

# SCHOOL DISTRICT - PUBLIC TRANSIT COORDINATION IN THE DALLAS-FORT WORTH REGION



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# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide information and tools to help facilitate coordination and build partnerships between school districts and public transit agencies. The report will:

- Summarize the benefits that school districts, transit agencies, and communities can enjoy when they coordinate their transportation resources
- Outline the types of coordination and partnerships that school districts and transit agencies can employ
- Describe the current state of coordination between school districts and transit agencies in the Dallas-Fort Worth region
- Identify attitudinal, perceptual, and policy/regulatory barriers to coordination and resource sharing
- Offer strategies and techniques to overcome barriers

## BACKGROUND

School districts are the most significant providers of public bus service in the country. While local rates may vary, more than 50 percent of students across the United States are dependent on school buses to get to and from school and school-related activities (Vincent et al., 2014). Yet the state's pupil transportation funding formula has not increased sufficiently over the years to keep up with the enrollment growth; today, it often covers less than a quarter of the costs of providing transportation as operated by most districts. In many areas, the growth in spending on student transportation is outstripping the growth in student enrollment, as school districts continue to offer more magnet/choice programs, schools are consolidated in an attempt to save money, and new housing developments crop up far from existing schools. As a result, school districts must either supplement funds using funds taken from basic education, facility maintenance, or general operations; or, they must limit transportation services to the basic regulatory requirements.

At the same time, transit bus ridership and ticket sales are declining, and in more suburban and rural areas communities are struggling to find mobility options for elderly, disabled, and low-income people who have limited options for transporting themselves.

While community transportation is the key mission of transit providers, transportation is not, per se, the mission of the school district; it is a means to their mission of education. To become involved in coordinated transportation, the school board necessarily needs to make a decision to participate in a larger community service mission to obtain benefits for the district (Agency, 2004). But the benefits, as discussed in greater detail later in this report, are worthwhile. These benefits include reducing transportation costs so more money can be directed towards education, improving student absenteeism and increasing participation in before- and after-school activities by giving students more transportation options.

This report will attempt to demonstrate that, through coordination, school districts and transit agencies can:

- Maximize the use of public dollars by eliminating duplication and inefficiency
- Offer more rides to more people, thereby serving a greater number of people within current resources
- Attract new money by demonstrating wise use of scarce resources and responsiveness to community need

## METHODOLOGY

This report was informed by:

- An initial scan of school district-transit agency partnerships across the United States. Methods included internet news searches, and searches for information on school districts' and transit agencies' websites.
- A literature review of existing studies and guides relating to school district-transit agency coordination.
- Research into laws, regulations, funding sources, and technical standards with the potential to impact school district-transit agency coordination.
- Interviews with the three major transit service providers in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, and the largest school districts in each of their service areas.
- Data collected on the three transit providers and three school districts, including the current rate of K-12 student transit, the number and type of buses owned and operated by each agency, and the cost of transporting students.





## REASONS TO COORDINATE

Communities that have been successful in coordinating school and community transportation report significant benefits, including 1) cost savings, 2) improved academic performance and expanded school choice, 3) reduced environmental impact from transportation, 4) increased transit ridership (including ridership later in life), and 5) expanded mobility options.

### REDUCE COSTS AND GAIN FUNDING

School districts and public transit agencies can save a considerable amount of money through coordinating services and resources, and seeking innovative ways to utilize existing resources. In the 2016-2017 school year, over \$1.4 billion was spent statewide on student transportation in Texas—an average of \$278 per enrolled student, or roughly \$1,000 per student that rides the bus. Only 25 percent of the funding for that transportation comes from the state allotment for pupil transportation, with the rest coming from school district general operating funds. Therefore, any money that school districts save by reducing transportation costs can be instead directed towards the classroom.

One way that cost savings can be achieved—as will be described in greater detail in later sections—is by purchasing transit passes for students instead of providing yellow bus service where feasible. Transit pass purchase can benefit high school students, students in magnet/choice programs, or special education students. Purchasing transit passes for 10 students, for example, can cost less than half of what it would to provide those 10 students with yellow bus service. This can also be a potential revenue source for the transit agency if the buses on the existing transit routes have the capacity to support the increase in student riders.

Some ISDs, such as Dallas ISD, require a point-to-point ride for all students, meaning that each route must connect every origin with every destination. However, when using public transit to provide students with transportation to school, a point-to-point to system may not always be achievable and many trips will require transfers. An alternative is a hub-and-spoke system, where all routes go through a hub to reach destination points along the spokes. To serve schools, high schools could be designated as hubs with elementary schools being served on spokes. Allowing transit on a hub-and-spoke system to serve schools could help achieve cost savings while providing students with a public transit option.



When Minneapolis Public Schools implemented a pilot program from 2009 to 2012 called Student Pass, which allowed high school students to take unlimited rides on regular-route buses and light rail during the school year, it was estimated that the school district saved \$1.55 million per year in continuing bus service costs. (Fan & Das, 2015)

Mason County Transportation Authority in rural Washington coordinates school district and public transportation resources, saving both over \$20,000 per year in operating expenses, \$120,000 in vehicle purchase costs, and \$84,000 in annual fuel costs (Burkhardt, Koffman, & Murray, 2003).

Other ways efficiencies can be gained are if school districts and transit agencies:

- Share bus storage facilities;
- Combine driver training, background checks, and drug screening (both school districts and transit agencies require drivers to have a CDL, comprehensive background checks, and random drug screening); or
- Share costs related to dispatching and scheduling software; or, share the staff that perform these services.

Savings can occur through coordination when any of these three conditions are present:

1) Available capacity on transit vehicles or school buses; 2) Specialized fleet equipped to serve passengers with disabilities; and 3) Infrastructure resources (fueling facilities, vehicle storage and maintenance facilities, administrative structure) (Farber, 2008). Enabling joint use of fueling facilities may require long-term planning and coordination between agencies to standardize fuel types and allow for sharing of compatible fueling facilities.

## IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND EXPAND SCHOOL CHOICE

Coordination in the form of greater student access to public transit services has been shown to:

- Help students attend school more regularly and reduce absenteeism (if students miss a yellow school bus and have no other way to get to school, they will likely miss half the day or the entire day of school; but, with transit, they can simply catch the next bus);
- Give students greater access to specialized programs and higher- quality schools;
- Provide students the opportunity to access after-school learning opportunities that may improve academic performance; and
- Enable students to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities, allowing

them to be more socially engaged and active (Vincent et al., 2014; Meehan & Sanchez, 2012).

## INCREASE TRANSIT RIDERSHIP AND RIDERSHIP LATER IN LIFE

For transit agencies, coordination has the potential to increase ridership and revenue gains with little or no incremental costs, as well as increase potential future ridership and foster positive perceptions toward transit. When Seattle launched a reduced-fare pilot project for the summer of 2017, youth ridership increased 35 percent from the previous summer (Constantine, 2017).



Researchers at the University of Minnesota found that Minneapolis students that used the Student Pass experienced 23 percent lower absenteeism than non-pass users (Fan & Das, 2015).

In Seattle, 80 percent of students surveyed about the student pass program said that having a free ORCA transit pass improved their attendance at school. In response to the question "What is the most significant benefit of having an ORCA card," the largest percentage of students, 39 percent, said it was getting to school on time (Seattle, 2017).

Exposure to transit and learning how to ride transit during youth and young adulthood is associated with an auto-light lifestyle and greater transit usage later in life (Smart & Klein, 2018). Minneapolis students that used the Student Pass to get to and from school and access other learning opportunities (after-school programs and extra-curricular activities) were more likely to use transit after graduating from high school (Fan & Das, 2015).

## REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Combining services that often run along the same routes, and encouraging students to use transit, results in fewer buses and single-person vehicles on the road. With fewer exhaust emissions, less carbon is released into the atmosphere, and fewer harmful pollutants are emitted in the areas around schools.

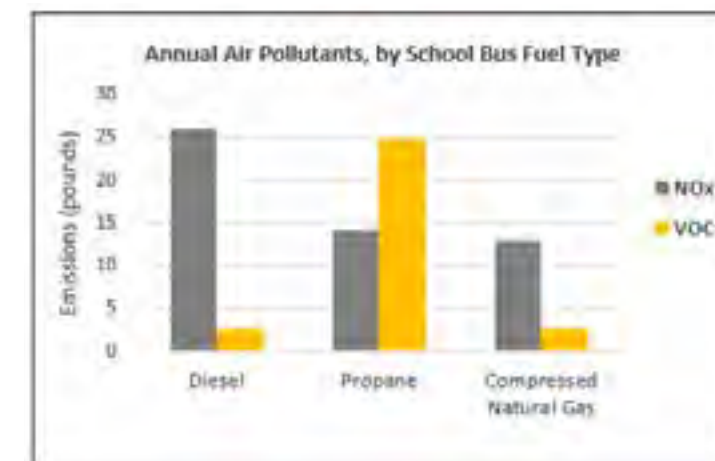
School buses also tend to be older (with large percentages dating to before higher emissions standards were adopted), and they lag behind transit vehicles on converting to alternative sources of fuel. One study found that, in 2014, only 6 percent of the school buses sold in the U.S. were powered by an alternative fuel, with the most common being propane gas. Conversely, more than 35 percent of public transit buses used alternative fuels such as compressed natural gas (CNG) (Burgoyne-Allen & Schiess, 2017). Figure 1 shows the annual air pollutants that school buses that run on diesel, propane, and CNG emit.



In the study of Minneapolis's Student Pass program, researchers found that the transportation of students on transit was linked with significant annual emission reductions (93 percent for NOx emissions, 89 percent for PM emissions and 59 percent for CO) and vehicle miles traveled savings (158,400 miles from buses and 2,038,784 from personal vehicles).

There are health and educational benefits from improved air quality. In North Texas, traffic emissions are the leading cause of pediatric asthma; and in Dallas ISD, for

Figure 1: Annual Air Pollutants, by School Bus Fuel Type



Source: AFLEET Tool 2018, <https://afleet-web.es.anl.gov/afleet/>.

\*Nitrogen oxides (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOC) are the precursor pollutants to ground-level ozone and are therefore a primary focus of the air quality improvement strategies implemented in North Texas.

example, respiratory issues are a leading cause of absenteeism (Hart, 2018). Reducing the number of buses and cars around schools, or utilizing buses that run on alternative fuels, can go a long way towards improving student respiratory health.

## EXPAND MOBILITY OPTIONS

School buses are active when needed by school districts to transport children to and from school, but most sit idle during late morning hours, early afternoon, weekends and in summer months when school is not in session. During these times, school buses represent an enormous unused resource. They could be employed to transport people who are not able or cannot afford to transport themselves.

A great need also exists for additional mobility for the general population in rural areas, where public transportation is limited or nonexistent. Studies show that one in four rural households has no automobile, and one in three rural citizens has no automobile or cannot drive (Farber, 2008).

In *School Buses and Special Needs Transportation: Options for Policymakers (2008)*, Nicholas Farber describes how, through collaborative partnerships in more rural areas with little access to public transit, school buses can be used to transport special needs or elderly populations. This sort of partnership benefits both those being transported and the school district by providing an extra revenue stream. It can also allow services to be retained in difficult economic times. However, it should be noted that certain legal and practical operational challenges must be addressed for these partnerships to get off the ground and be successful. These include:

- School bus safety standards
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for vehicles that serve as public transit
- Concerns about mixing students with the general population
- Inadequate air conditioning and heating
- The need to disguise school buses for non-pupil use (a federal requirement)
- Labor arrangements
- Personal safety concerns

These potential barriers will be discussed in greater detail.

## EVERYONE IS A WINNER

The ultimate goal of coordination is to make the best use of community resources so that more rides can be provided to more people, and school districts can put their funding where it really matters: towards education. This is also an opportunity for transit agencies to increase ridership and farebox collections. The organizations involved may benefit from an increase in services, a decrease in costs, or both. Coordination is most effective and long-lasting when all of the partners in a coordination project are winners. The following section will outline the various options for school district - transit agency coordination and partnerships.



# MODELS OF COORDINATION AND RESOURCE SHARING

“Coordination” can be defined as “working together with people from different agencies and backgrounds” (TCRP, 1999). Coordination occurs when the following conditions are present: (Andrle et al., 2003)

- There is a need
- Unused capacity is available at the right time or a specialized fleet is available
- Each coordinating agency either saves money or gains revenue
- Managers are willing to work together to solve problems
- There are no legal or regulatory barriers
- Both the reality and perception of student safety can be assured

Coordination is often a political process where two or more organizations work together in the delivery of their services. It can take a number of forms, including planning, operations, and marketing; generating new revenues by providing services to new markets; contracting with other agencies to provide services to their current clientele; and coordinating dispatching.

This section identifies the types of coordination that currently exist between school districts and transit agencies in communities across the country. The various types have been grouped into the following categories:

1. Information sharing and coordinated planning
2. Transit pass programs
3. Management and administrative activities coordination
4. Sharing infrastructure and physical stock

Some of these options may not be relevant to all communities. A step-by-step process for deciding what type of coordination is most appropriate for your community can be found in the section titled “Steps to Improving Coordination.”



## information sharing & coordinated planning

At the most basic level, there are several ways school districts and transit agencies can work together to provide students with greater transportation without needing to execute formal agreements. For example:

- School district transportation officials and transit planners can share information and engage in conversations about where public transit may be able to meet certain student transportation needs more effectively than a yellow school bus. That might involve sharing information on where students are coming from and going to, what routes connect the two, and where a bus stop could be added along a route to more easily serve a large group of students.
- The school district can provide input (often collected from school principals or administrators) on general public fixed-route bus schedules.
- Align school morning and afternoon bell times with transit schedules or adjust transit schedules so buses arrive at a school at more convenient times for students where possible while still maximizing the overall transit network. Alternatively, increase bus frequency so that buses pass schools more frequently during AM and PM peaks.
- Transit agencies and school districts can jointly site transit stops on or near school grounds.
- School districts can engage transit agencies in discussions about where to locate new high schools or new choice/magnet programs so that the school sites can be adequately served by transit, now or in the future. Transit planners can advise school officials on what areas have the greatest transit service, or whether it would be feasible to extend a transit route to serve a new school.

## transit pass programs

Transit pass programs involve providing students with free passes to use the public transit system in addition to, or in lieu of, yellow school buses. Communities have funded these passes in several ways:

- The school district may absorb the entire cost of the passes (e.g., Minneapolis Public Schools);
- The transit agency may absorb the entire cost of the passes (e.g., Tulsa Transit's TPS Rides program, Seattle's Youth ORCA passes for Seattle Public Schools); or
- Cost sharing between the school district, transit agency, and/or city (e.g., Nashville MTA StriDe, Portland TriMet YouthPass).

Most often these passes are only offered to high school students; however, in some cities such as Baltimore, Nashville, New York City, San Francisco, and Seattle, middle school students or younger may also be eligible. Other criteria that are commonly used to determine student eligibility is students' enrollment in a citywide "choice" program (also known as an out-of-zone school), family income or student eligibility for free/reduced price lunch, or distance students live from school (e.g., more than two miles). Table 1 summarizes some of the transit pass programs found across the country.



Table 1. Examples of Transit Pass Programs

City	Program/Pass	Description	Criteria for Qualification	Funding Source
Austin, TX	Kids Ride Free	Kids 18 and younger ride free on all Capital Metro services	All K-12 students with a valid ID	Capital Metro
Baltimore, MD	MTA: Student S-Pass/One Card for Middle and High School Students	Free annual transit passes for qualifying middle and high school students attending Baltimore City Public Schools, valid on school days from 5 am - 5 pm	Middle school students who live more than 1.5 miles from their neighborhood or citywide choice school; high school students who live more than 1.5 miles from their citywide choice school; and students who live less than 1.5 miles if they do not have a safe route to walk, have an Individualized Education Program, are homeless, or are in pre-K	Participating Public Schools
Columbus, OH	School/University Program – Columbus City Schools	Columbus City Schools provides high school students with a COTA bus pass for them to access their required internships, and to students that are deemed impractical to transport on school bus routes	High school students and students eligible for school transportation that are deemed impractical to transport on school bus routes	Columbus City Schools
Denver, CO	DPS-RTD Pass and Youth Special Discount Card	The school district provides monthly transit passes to transport qualifying high school students. All other students can get a 70% discount on fares through the Youth Special Discount Card	High school students who live more than the minimum 2.5 miles from their boundary school or who attend a magnet program more than 2.5 miles from their home	Denver Public Schools, RTD
Lakeland, FL	Citrus Connection: COLTS	Free weekday rides on all Polk Transit Authority buses for high school students	All public school high school students in Polk County	Polk County Public Schools
Minneapolis, MN	Metro Transit: Student Go-To Pass	Free transit passes during the school year for qualifying Minneapolis Public Schools high school students, and discounted passes for other high school students.	High school students that receive free/reduced price lunch, live more than two miles from school, or are enrolled in a city-wide program	Minneapolis Public Schools
Nashville, TN	MTA: StriDe	Free year-round MTA bus passes for all MNPS high school students, and certain middle school students	All MNPS high school students, and MNPS students in grades 5-8 that attend an out-of-zone school and do not have yellow bus service	MTA, the Mayor's Office, and Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS)
Portland, OR	TriMet: YouthPass	Free passes during the school year for all high school students in Portland Public School District	All high school students in the Portland Public School District	Portland Public Schools, TriMet, and the City



City	Program/Pass	Description	Criteria for Qualification	Funding Source
San Antonio, TX	VIA Semester Pass	\$38 for unlimited rides all semester	All K-12 students and students enrolled in a local college or university. High school students must have a school photo ID	VIA Metropolitan Transit
San Francisco, CA	Free Muni for Youth	Free year-round transit for low- and moderate-income youth aged 5 to 18	Youth ages 5 to 18 with a gross annual family income at or below 100% of the Bay Area Median Income level	Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Seattle, WA	Youth ORCA (Seattle Public Schools)	Free year-round passes for all Seattle Public Schools (SPS) high school students and income-qualifying middle school students	All SPS high school students, and SPS middle school students (grades 6-8) with a family income less than 200% of the federal poverty guidelines	Seattle Transportation Benefit District (STBD)
Tulsa, OK	Tulsa Transit: TPS Rides	Free weekday transit service for all high school students in Tulsa Public Schools	All Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) high school students with their student ID	Metro Tulsa Transit Authority
Washington D.C.	Kids Ride Free	Free bus and rail passes for all traditional and charter K-12 students. Bus passes are provided to private schools	All students in grades K-12	The District of Columbia

**management & administrative activities coordination**

Coordination of management and administrative activities involves sharing time-consuming and costly functions such as driver background checks, drug screening, training, and licensing; vehicle maintenance; purchasing of tires, parts, and fuel; vehicle dispatching software or staff, etc. (Meehan & Sanchez, 2012). For example, all school districts and transit agencies conduct thorough criminal background checks on drivers and random drug screening, and most provide training for drivers to obtain a Commercial Drivers License (CDL) required to operate a school or transit vehicle. There may be opportunities for school districts and transit agencies to coordinate to reduce the costs of these ongoing activities.

In more rural areas, transit pass programs might occur in the form of a regional transit system carrying students with disabilities using small lift-equipped buses they already operate for transit service, per ADA requirements. Alternatively, school districts might purchase passes for students that live in locations hard to serve efficiently with larger school buses, far from established school routes. The regional transit buses provide a subscription service for these students, saving the school district the cost of adding another vehicle to its fleet to transport a small number of students. In some cases, pre-school children, students, and adult clients all ride on the transit system's demand-response services at the same time, resulting in significant cost savings (Andrle et al., 2003). These arrangements save money for the school district involved and provide revenue to the transit system.



The Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Authority contracts with the Des Moines Independent School District to provide transportation to two high schools and seven middle schools. The school district pays the transit authority \$256 per student; it would cost the district \$448.60 per student, resulting in annual savings of \$400,000. Transit authority management works closely with the school district to ensure similar disciplinary policies (Andrle et al., 2003).



## sharing infrastructure & physical stock

This includes contracting to share facilities for the daily storage of school bus and public transit vehicles, or share (rent/lease out) vehicles when they are not in use for their intended purpose. With both facilities and vehicles, the purpose of sharing is to avoid unnecessary duplication, reduce costs and/or add revenue sources for each agency, and provide greater services with existing resources.

As populations and demand for transportation increases, school districts and transit agencies will need to expand their existing bus facilities or build new ones to reduce their bus mileage. These can be costly undertakings. Coordinating the use of these facilities can help relieve bus overcrowding in a more cost-effective way.

One example of sharing vehicles to provide transit to existing schools involves using school buses as transit “tripper” vehicles during peak rush hour or for special events, when it is not economically viable for the transit agency to purchase additional transit buses for these short, one-off trips each day. FTA has defined school “tripper service” as regularly scheduled mass transportation service that is open to the public and is designed or modified to accommodate the needs of school students and personnel; for example, by deviating a few blocks from the regular route or by increasing frequency during school arrival and dismissal periods. Transit agencies often employ “trippers” as extra buses operated along a route to protect against overcrowding on buses during school arrival or dismissal. However, when planning for new schools, a major



In Ames, Iowa, to accommodate the morning rush to Iowa State University in residential areas with high student population, CyRide – the local transit agency – began contracting with the Ames School District’s transportation provider in 2002 for the use of several vehicles and drivers during these peak times, after the buses have finished dropping off students at public schools. Benefits of this agreement include CyRide saving money by not having to add additional vehicles and drivers for a handful of trips, and extra revenue generated for the school district by utilizing buses when they would otherwise not be in use (Andrle et al., 2003).

consideration can also be locating schools on established transit routes. This will help students gain the benefits of greater student access to public transit services (see page 8) without the need to expend resources on providing tripper services, which may also serve the school less frequently than the school being located on an established route.



The Northeast Regional Transit System (NRTS)—the state-designated regional public transportation system in northeastern Iowa—operates a region-wide paratransit service for the general public. Some of the riders are students whose home-to-school trips are paid for by some of the 18 school districts in the region. In addition, some of the families that are ineligible for subsidized school transportation also opt to use NRTS to transport their children to and from school. Pre-school children, students, and adult clients all ride on NRTS paratransit services at the same time, resulting in significant cost savings. (Andrle et al., 2003).

Another example is the sharing of paratransit vehicles. A 2003 report by the Iowa Department of Transportation found that it could be beneficial for school districts to coordinate with public transit to provide service for disabled students, because public buses are already equipped with the lifts and wheel chair tie-downs required under the ADA. By coordinating transportation services for special needs and disabled riders, taxpayers in an area save money by reducing the need for extra vehicles, fuel, equipment, and drivers (Andrle et al., 2003).





# STEPS TO IMPROVING COORDINATION

This section summarizes steps to improve coordination outlined in the TCRP report, Integrating School Bus and Public Transportation Services in Non-Urban Communities (1999). This report provides a comprehensive work plan to help school districts and transportation agencies decide if coordination is appropriate for their communities, and if so, assist them in taking action and moving forward with these efforts. The eight steps in the work plan are summarized below. The report is available online at [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp\\_webdoc\\_11.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_webdoc_11.pdf).

**phase 1:  
identify needs,  
resources, and  
participants**

## Step 1: Document Needs and Inventory Resources

- Document Needs: The following components should be reviewed for each of the transportation providers.
  - Unmet Transportation Needs
  - Excessive Travel Times
  - Insufficient or Unstable Work Force
  - Insufficient Budget
  - Limited Fleet Size
  - Inaccessible Vehicles
  - Insufficient Vehicle Replacement
  - Under-Utilization of Equipment
- Develop profiles of each transportation provider, including unmet needs, legal mandates, external/internal policies, funding constraints, etc.

## Step 2: Identify Participating Parties, Gather Support, and Set Goals

- Gather broad support. The support of local school leadership, transit boards, and the community is crucial. Garnering the support of local politicians is also important, as they are likely to be particularly vested in resolving pervasive community problems such as lack of mobility and career readiness for attracting potential employers to the area. These efforts need support and buy-in from community, agency, and other organization stakeholders at all levels as part of the process.
- Hold organizational meetings at which to request assistance and support, and to strategize for future steps.
- Establish a Task Force or Working Group, which would include representation from community members and key stakeholders, especially decision-makers from the participating transportation providers. The Task Force should offer guidance, facilitate work, and get members in touch with the right contacts.
- Develop a formal set of goals and objectives for service coordination that directly relate to the needs established in Step 1.

## phase 2: identify & assess coordination; decide approach

### Step 3: Identify and Assess Coordination Alternatives

- Evaluate the different approaches to coordination in light of the goals and objectives established in Step 2 and identify the lead agency for each approach. Assess alternative approaches by identifying the estimated revenue and cost impacts, prospective advantages and disadvantages that accrue each organization and target market segments, the coordination role and responsibilities of each organization, and any necessary changes to administration, management, or operations.

### Step 4: Identify, Assess, and Address Barriers

- Identify and assess prospective barriers and other factors that may thwart or limit your effort (e.g., legal and regulatory issues, funding, safety issues, operational issues, and liability issues).

### Step 5: Decide on An Approach

- Select the coordination strategy or strategies that will comprise your approach. This includes lower-level coordination strategies that can be implemented in the short term and that will support the preferred approach.
- Identify the entity that will serve as the lead agency. It will be the Task Force's job to support the lead agency on a continuing basis.

## phase 3: develop plan, implement service, and evaluate service

### Step 6: Develop Service, Financial, and Implementation Plans

- A service plan may focus on routing and scheduling, staffing (drivers, mechanics), vehicle maintenance, etc.
- The financial plan should include a cost schedule, budget organization and procedures, funding sources and levels, fare structure, capital plan, etc.
- An implementation plan should include a detailed outline for the transition period and the first five years of service. It should identify tasks, task initiation dates, and responsible person (or organization, if appropriate).

### Step 7: Develop A Marketing Plan

- Conduct a marketing inventory.
- Develop a marketing strategy. A concisely written marketing strategy will help keep this effort focused over an extended period of time and ensure that planned marketing efforts are implemented.
- Develop an action plan, which should include a detailed description of each marketing effort listed in the marketing strategy.
- Develop the marketing plan products (e.g., route maps, schedules, brochures, websites, etc.).

### Step 8: Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate Service

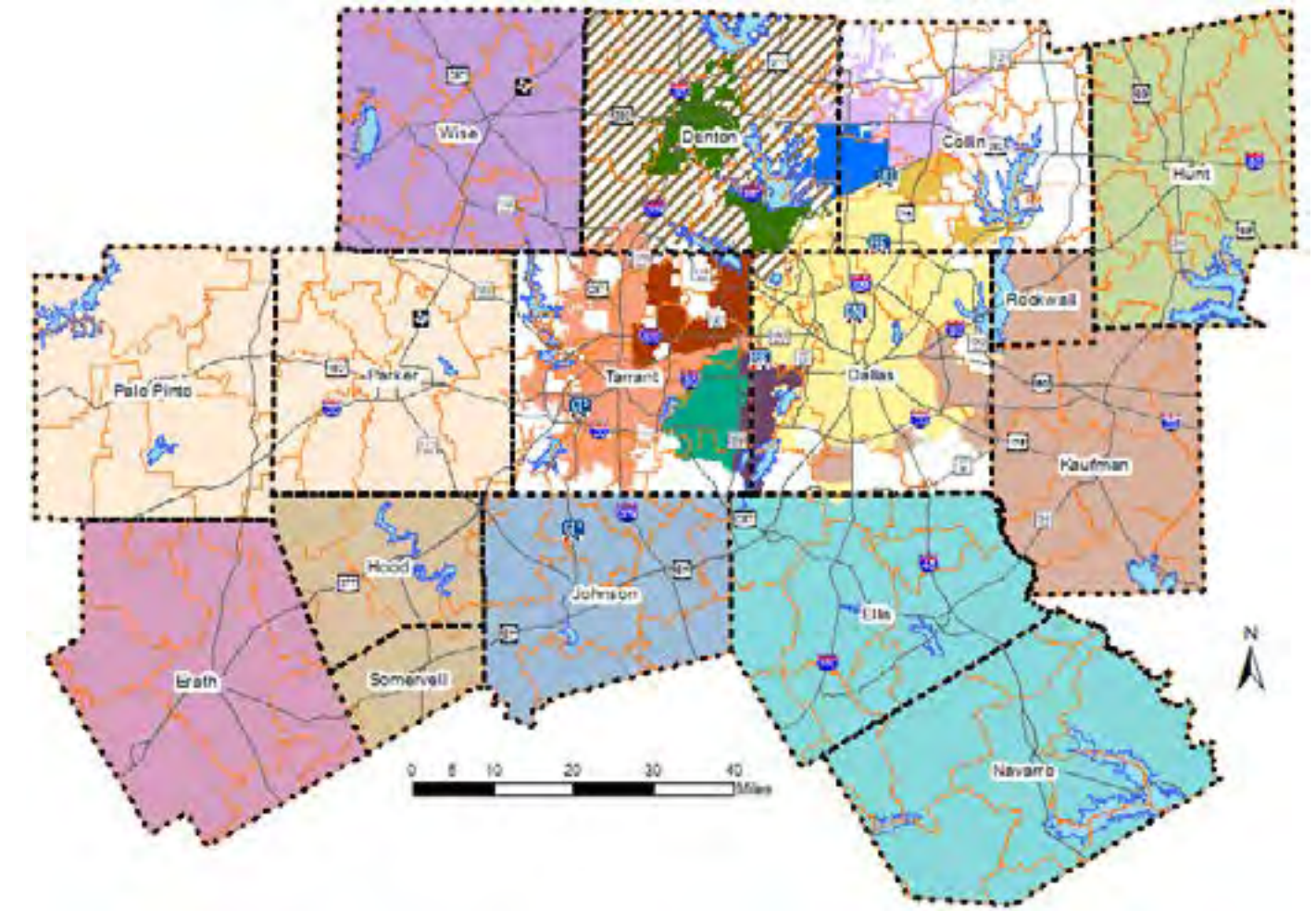
- Implement the service, monitor and assess results, and make adjustments.

### ADDRESSING AND OVERCOMING BARRIERS

- Identify and assess legal and regulatory issues. (See page 38)
- Identify and assess funding issues.
- Identify and assess safety issues.
- Identify and assess operational issues.
- Identify and assess organizational issues.
- Identify and assess liability and insurance issues.



## THE DALLAS-FORT WORTH REGION: EXISTING CONDITIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREATER COORDINATION



In the 16-county Dallas-Fort Worth region, there are 154 Independent School Districts and 18 public transportation service providers (transit agencies). Four of the transit agencies provide fixed-route service as well as demand-response service. They include Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Trinity Metro, Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA), and STAR Transit. The remaining transit agencies provide only demand-response service.

The following sections will cover:

1. Existing conditions related to the current state of transit ridership by K-12 students in the DFW region, transit pass discounts for K-12 students, and current areas of coordination among the three major transit providers in the region and the largest school districts in their service areas
2. Opportunities for expanded coordination, as identified by the major transit providers and school districts, as well as potential barriers that must be addressed to achieve greater coordination
3. The legal, regulatory, and funding environment relevant to school transportation and the coordination of school transportation and public transportation service in Texas

## existing conditions

### Current State of K-12 Transit Ridership

Table 2 - K-12 Student Transit Ridership, by Transit Agency<sup>a</sup>

	DART	Trinity Metro	DCTA
% of Transit Riders Under Age 18	3.2%	2.1%	0.3%
% of Riders that are K-12 Students	3.1%	2.1%	0.2%
% of Trips that are to/from K-12 Schools	2.4%	1.5%	0.2%

<sup>a</sup>Source: 2014 Regional On-Board Survey

The numbers of K-12 students riding transit in the DFW region, as shown in Table 2, is much lower among transit providers than other comparably-sized transit agencies across the U.S. In Minneapolis, the percent of riders under the age of 18 is 4 percent (Metro Transit, 2015); in Nashville it is 6 percent (Nashville MTA, n.d.); in Phoenix it is 13.5 percent (Valley Metro, n.d.); and in Los Angeles it is 9 percent (Metro, 2018). This indicates that there is room for greater coordination to increase transit ridership among K-12 students in the DFW region. These numbers reflect general trends and further research would be needed to determine the reasons for the variations in ridership among different programs across the country as compared to the DFW region.

### Discounted Transit Passes for K-12 Students

School-age students are eligible for reduced-price passes with all three major transit agencies in the region. The discount is applicable year-round. Table 3 summarizes the student eligibility for discount passes and the reduced price of the passes for each of the three major transit agencies.

Table 3 - Discounted Student Passes, by Transit Agency, in 2019

	DART <sup>a</sup>	Trinity Metro	DCTA
Eligible Age Limits for Discount	5-18 years	5-19 years	5-18 years
Required ID or Proof of Age	High school ID	None required	High school ID
Price of Reduced Single-Ride Pass	\$1.25	\$1.00	Not available
Price of Reduced Monthly Pass	\$48	\$40	\$24
Price of Reduced Annual Pass	Not available	\$400	\$240

<sup>a</sup>As part of DART's Higher Education Pass Programs, colleges and universities can purchase semester passes for as low as \$78 per student. The exact cost depends on whether passes are purchased for 100 percent of enrolled students or only those that wish to participate.

### Current Areas of Coordination

The following areas of coordination were identified through interviews in December 2018 and January 2019 with the three major transit agencies in the DFW region (DART, Trinity Metro, and DCTA), and the largest school districts in their service areas (Dallas ISD, Fort Worth ISD, and Denton ISD).

#### DALLAS

Dallas ISD currently purchases one-day transit passes for homeless students and students that are difficult to serve with school bus routes. Most of the students that attend CityLab High School in downtown Dallas take transit to get to school. There is also a link on the school district's website for school campus staff to request DART passes. DART has a travel training education program for school-age students for how to use the transit system. Additionally, DART police coordinate with some of the high schools on security issues.

A recent series of meetings between Dallas ISD's operations and transportation staff and staff with DART's consumer programs explored 1) what DART could do to supplement Dallas ISD's transportation for students attending Early College programs at the community colleges, 2) the modification of transit routes or addition of stops to better serve students and schools, and 3) options for Dallas ISD to purchase more cost-effective passes than one-day passes, such as the semester-long passes purchased by the colleges, and 4) software used for routing, fleet management, and other topics. While the frequency of conversations has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, recent conversations have occurred and future discussions regarding these options with intensive data analysis are planned.

#### FORT WORTH

Fort Worth ISD purchases transit passes for special education students to practice riding transit as part of their job training coursework, to learn how to use transit to get to work or other educational facilities. Trinity Metro also reported that there are some students that have to take a class across town as part of a special program, and that when it is not feasible for the district to send a school bus for the individual student, many of those students will take public transit to get to that one special program or class.

Fort Worth ISD reported that they had met with Trinity Metro a few times in the past; however, ongoing coordination had not been formalized. Past discussion included coordinating buses in the event of a disaster or emergency, transporting kids from one part of town to the other, and maybe sharing bus drivers.

Trinity Metro has also had recent conversations with a new Uplift Academy charter school that inquired about whether a transit route could be extended to serve their school. It was determined that it would not be cost-effective or efficient for transit service to be extended to the campus at this time.

## DENTON

There has only been one partnership between DCTA and Denton ISD, which has since ended. It involved an agreement between the school district and the City of Denton to pay most of the costs of reduced transit passes for students at Ryan High School that would otherwise have to walk to school along the roadway fronting the school. The partnership came to fruition because the road lacked sidewalks, and several high school students had been struck by cars on their way to school. The partnership ended once the construction of the sidewalks was complete. Only about 15-20 students took advantage of the reduced-price passes and it was speculated that, even though it was a very inexpensive fee to get a pass, even that fee was too much for some students.

DCTA works with all area schools to coordinate field trips that utilize transit, and reported having a relationship with various Denton ISD high schools to offer discounted passes for students who do not qualify for school bus service. Additionally, DCTA's Mobility Specialist works with schools in Denton ISD and Lewisville ISD to conduct travel training and educate students and their families on how to ride public transit through a variety of tabletop events, presentations, and by providing transit-related materials as needed.



**opportunities  
for expanded  
coordination**

Also as part of the interviews with the transit agencies and school districts, the agencies were asked to identify areas where they may be interested in greater coordination or future discussions. Those areas of interest for coordination are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4 - Areas of Interest for Potential Coordination**

	Dallas ISD	DART	Fort Worth ISD	Trinity Metro	Denton ISD	DCTA
Information Sharing & Coordinated Planning						
Sharing information about when and where public transit could meet certain student transportation needs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Coordinating the timing of school arrival and dismissal bells with transit schedules	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Getting school district input on general fixed-route schedules or operating hours of service (QUESTION FOR TRANSIT ONLY)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Joint siting of transit stops on or near school grounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Locating new schools, particularly high schools or choice/magnet schools or programs, along major transit routes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other: Emergency/Disaster Preparedness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Dallas ISD	DART	Fort Worth ISD	Trinity Metro	Denton ISD	DCTA
<b>Transit Pass Programs</b>						
Using the public transit system to transport certain students (e.g., high school students, students in Early College programs, students along hazardous routes, homeless students) by purchasing and distributing transit passes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Cost sharing between the school district and transit agency to offer free passes to students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Joint Procurement</b>						
Buses with common specifications (e.g., special needs/paratransit vehicles)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintenance parts for vehicles, fuel, or other supplies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Joint maintenance contractor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Driver training or background checks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Joint Use of Facilities</b>						
Joint use of maintenance facilities (service centers) or vehicle storage facilities (bus barns)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Leasing/renting out school buses and drivers when they are not being used for their primary purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sharing special needs/paratransit vehicles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

All of the transit agencies and school districts were open to 1) future conversations about sharing information on when and where public transit could meet certain student transportation needs; 2) locating new schools, particularly high schools or choice/magnet schools or programs, along major transit routes; and 3) transit pass programs.

Below are additional comments obtained from the transit agencies and the school districts during interviews and requests for comment about the potential areas of interest.

## DALLAS

### Dallas ISD:

- **Coordination:** Identifying where there are transit routes that could easily get students from home to school, or from school to Early College programs at the DCCCD campuses.
- **Transit Passes:** Potentially purchasing passes for students that are difficult to serve with yellow bus service, that would have shorter travel times on public transit than on school buses, and for students that attend Early College programs at the DCCCD campuses.
- **Cost Sharing of Transit Passes:** Negotiating a reduced rate for passes, similar to the semester passes that the colleges purchase, without having to buy them for 100 percent of students at a school, though Dallas ISD may be willing to purchase passes for 100 percent of students in a program. It needs to be a win-win for DART and Dallas ISD.
- **Joint Use of Facilities:** Dallas ISD is considering piloting the use of electric buses. Since DART has also begun using some electric buses, DISD may be interested in discussing the joint use of maintenance or vehicle storage facilities for their pilot electric buses.

## FORT WORTH

### Trinity Metro:

- **Coordination:** Sharing information about where high school students are going and when.
- **Coordination:** Coordination on potential sites for new schools or new choice/magnet programs (before the location has been finalized), if the school district would be interested in public transit as an option for getting students to that new school or program.
- **Coordination:** Discussing ways to manage school traffic in areas that block the through-movement of transit vehicles, or where transit vehicles are blocking school traffic.
- **Driver Training:** Trinity Metro making their forthcoming on-site CDL certification available to the school districts.
- **Joint Procurement for Driver Training:** Texas would need to relax testing requirements. Trinity Metro can only test individuals who plan to work for Trinity Metro. Other states allow third party testers to test those outside their organization, which would help school districts during testing backlog times such as during school startup. Additional savings could be achieved if school bus drivers could work in other roles (food service, custodial, etc.) between driving shifts. This would also help reduce bus driver turnover (which also increases the demand for testing), since the current low number of hours for drivers often provides insufficient wages.
- **Joint Use of Facilities:** Trinity Metro's bus storage facilities are nearly over-capacity. If the agency continues to expand its services, they will need another satellite facility in the next 5-10 years to reduce the number of miles



when the bus is empty (dead-head miles). If the ISD has the same need, Trinity Metro would be interested in potentially partnering.

#### Fort Worth ISD:

- **Coordination:** Coordinating the use of buses in the event of an emergency situation (emergency preparedness).
- **Transit Passes:** Purchasing passes for field trips
- **Supporting each other on days/times when their services are stretched.** For example, the school district's heavy season is football season when they may need buses at the same time they are picking up students from schools. Friday evenings may be times when the transit agency has availability of staff, and during football season the school district has demands across the city. In this situation, the transit agency may be able to help with trips that have to occur during the time that the district is picking up or dropping off students. (FWISD's Herman Clark Stadium, for example, is next to the Tarrant County College South Campus, and Farrington Field is next to the West 7th district).
- **Joint Use of Facilities:** Fort Worth ISD is currently too limited on bus storage space to offer it to Trinity Metro. They may be interested in renting space from Trinity Metro if they had space available.

#### DENTON

##### DCTA:

- **Coordination on New School Locations:** How does DCTA get into conversations on school siting?
- **Travel Training:** Is there a grant opportunity for travel training or campaign to go around to schools in the region—to share between the transit agencies?

##### Denton ISD:

- **Coordination:** Identifying routes and stops that could be used to transport some of the students currently living on what are considered hazardous routes. These are routes where students living within two miles of school must walk through a hazardous condition to get to school, such as across an uncontrolled major arterial or railroad tracks, or along or across a freeway.
- **Transit Passes:** Purchasing transit passes for students currently transported on hazardous routes, that have public transit connections available to get to school.
- **Employment opportunities for Denton ISD's bus drivers during the summer, Christmas, and/or spring break.**

## barriers and issues

Barriers and issues to expanded coordination were identified by each of the agencies as part of the interviews. They are summarized below and would need to be addressed as part of future coordination discussions. Common barriers include staff time and availability for coordination, managing student transit behavior on transit buses, timing of the transit routes relative to school bell times, student safety (or parent perception of student safety), and requirements for bus drivers (whether background checks and drug screening are as rigorous as transit agencies as they are at school districts).

#### DALLAS

##### DART:

- **Peaking problems,** FTA school bus regulations, security issues (need for police), and peak demand bus costs.
- **DART already provides a 50 percent discount on transit passes for K-12 students.** Regarding cost sharing, it would be difficult for DART to reduce the price further.

##### Dallas ISD:

- **Changing entrenched processes and practices that currently do not foster coordination at large organizations such as Dallas ISD and DART.**
- **The school district has stated that they would still keep all of their bus routes and service even if they did buy more students transit passes—that buying transit passes for students would be used to supplement existing bus routes.** However, this scheme would only increase their overall student transportation costs. Because Dallas ISD would still be sending out the same number of buses, a barrier would be the cost-benefit analysis of purchasing passes. Dallas ISD would need the passes at a lower rate, but DART may not be able to sell them at a lower rate. Any partnership to purchase transit passes for students on a larger scale would need to result in reduced transportation costs for the school district; otherwise, there is less of an incentive for the school district to coordinate.

- Politics: every stakeholder and agency has a different political hold-up.
- Safety of students riding DART. However, this could be addressed with a marketing campaign with DART. Dallas ISD would develop a campaign around riding DART for the next school year if they do decide to purchase more passes.

## FORT WORTH

### Trinity Metro:

- Transit Pass Programs: How to deal with unruly students.
- Driver Training: It could be difficult to coordinate driver training if there are differences between what transit bus drivers and school bus drivers must learn.
- What are the training differences? Trinity Metro has to train drivers on fareboxes, etc. They conduct criminal background checks for drivers, and conduct drug testing before drivers are hired and then at random. There could also be complications because any changes would also need to be approved by the driver's union. Depending on whether the ISD operators are under the same restrictions, they would probably say no.

### Fort Worth ISD:

- The agencies have different missions and different clientele.
- Coordinating transit schedules with school bell schedules: Coordination of schedules would be difficult. All the students have to be at a certain place at a certain time.
- Staff availability or reluctance to coordinate. The agency would need to see coordination as worthwhile enough to dedicate the staff time and make it a priority, as both agencies already have many needs and many challenges.

## DENTON

### DCTA:

- Staff availability for coordination.
- Overlapping jurisdictional and school district boundaries, and all their associated differences, is a burden to coordination.
- Student safety: parent fear factor and perception.
- Difficulty finding the right person at the school district for different things, and staff turnover at the school district.
- Lack of sidewalks on and around school campuses.

### Denton ISD:

- Timing of the routes and school start times.
- Are background checks and drug testing requirements as stringent for DCTA as they are the ISD? That could be a hang-up.
- Trust issues between the school districts and transit authorities because they both complete for drivers with CDLs.

## ADDITIONAL BARRIERS AND ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH A LITERATURE REVIEW

Any exhaustive literature review was conducted to identify any additional barriers that agencies may face as they look to increase their coordination. The barriers have been summarized below by the type of coordination they are associated with.

### Coordination:

- Reluctance on the part of potential coordination partners to devote time and resources to planning and implementation.

### Transit Pass Programs:

- Parental safety concerns about mixing students and the general populations. The safety of school buses is of principal concern among both parents and school administrators and allowing strangers on a school bus with children can defeat these efforts. However, others argue that, while separating younger children from the general population is a good idea, in junior high and high school students do not need the same protection because teenagers are more capable of determining if an adult is acting inappropriately. Since school-age children and adults co-mingle daily on public transportation with few, if any, incidents, it is less likely that problems would occur. Future discussions between school districts and transit agencies will need to explore these concerns and decide what is most appropriate for the community.
- Student behavioral issues. Unlike with school buses and drivers, there is not an established procedure for managing student behavioral issues and safety issues on public transit buses.
- Safety standards of public transit buses vs. school buses. The excellent safety record for yellow school buses transporting children is well known and often cited. For example, the Transportation Research Board Special Report 269 found that school buses represent 25 percent of the miles traveled by students but account for less than four percent of the injuries and two percent of the fatalities. However, researchers have found no recognizable differences between pupil fatality rates on transit buses and school buses or crash rates, and both have excellent safety records (Kostyniuk, 2003). Although school buses have more safety measures, public buses usually have greater vehicle weight and structural integrity and are better able to manage disabled passengers.
- Sidewalks and safe street crossings: The need for safe street crossings at or near transit stops (students will have to cross the street to/from the transit stop once a day) and sidewalks connecting to school buildings.
- Insurance and liability standards are different for school buses and public transit. School districts are liable for the safety of the student from the moment the board a school bus, which can be difficult to convert onto a public transit bus or vehicle.

#### Driver Training:

- Differing driver qualifications and training standards for public transit and school bus drivers. Minimum qualifications and ongoing training requirements for school bus and public transit drivers are similar. Drivers must have a commercial driver's license and undergo a background check; some states also require school bus drivers to be fingerprinted. Safety training qualifications differ, however. In Kentucky, for instance, school bus drivers must be trained in first aid and student management techniques, special education transportation, and incident and emergency preparedness procedures. Training for mass transit drivers typically consists of safe vehicle operation, defensive driving, hazard recognition and emergency procedures, but does not address passenger safety (Farber, 2008).

#### Coordination of Other Management and Administrative Activities:

- Complications with reorganizing labor agreements. Labor arrangements with drivers, mechanics, and other staff include collective agreements governing work rules, hours, and wages. Integration of school bus and public transit services may be limited to certain work rules and the existing collective agreement for employees (TCRP, 1999).

#### Joint Use of Vehicles:

- Bus safety and comfort. Both federal and state laws govern school bus safety standards. The measures taken to keep children safe in case of an accident (i.e., tightly spaced compartmentalized seating) make the buses difficult to maneuver and uncomfortable for adults and difficult, if not impossible, for certain disabled people to sit in them. (Andrle et al., 2003). School buses also lack other features that make transit buses comfortable for adults, such as larger seats, aisles, doors, and ceilings.
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for public transit vehicles. ADA ensures equal access to public transportation for people with disabilities and requires all "new, used or remanufactured buses and vans" to be equipped so people with disabilities can use public transit. School buses are not subject to these same requirements. While some school buses are equipped with wheel chair lifts and restraints, the majority are not; and even those school buses with wheelchair lifts installed usually do not meet access standards required for public transit. These constraints make it challenging and problematic for school buses to transport adults, particularly the elderly and disabled.
- The need to disguise school buses for non-pupil use. Many states require that, when a school bus is not transporting students, the "SCHOOL BUS" signs be covered, and the pedestrian arm and flashing signals disabled. Although these restrictions seem simple, they can make it more difficult to sue a school bus for non-pupil purposes. (Farber, 2008).

- Legal considerations: Labor arrangements. Labor agreements between school districts and unions for drivers, mechanics and other staff could affect a school district's ability to use buses for transporting disadvantaged populations. Reorganizing the workforce between tasks—such as driving students in the morning, adults during mid-day, and students again in the afternoon—could create issues such as seniority rights for existing employees and affect training, licensing and compensation arrangements. Nevertheless, most states that allow school bus use to transport others require groups that use a bus to reimburse the school district for all costs, including the driver's salary. (Farber, 2008).
- Insurance and liability. Standards are different for school buses and public transit. School districts are liable for the safety of the student from the moment the board a school bus, which can be difficult to convert onto a public transit bus or vehicle.



## legal, regulatory, and funding environment

The below discussion summarizes some of the laws, regulations, and requirements governing state funding for student transportation and federal funding for public transit. The legal, regulatory, and funding environment plays a significant role in what type of coordination activities school districts and public transit agencies might pursue.

### REGULATIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS CONTRACTING WITH PUBLIC TRANSIT AGENCIES

A school district may contract with a mass transit authority for all or any part of a district's school transportation if the authority: (TEC Sec. 34.008)

- 1) Requires its school bus drivers to have the qualifications required by and to be certified in accordance with standards established by the Department of Public Safety; and
- 2) Uses only those mass transit authority buses in transporting 15 or more public school students that meet or exceed safety standards for school buses established under Section 34.002.

A mass transit authority contracting for daily transportation of students to or from school shall conduct the following education programs, in a manner approved by the district school board:

- 1) A program to inform the public that public school students will be riding on the authority's or company's buses;
- 2) A program to educate the drivers of the buses to be used of the special needs and problems of public school students riding on the buses; and
- 3) A program to educate public school students on bus riding safety and any special considerations arising from the use of the authority's buses.

### STATE FUNDING FOR BUS PASSES FOR STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

With approval from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), a school district may establish a program to provide bus passes or cards for another transportation system to certain students and receive TEA reimbursement for those passes or cards. The students must be ones who are eligible to use the district's regular transportation system but for whom the regular system is not a feasible method for providing transportation (TEC, §42.155(l)). To be eligible for reimbursement, students must meet the eligibility requirements and the bus passes or cards must be used only for transportation that meets eligibility requirements described below. To establish a program, a district must submit a letter and application to the TEA by July 15 before the first school year the district plans to operate the program.

The following types of bus passes and bus cards are the only types eligible for reimbursement:

- Daily bus pass
- Weekly or seven-day bus pass
- Monthly or 30-day bus pass
- Bus card (a card that is electronically loaded with a specific amount of funds or a specific number of rides) (cannot be loaded with funds for riders for a period longer than one month)

A student ID card purchased from the transit authority by the district or a student is not eligible for reimbursement (TEA School Transportation Allotment Handbook, 2017).

### STUDENT TRANSPORTATION ELIGIBILITY FOR STATE FUNDING

The following types of services are eligible to be reported to the state for funding:

- Regular Route Services: The transportation of regular-program students to and from school, and transportation during the school day to attend required academic courses that are not offered at the students' campus of attendance. Regular-program students include those that live two or more miles from their campus of regular attendance, students who live in a hazardous traffic or high risk of violence area within two miles of the students' campus, or students that are homeless or in foster care.
- Special Route Services: The transportation of special-program students.
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) Route Services: The transportation of regular- or special-program students during the school day to attend a TEA-approved CTE course that is not available at the students' campus of attendance, and that make up only a part of the students' instructional day.

Transportation that is ineligible includes transportation to federal Head Start programs, summer school transportation, and transportation to or from non-academic school-related activities (extra- or co-curricular events or field trips).

## FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION (FTA) REGULATIONS REGARDING SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Regarding the use of transit vehicles for school transportation, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) may not provide financial assistance to transit agencies unless they have entered into a written agreement that they “will not engage in school bus operations exclusively for the transportation of students and school personnel in competition with private school bus operators” (49 CFR part 605.14).

The FTA regulations exempts “tripper service” from the prohibition against school bus operations. Tripper service is “regularly scheduled mass transportation service which is open to the public, and which is designed or modified to accommodate the needs of school students and personnel, using various fare collections or subsidy systems.” Through administrative decisions over the years, FTA broadened its interpretation of its tripper service definition to allow transit agencies to make minor modifications to its route paths within the vicinity of schools (typically up to a few blocks, to stops located at or in close proximity to the schools), and frequency of service (e.g., increasing the frequency that buses arrive in the period before school starts and after school ends to accommodate the increased demand).

### BUS DRIVER AND BUS SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

Requirements for bus drivers and bus safety standards can be found in Appendix B.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## next steps

Coordination of public transportation and school transportation occurs when there is clear benefit to both parties (i.e., each coordinating agency either saved money or gains revenue), managers are willing to work together to solve problems. Improving the coordination of school transportation and public transportation services has the potential to result in efficiencies in the provision of transportation services, reduce the amount that school districts spend on student transportation, increase the number of riders on public transit buses, and provide students with additional means for getting to school and participating in after-school and other academic opportunities. It can result in students that are more equipped to enter the workforce, improved air quality around schools, and additional revenue sources for school districts and transit agencies.

This report has outlined some of the ways school districts and transit agencies in the DFW region, and across the country, can coordinate to achieve these benefits.

### NEXT STEPS

Below are recommendations for next steps that the school districts and transit agencies interviewed as part of this study, as well as NCTCOG, might take to advance the coordination efforts and areas of interest identified previously.

#### DALLAS

Dallas ISD is not yet ready to buy students transit passes in lieu of sending out a school bus. Additional analysis needs to be done of the relative cost of sending out a bus to pick up students compared to the cost of purchasing those same students transit passes, and at what point purchasing transit passes would be more cost-effective. It is recommended that Dallas ISD and DART consider initiating a pilot program to test out the benefits and cost-effectiveness of purchasing transit passes rather than running a bus route.

Potential options for the pilot program include:

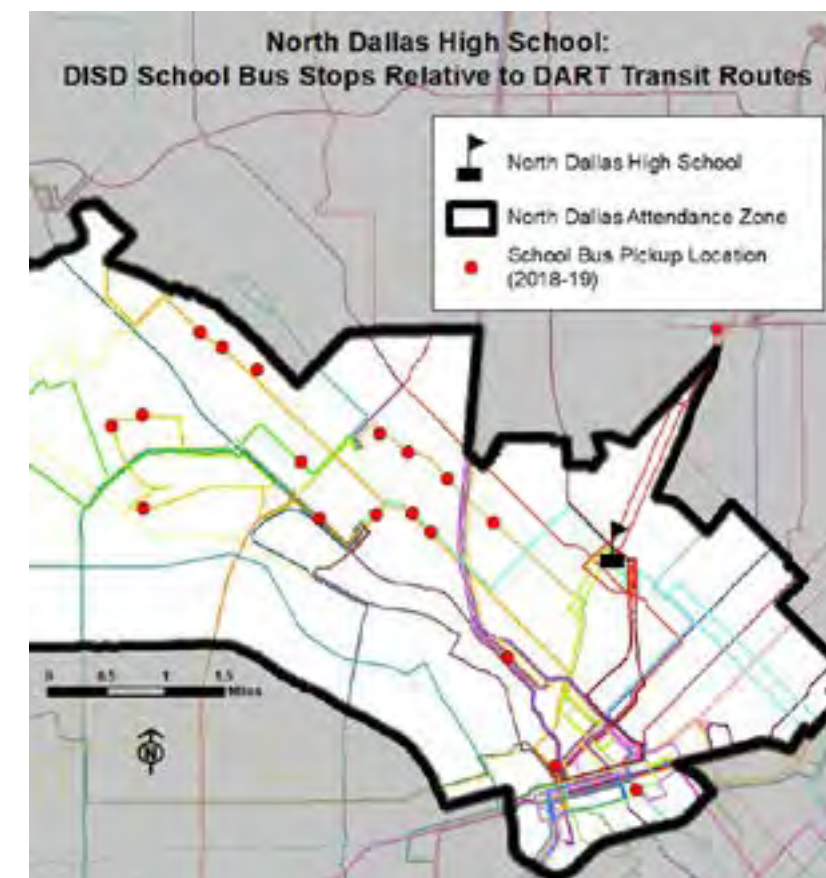
- Purchase passes for students that attend charter schools or Early College programs at the community college campuses, where there are good transit connections between the home school and the high school (e.g., Conrad High School to Richland College; Adamson, Pinkston, Roosevelt, and Madison

High Schools to El Centro College; North Dallas High School to Brookhaven College; Kimball and Sunset High Schools to Mountain View College).

- Start out with two high schools with good transit access to the school and good coverage of the attendance zone (e.g., North Dallas High School, Skyline High School, etc.).
- Purchase passes for students that attend citywide choice programs, with good transit connections between their home/neighborhood school and the choice school (e.g., Woodrow Wilson HS and Mockingbird Elementary to Ewell Townview Center; Conrad HS to Ewell Townview Center).

Potential barriers or issues that would need to be addressed as part of this pilot program include:

- Funding: Evaluate existing resources. Consider an agency partnership—for example, the transit agency discounting their student passes further if the school district agrees to purchase more passes.
- Schedules: Coordinate school bell schedules and transit schedules and ensure there are easy transfers between bus routes students will likely use. Consider increasing the frequency of buses if necessary.
- Education: Educate students on how to use the transit system and provide marketing materials showing which routes students can use to get to the school. Promote positive perceptions of using the transit system for school travel by working with the media and developing a marketing campaign for the schools, school district, and transit agency to use. Conduct joint strategic planning to minimize or offset the impacts to transit routes and schedules, which must serve multiple customer groups with a sufficient level of service.



## FORT WORTH

It is recommended that Trinity Metro and Fort Worth ISD begin meeting on a quarterly or semi-annual basis. Potential topics of discussion might include:

- Mapping which transit routes connect to high schools and city-wide magnet programs.
- Purchasing transit passes for field trips: One easy way the district can make public transit available as an option for field trips is by posting a Trinity Metro pass request form and submittal information on the district's transportation website. A good example of this can be found on Dallas ISD's Transportation Services website: <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/54265>
- Consider conducting a pilot program to test out the use of use of public transit for transporting students in lieu of yellow school buses. Potential options for the pilot program might include (see Barriers under Dallas, above):
  - Start out by purchasing passes for students that attend Early College programs at the Tarrant County College campuses, where there are good transit connections between the home school and the high school (e.g., between Wyatt High School or Paschal High School and the TCC South Campus, or between many of the high schools and the TCC Trinity River Campus).
  - Start out with two high schools with good transit access to the school and good coverage of the attendance zone (e.g., Wyatt High School, Dunbar High School)
  - Start out by purchasing passes for students that attend citywide choice programs, with good transit connections between their home/ neighborhood school and the choice school.
- Coordinate on the location of any future new choice/magnet programs for high schoolers and on the location of future high schools—*before* the locations have been finalized.

## DENTON

Begin hosting a series of quarterly or semi-annual coordination meetings between Denton ISD and DCTA. The reward for DCTA of allocating limited staff availability could be significant increases in ridership on some routes.

Denton ISD is interested in potentially eliminating some of its bus routes that serve students with hazardous conditions getting to school (see page 27 for transportation services eligible for state allotment funding) by purchasing students transit passes. Denton ISD and DCTA should work together to identify where hazardous bus routes overlap with transit routes, and where students that live less than the required two miles from school are in need of transportation.

## NCTCOG

NCTCOG should work to advance coordination between transit agencies and all level of education, including school districts, community colleges and the other higher education institutions.



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