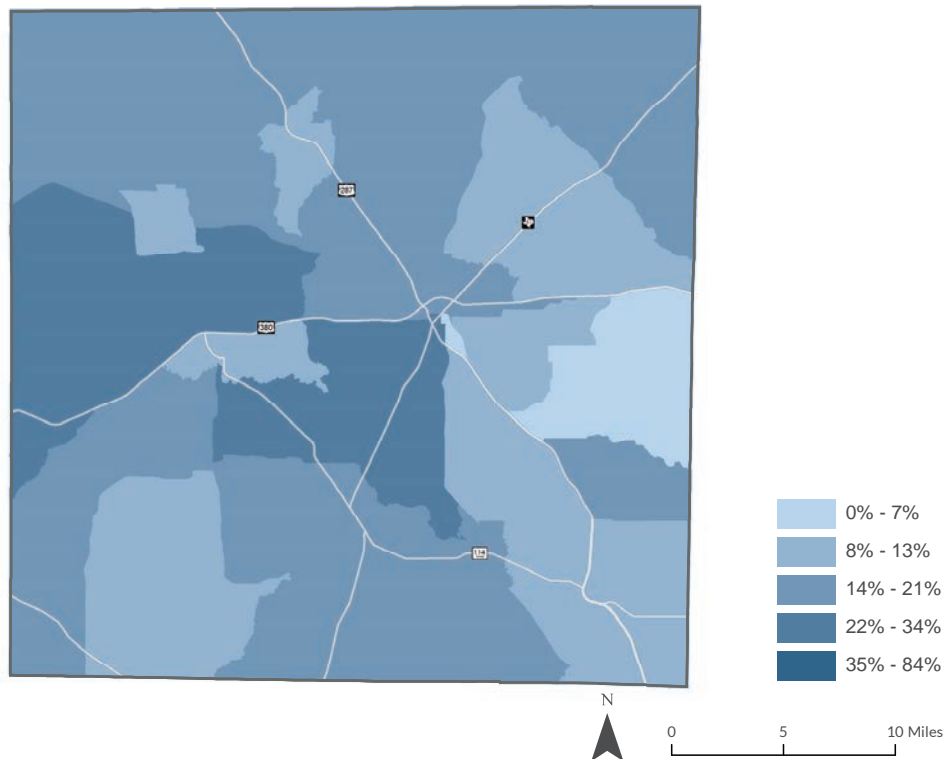
	0% - 7%
	8% - 13%
	14% - 21%
	22% - 34%
	35% - 84%

Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
Data aggregated to the Census block group level

Latino, making up the second largest majority in the county. Overall, 7.1% of residents speak English less than very well. This is less than the region wide estimates of 13.2% who have limited English proficiency. Additionally, in Wise County 3.4% of total households do not possess a car. The higher percentage of households not possessing a car are focused primarily surrounding Decatur and west of Alvord. The overall county percentage exceeds the 1.6% of zero-car households across the region. With a higher percentage of zero-car households in Wise County than the region, efforts to add and promote transit service opportunities should be included in strategies to reach this population.
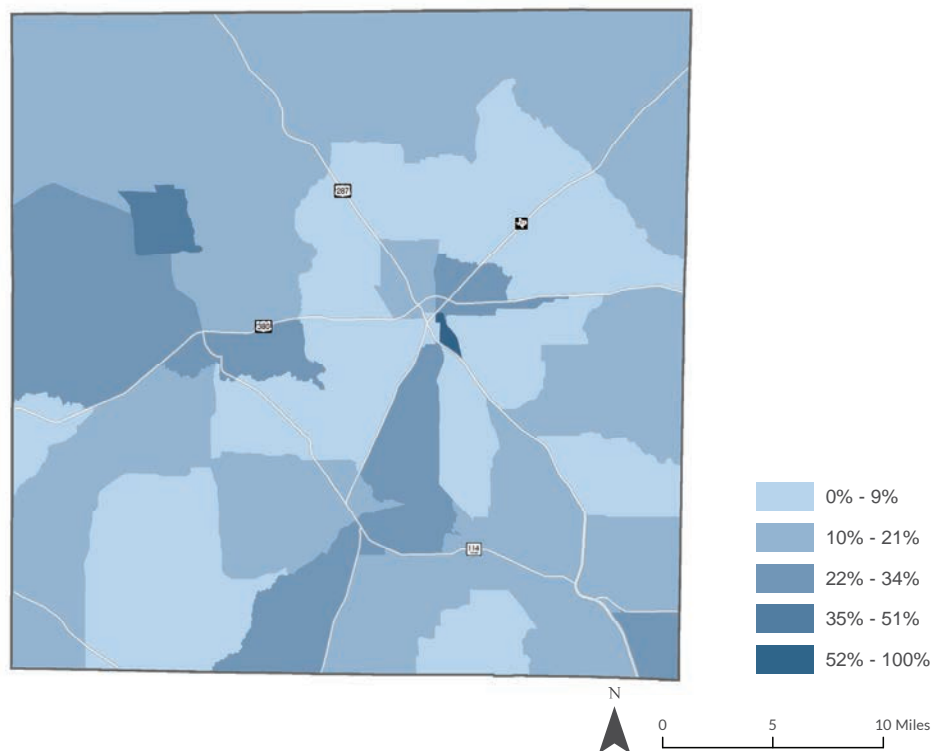
PROCESS

Outreach

Public outreach for Wise County was conducted through a series of virtual public meetings, online surveys, paper surveys on request, and public mapping data. Outreach efforts were advertised through email invitations, the Access North Texas website, a publication in Local Motion, a press release, and social media.

NCTCOG conducted a total of two virtual outreach meetings for Wise County. Email invitations were successfully shared with 39 stakeholders. 5 individuals registered for the meetings and 3 attended. Attendees included a member of the public, representatives from the local transit provider and a non-profit.

A transportation survey was also available to residents and stakeholders, online and in paper in two language formats including English and Spanish. This survey collected input on public transportation in the region. A similar survey was also available online for organizations and agencies that work with transit-dependent populations. In total, 2 responses were received for Wise County for the agency survey.

Wise County Low-Income Individuals

Legend:
- 0% - 9%
- 10% - 21%
- 22% - 34%
- 35% - 51%
- 52% - 100%

N

0   5   10 Miles

Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
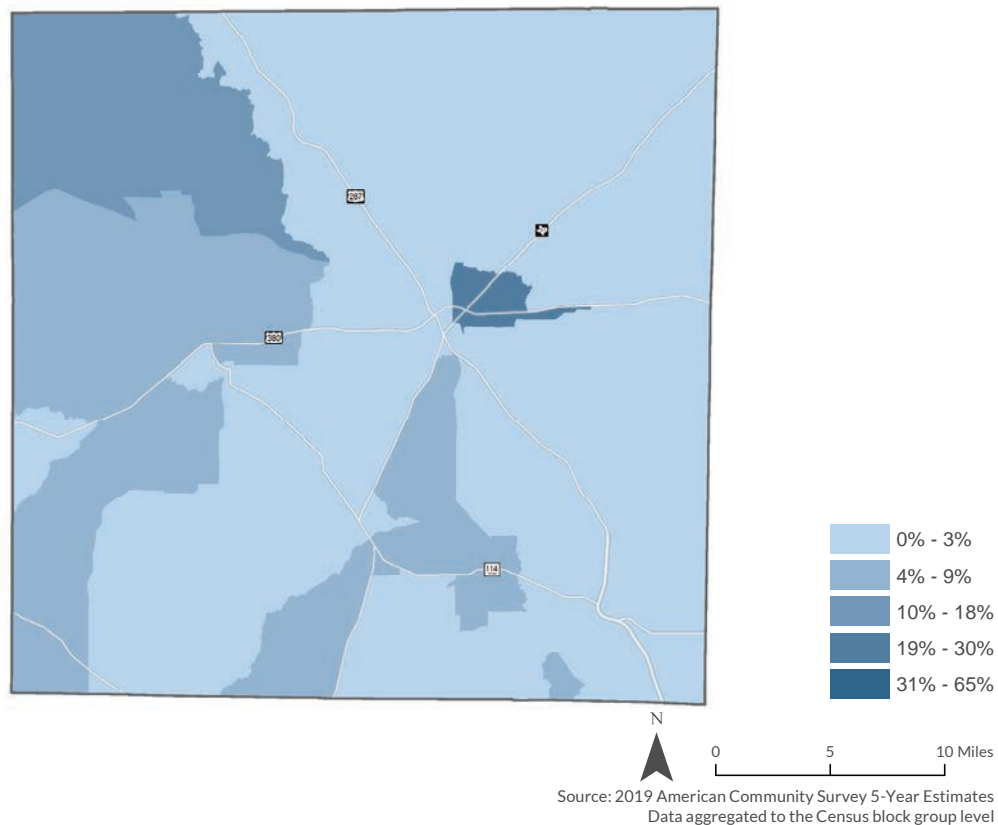Data aggregated to the Census block group level

Data Sources

The planning process for Access North Texas involved North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) staff, community stakeholders, transportation providers, and community members. Through virtual meetings, members from each county prioritized its main concerns about transit access in their area.

Discussions with Wise County residents and stakeholders highlighted several key concerns such as transit service area connectivity, affordability, and driver shortages. One of the major challenges mentioned is the limited options to travel within the county and to Fort Worth for medical appointments. Local organizations have worked with TAPS, the designated public transportation provider, to schedule rides and subsidize trips for riders but with 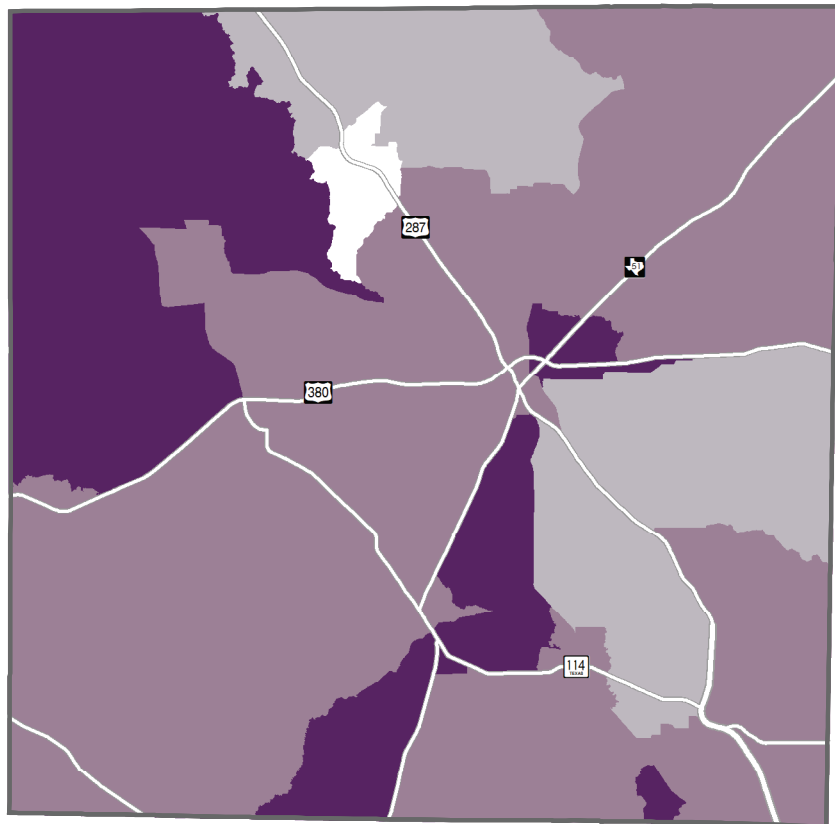the impacts from COVID-19, some riders were experiencing affordability issues. Another challenge in Wise County is the difficulty with finding and retaining drivers, especially for larger vehicles. This was echoed by different public transportation providers across the region and in Wise County the driver turnover was described as very high. One of the participants proposed regional and state coordinatization to elevate the issue. All information gained through outreach meetings was gathered to help develop regional goals and the prioritized strategies for Wise County.

Another form of receiving data from residents and stakeholders was a transportation survey; made available online and translated into English and Spanish. Due to COVID-19 limitations, paper copies were available upon request or through transportation partners. The survey helped NCTCOG staff to collect first-hand data about public transportation in the region from riders and

Wise County Zero-Car Households

Legend	
	0% - 3%
	4% - 9%
	10% - 18%
	19% - 30%
	31% - 65%

Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
Data aggregated to the Census block group level

Wise County Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)

Legend

All Variables At or Below Regional Percentage

One Variable Above Regional Percentage

Two Variables Above Regional Percentage

All Variables Above Regional Percentage

0   7   14 Miles

N

Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) is a preliminary screening areas that may need additional analysis when considering transportation-disadvantaged groups in a plan, project, or program. The TAIT displays Census block groups above the regional percentage for three variables: Age 65 and Over, Below Poverty, and Persons with Disabilities.

organizations that work with transit-dependent populations. No identifiable survey feedback from Wise County residents were received.

TAIT Tool and Environmental Justice

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) identifies communities who face transportation disadvantages and may have greater potential need for public transit. This tool is updated by the North Central Texas Council of Governments and is based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Based on information from TAIT, Wise County has moderately sized census block groups where populations of individuals aged 65 and over, below poverty, and with disabilities are above the regional percentages.

Analysis

The largest census block area within Wise County where the three variables are identified as above the regional percentage is clustered within northwestern Wise County between U.S. 380 and U.S. 287. In addition, areas slightly north and south of Decatur, including the City of Cottondale, have all three variables as above the regional percentage. Comparing the Wise County Low-Income, Zero-Car Household and TAIT maps, a correlation can be made with regard to low-income and zero-car households. Surrounding the City of Alvord, the map identifies that all variables are either at or below the regional percentage.

Development of Strategies

The prioritized strategies were developed once information from outreach meetings, the transportation poll, and research data was compiled and analyzed for patterns and gaps of service. Observations and recommendations were coded into five (5) main categories to identify themes across the 16-county region and inform regional goals. Those goals provide a framework for Access North Texas, and individual strategies were identified for Wise County to further those

goals and provide a plan for transit providers and organizations in future implementation of services. Drafted goals and strategies were provided to the stakeholders for additional feedback and review prior to the finalization of the plan.

FINDINGS

In Wise County, there were no in-county residents who submitted the Access North Texas survey to NCTCOG. In combination with a virtual meeting, feedback from meeting participants revealed transit service challenges orient toward cross-county boundary public transportation options, affordability, mode options, transit-based education, bus stop to destination walking distance, and efforts to increase training, recruitment, and retention of drivers. There is interest in improvements in enhancing access to affordable transportation options for medical appointments, additional connectivity within Wise County, and adding bus lanes to reduce congestion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The goals and strategies below identify ways to address the most important public transportation needs stakeholders identified as needing to be implemented over the next few years. The strategies build upon the progress and feedback that has been provided since the 2018 Access North Texas plan and should be referenced when state and federal funds for public transportation become available.

Implementing the Plan

Cities within Wise County including but not limited to Bridgeport, Runaway Bay, Decatur, and Rhome have identified transportation in general as an element in their community and/or comprehensive plans but have limited information on public transportation. In combination with transit services offered by TAPS and community organizational partnerships, Wise County is

REGIONAL GOAL	WISE COUNTY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES
Plan and Develop Transportation Options by Assessing Community Need and Challenges	A) Conduct planning activities to further identify public transportation needs of residents outside of existing transportation authorities and define additional coordination opportunities for existing providers B) Invest in programs to assist with filling gaps in public transportation and facilitate service for work-related trips C) Invest in programs that facilitate transportation trips to medical and healthcare appointments
Implement Services by Enhancing Transportation Options and Expanding Where Service Gaps Exist	A) Improve existing public transportation options to better fit the needs of riders and households with 1 or zero cars by increasing service frequency and availability B) Establish additional assistance or more specialized public transportation options for customers who are not ADA paratransit eligible or physically capable of utilizing regular public transportation services C) Expand public transportation services to key destinations throughout the region without comprehensive service and support regional integration of new services
Coordinate with Transportation Providers, Public Agencies, and Stakeholders to Increase Efficiencies	A) Work with regional and local organizations to increase ease of travel across municipal and county boundaries B) Create and support partnerships between public transit providers and local organizations to increase opportunities to make fares more affordable for those in need C) Identify, evaluate, and implement where appropriate, non-traditional ways to deliver and support public transportation, including but not limited to partnerships among public transit agencies, private transportation providers, transportation network companies, shared use mobility programs, and volunteer drivers
Support Public Transportation Recovery and Growth	A) Explore sources of local revenue for public transportation through partnerships, sponsorships, and contracting for service B) Partner with organizations to coordinate training and recruitment for future public transportation professionals and create pipelines with area schools C) Establish driver recruitment and retention programs for public transportation services to address difficulties in retaining drivers

REGIONAL GOAL	WISE COUNTY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES
Promote Access and Information about Available Transportation Options	A) Conduct travel training to educate the public on available services and policies B) Partner with agencies, recreation centers, senior residencies, housing assisted living centers, and other organizations to publicize information C) Identify, recruit, educate, and support influential champions for public transportation (elected officials, community leaders, or business leaders) to promote and support public transportation through leadership, policy, or funding initiatives

laying the framework to providing more diverse, affordable, flexible, and accessible transit options for county residents.

Agencies and organizations looking to develop transit projects aligned with these strategies may find support through NCTCOG's Transit Strategic Partnerships Program or the TxDOT Call for Projects. Competitive proposals will demonstrate innovative solutions, strategic value, sustainability, implementation capacity, and evidence of collaboration. Most importantly, the proposal's needs assessment will need to be supported directly by county specific strategies identified in this plan. The most competitive proposals will demonstrate how the proposed project or service will utilize one or more strategies to enhance transit accessibility for transit-dependent populations. More information on the Transit Strategic Partnerships Program can be found at **www.nctcog.org/strategicpartnerships-transit**. More information on the TxDOT Call for Projects can be found at **www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/division/public-transportation/local-assistance.html**

REFERENCE TO THE APPENDIX

For more detailed information about Wise County, please see Appendices A-E, available online at **www.accessnorthtexas.org**.

See Appendix A, Summary & Status of 2018 to review previously adopted goals and strategies that were included in the 2018 Access North Texas plan.

See Appendix B, Get-A-Ride Guide, for a list of public and private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These providers are an additional transportation resource that individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective), or organizations can contract with to provide specific service for clients.

See Appendix C, Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool, for additional information on how the tool was developed and how to use it.

See Appendix D, Data & Analysis, for copies of the transportation surveys, statistics, and affiliated county-based maps.

See Appendix E, Outreach Meeting and Supplemental Information, for a list of previously held virtual meetings by county with a copy of the presentations.