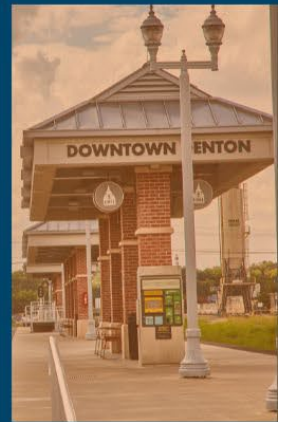


Task 4 Report: Develop Collaborations Between Existing Transit Authorities

Draft

REGIONAL
TRANSIT 2.0



North Central Texas
Council of Governments



Executive Summary

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) and the three transit authorities (TAs) within its planning area boundary—Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Trinity Metro, and Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA)—face challenges as they work collaboratively to enhance regional connectivity and improve transit services throughout the region. While the TAs each have leaders at the executive and Board levels who embrace the desire to increase collaboration, such efforts could benefit from a more strategic approach aimed at increasing cooperation and optimizing opportunities for enhanced service and integrated mobility programs.

Projected regional population growth is estimated to surpass 4 million new residents in the next 25 years. At the same time, most freeway corridors are reaching maximum buildout, leaving the TAs with the challenge and opportunity to optimize collaboration for a more interconnected transit future. Key challenges to better collaboration or that collaboration could improve include the following:

1. TA governance structures that limit capacity for coordination and delivery of optimal transit and mobility services;
2. Duplicate administrative functions that create financial and operational inefficiencies;
3. Funding availability and financial structures that serve as barriers to more effective regional transit services;
4. “Edge service” boundary planning that is difficult due to the patchwork of current TA member jurisdictions; and
5. Regional growth, suburban sprawl, and rising congestion that require greater transit connectivity, even as many local jurisdictions undervalue its benefits.

An inventory of seventeen strategies was developed based on ideas shared by NCTCOG, the TAs, and industry-leading innovations, best practices, and case studies. The strategies posed in this report would help TAs increase collaboration to realize operational efficiencies and improve the customer transit service experience. These are aggregated into operations and maintenance strategies, collaborative fare strategies, and consolidation strategies—some of which apply to the supply of transit service, while others impact customer service and ridership challenges at authority boundaries. Though some strategies complement one another, they are not in all cases meant to be undertaken as a package.

Operations and Maintenance Strategies

- O1. Improve traffic signal timing and infrastructure for transit prioritization
- O2. Strategically build and enhance mobility hubs
- O3. Coordinate regional safety and security efforts
- O4. Develop an integrated regional bus action plan
- O5. Develop and implement collaborative procurement processes
- O6. Plan and prioritize opportunities for cross-TA system networking and interlining

Collaborative Fare Strategies *(These strategies are advanced further in Transit 2.0 Task 7, Review of Fare Collection Strategies to Increase Ridership without Lowering Revenues)*

- F1. Provide a regionally integrated and customer-oriented payment experience utilizing a “mobility wallet” strategy
- F2. Develop and implement a regionally integrated fare structure
- F3. Offer account-based ticketing (ABT) on all modes of transportation

Consolidation Strategies

- C1. Establish a regional rail authority to better integrate inter-community connectivity and service *(This strategy is advanced further in Transit 2.0 Task 2, Transit Legislative Program)*
- C2. Consolidate commuter rail operations and maintenance responsibilities
- C3. Establish an integrated, region-wide vanpool program
- C4. Establish an integrated, region-wide paratransit dispatch system
- C5. Establish an integrated, region-wide microtransit system
- C6. Co-mingle paratransit and microtransit with the potential for utilizing a single regional provider *(Other private sector-initiated recommendations are advanced in Transit 2.0 Task 5, Develop Strategies to Foster Transit Authority Board Partnership and Teamwork)*
- C7. Evaluate and plan the transition to a region-wide authority with the mandate to establish regional multimodal priorities
- C8. Consolidate the three TAs into a single regional Integrated Transportation Authority (ITA).
- C9. Increase the role of NCTCOG in regional decision making to expedite and optimize regional coordination

These strategies have different strengths in their ability to address key challenges to increasing TA collaboration. Criteria are proposed and leveraged in the report to evaluate the degree to which these strategies:

- Improve the regional customer experience;
- Create operational efficiencies; and
- Improve regional effectiveness.

The Transit 2.0 team recommends that the TAs and NCTCOG continue to prioritize building habits of collaboration through the proposed O&M and collaborative fare strategies, all of which could be pursued and implemented without any organizational transformation. However, the scale at which regional collaboration impacts connectivity is significant, and NCTCOG should foster a conversation with the TAs around the proposed consolidation strategies that could result in more transformational regional collaboration. Basic buy-in already exists between DART and Trinity Metro regarding the creation of a regional rail authority, and synergies likely exist in other consolidation areas.

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1. Introduction

Since 1974, NCTCOG, in conjunction with the Regional Transportation Council (RTC), has served as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area. The NCTCOG Executive Board serves as the MPO's fiduciary and fiscal agent, while the RTC serves as the MPO's policy body for federal transportation planning, programming, and policy decisions.

NCTCOG, RTC, and the three transit authorities (TAs)—Trinity Metro, Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA), and Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)—are challenged in their work to enhance collaborations in the interest of improved regional connectivity. This collaboration will need to be enhanced to support more seamless regional connectivity in the rapidly growing and dispersed 16-county NCTCOG region—a region that is projected to exceed 12 million people within 25 years (2024 NCTCOG Population Estimates).

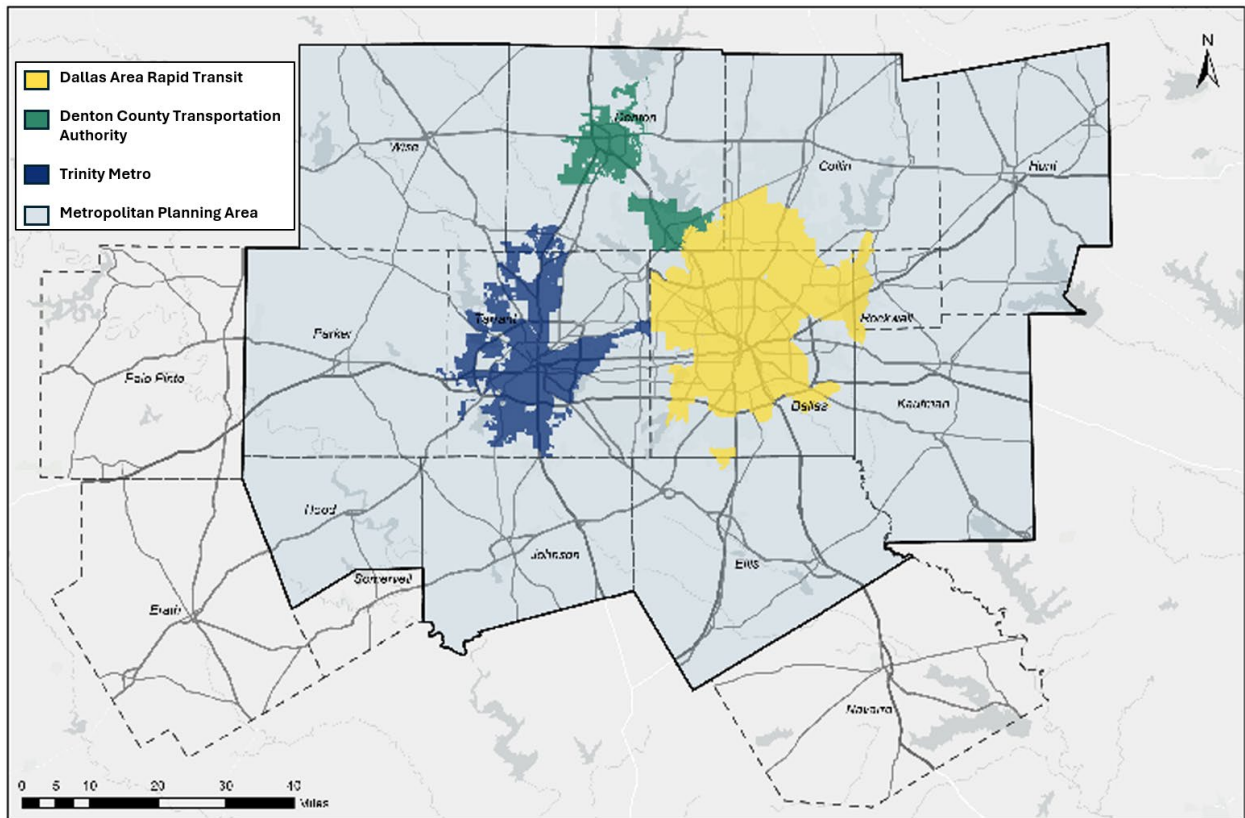
While the TAs have collaborated positively on a tactical basis, long-term strategic planning for regional collaboration and potential service enhancement has been less effective. A common theme arising from interviews with the Board members and the executive teams at each of the Authorities was that Authority leadership clearly has a desire for increased collaboration and enhanced mobility and transit service opportunities across the region. This disposition will be critical for the three TAs to increase operational efficiency (supply) and improve the customer experience (demand).

Seeking and implementing supply-side efficiencies through collaboration on operations and maintenance activities can help the TAs achieve efficient operations while minimizing costs—a critical nexus in an increasingly tight funding environment. Collaboration on demand-side efficiencies will require the TAs to closely examine the edges of their service areas to ensure that transfers, when necessary, are coordinated and seamless between authorities. This means optimizing physical transfer points for ease of movement, schedules for quick and efficient journeys, and fare systems that facilitate intuitive, equitable, and understandable customer fares.

The Transit 2.0 team heard multiple justifications for current collaboration levels between TAs, including the variable contributions provided between DCTA and Trinity Metro member jurisdictions (half-cent) and DART (one cent), disparate institutional goals and policies, and a focus on serving each agency's member cities; connectivity to other regional transit systems is in many cases an afterthought. New and specialized forums for collaboration on service provision are needed at jurisdictional boundaries and in standardization of tools and services.

Collaboration at service boundaries is made more difficult by the patchwork of transit provision throughout the region (Figure 1), a direct result of required jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction elections for TA membership. In practice, this means that the TAs physically interact only at limited boundary locations, limiting opportunities for operational collaboration and making those points of interaction critically important to get right.

Figure 1. Transit Authority Jurisdictional Boundaries.



Source: NCTCOG.



2. Key Challenges to Increasing Collaboration Between the Existing Transit Authorities

Task 4 findings were informed by interviews with staff at NCTCOG and the three TAs. The Transit 2.0 team spoke with each TA's Chief Executive Officer, Chief Planning Officer, Chief Operations Officer, and Chief Information Officer (or equivalently titled individuals) and conducted a thorough review of current TA policies and NCTCOG studies. Industry-leading innovations, best practices, and case studies were also reviewed.

Key challenges to better collaboration or that collaboration could improve include the following:

- TA governance structures that limit capacity for coordination and delivery of optimal transit and mobility services;
- Duplicate administrative functions that create financial and operational inefficiencies;
- Funding availability and financial structures that serve as barriers to more effective regional transit services;
- “Edge service” boundary planning that is difficult due to the patchwork of current TA member jurisdictions; and
- Regional growth, suburban sprawl, and rising congestion that require greater transit connectivity, even as many local jurisdictions undervalue its benefits.

TA governance structures that limit capacity for coordination

There are many examples of collaboration between the TAs, including the Trinity Railway Express (TRE), a 34-mile commuter rail line jointly owned and operated by DART and Trinity Metro, schedule coordination between DCTA's A-train and its connection at Trinity Mills Station with the DART Green Line, and early efforts to integrate use of GoPass, the region's app for trip planning and fare purchasing. Trinity Metro has leveraged a DCTA contract with Lyft for microtransit provision, and all three TAs “piggy-back” on state contracts when it makes sense to do so. NCTCOG has helped to support collaborative efforts, such as a collaboration between Trinity Metro and NCTCOG to procure trains for the 2026 World Cup and funding for Federal Railroad Administration-required positive train control (PTC) technology for vehicle avoidance on passenger rail lines.

There are also missed opportunities between the TAs in the coordination of service planning and delivery. For example, DCTA uses a different PTC system than Trinity Metro and DART, limiting opportunities for interoperability and shared maintenance facilities—despite an RTC policy for interoperability. Separate procurements for commuter rail rolling stock and buses further exacerbates this issue. At Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW), customers face an unpleasant and physically challenging transfer between DART's Orange Line and Trinity Metro's TEXRail. Fare products and purchasing platforms are not integrated across the TAs, in many cases requiring riders to pay two or more fares when transferring between providers. Broadly speaking, regional service and transfer planning is conducted on an ad hoc basis, without a cohesive or strategic effort to streamline the customer experience across all transfer locations. This occurs even with specific RTC directives focused on efficiencies and the customer experience.

Duplicate administrative functions that create financial and operational inefficiencies

Some amount of overhead duplication is expected and appropriate when there are two or more agencies in a region providing similar services. However, the integrated nature of travel across the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex means that there should be regular and systematic review of where collaboration on or integration and consolidation of administrative functions could increase operational efficiency and improve the customer experience in the NCTCOG region. Key opportunities exist in the areas of procurement, microtransit, paratransit, vanpool, shared maintenance facilities, and interlining of regional commuter rail.

Funding availability and financial structure that serve as barriers to more effective regional transit services

Most non-federal funding for transit in the NCTCOG region is derived from local sales tax measures authorized by voters in member jurisdictions of the three transit authorities. These range from the one-half percent sales taxes approved for Trinity Metro and DCTA to the one percent sales tax approved by DART member jurisdictions. Each TA has their own policy on how lower commitments of funding can be leveraged by non-member jurisdictions to obtain some level of transit service.

At DART, friction around how funds should be allocated across member jurisdictions has resulted in increasingly public displays of frustration from board members, city council members, and mayors that, as of November 2024, are still ongoing. All three TAs are accountable to their members for tracking and communicating the way these funds are allocated. At each TA, staff spend significant time tracking this information, which can limit an agency's ability to prioritize optimal transit provision.

This type of accounting, where each member jurisdiction expects to receive transit services in direct proportion to the funds contributed, forces transit authorities to

prioritize planning around jurisdictional boundaries, not regional travel patterns that better represent desired origins and destinations. In hub and spoke systems like DART, which is centered around Dallas, this type of accounting structurally underestimates the benefits provided by the core to the rest of the jurisdictions. This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of funding from jurisdictions that have not elected to join regional transit authorities; true regional connectivity would require funding and participation from all jurisdictions to assure integrated regional mobility.

“Edge service” boundary planning that is difficult due to the patchwork of current TA member jurisdictions

When TA jurisdictions only meet at limited boundary locations, edge service planning is even more critical to ensure that people can quickly and efficiently make transfers or direct interlined service to get where they need to go. The geography of current TA membership creates a fragmented and inconsistent system of service provision across the region that results in uneven access to transportation services, in turn limiting opportunities for travel between and beyond TA jurisdictions. This is even more difficult at boundaries where an adjoining jurisdiction runs their own on-demand transit system, as in Arlington and Grand Prairie.

Without a unified and coordinated transportation network, communities face barriers to accessing jobs, education, healthcare, and other essential services, exacerbating regional inequities and hindering overall economic growth and mobility.

Joint facility planning has been suggested as a potential area for cost savings and collaboration, however this only makes sense when physically convenient for staff and vehicle fleets – the lack of regional connectivity across the TAs thus limits these opportunities. Even when RTC policies such as those funding interoperable PTC are not fully realized, greater attention to system integration is required.

Regional growth, suburban sprawl, and rising congestion that require greater transit connectivity, even as many local jurisdictions undervalue its benefits

According to the NCTCOG 2050 Demographic Forecast, projected population growth in the North Texas region is anticipated to occur most intensely in the northern part of the region, where transit provision is sparse or nonexistent. Even in areas with transit service available, there is limited connectivity. At the same time, North Texas freeway infrastructure is reaching its full buildout potential in several corridors and traffic demand frequently stresses available capacity.

To achieve air quality goals and minimize the impacts of congestion, the TAs will need to work together to determine how best to provide transit service in these areas. Despite these compounding transportation challenges, many local jurisdictions doubt transit’s

utility, preferring to spend already-tight budgets on economic development and other city functions. They do not understand that transit can support these economic development goals while softening the impacts of regional growth, suburban sprawl, and rising congestion.

The lack of support for transit transcends local policy, with the State Legislature and State initiatives broadly in opposition. This has negatively impacted awareness by policymakers and the public regarding the value of transit and functional mobility within the North Central Texas region. This lack of awareness makes collaboration more difficult when transit authorities and advocates must continually spend resources conveying basic value propositions.

Focus of Analysis to Increase Transit Authority Collaboration

The challenges described above either limit TA collaboration or are the direct result of limited TA collaboration. This report builds on these key challenges and redirects the regional response toward strategies to improve collaboration in the areas of operations and maintenance (O&M), fares, and regional consolidation. The report presents these strategies and assesses the areas where they would be most impactful.

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3. Strategies to Improve Collaborations Among Existing Transit Authorities

There are a number of O&M, fare, and regional consolidation opportunities to be considered by NCTCOG, the RTC, and the three TAs as they plan transit provision for a region that is anticipated to receive over 4 million new residents in the coming 25 years. The strategies included in this inventory either inherently force increased collaboration (in the case of regional consolidation opportunities) or are strategies to improve regional transit and customer experience via collaboration. They can be leveraged individually and in combination.

Operations and Maintenance Strategies

The Transit 2.0 team has proposed six O&M strategies to increase TA collaboration in the region.

01. Improve traffic signal timing and infrastructure for transit prioritization

To enhance the speed and reliability of bus services, traffic signals can be synchronized within and at municipal boundaries to maintain faster, more predictable travel times. Paired with regional implementation of TSP along key corridors that cross jurisdictional boundaries, bus service delays caused by unsynchronized signals can be reduced and transit vehicles can flow as easily as emergency vehicles.

TAs should work with each other and member jurisdictions to plan and fund these improvements to traffic signals. NCTCOG desires to be involved as a regional coordinator of this effort to support regional prioritization and funding for signal upgrades.

CASE STUDY: REGIONAL TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT COORDINATION IN NEVADA

The [Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada \(RTC\)](#) is a regional entity that oversees public transportation, traffic management, roadway design and construction funding, transportation planning, and regional planning efforts for the entire Southern Nevada region. In the case of traffic management, different entities like Clark County, the Nevada Department of Transportation, and cities like Henderson, Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, and Mesquite own their own traffic signaling hardware, but the RTC traffic management team monitors, controls, and operates the system associated with traffic signal timing and coordination. RTC manages these activities on arterials and freeways to ensure vehicles throughout the system flow as smoothly as possible within and across these streams.



O2. Strategically build and enhance mobility hubs

Strategically building and enhancing mobility hubs across the region will streamline connections between DART, DCTA, and Trinity Metro services, making transit more accessible and convenient for riders. Situated at key transfer locations, mobility hubs should offer integrated facilities for transferring between bus, rail, paratransit, and on-demand services. These hubs should incorporate amenities like real-time transit information, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure to support a multimodal experience, and where it makes sense, carshare, electric vehicle charging stations, parking, shops, and/or secure bike storage. Private-sector opportunities can also be explored to reduce the cost and maximize the user experience at these hubs. Emphasizing accessibility and wayfinding improvements can enhance usability for all riders, including individuals with disabilities.

By investing in mobility hubs in high-demand, underserved areas, the TAs can ensure efficient, equitable access to transit options, potentially increasing ridership and relieving pressure on congested routes. Collaboration between the TAs and local governments will be crucial for securing funding, aligning zoning, and ensuring that these hubs support local land use goals, ultimately creating a more cohesive regional transit network. To ensure the hubs maintain a regional focus and are prioritized across systems, NCTCOG should lead a larger effort to create a system-wide plan.

O3. Coordinate regional safety and security efforts

To improve both the actual and perceived safety of transit services, the three TAs should collectively work to enhance safety and security measures across the region, beyond individual efforts such as those that have been undertaken by DART. Key efforts can include increasing the number of transit security officers, establishing a team of safety ambassadors, and deploying behavioral health specialists to proactively address passenger concerns. This team could integrate the expertise of security officers, co-response units, and local law enforcement to create a holistic approach to safety that

CASE STUDY: LA METRO'S AMBASSADORS: SAFETY IN GREEN

In 2022, LA Metro launched its Ambassador program to improve transit safety and customer experience through non-enforcement personnel. The Ambassadors—specially trained individuals who are not sworn officers—are present at stations and on buses and trains throughout Metro's network to assist passengers, answer questions, provide directions, report security concerns, and facilitate rapid response of law enforcement and medical personnel when necessary. These Ambassadors and their lime-green shirts are part of Metro's multilayered initiative to improve public safety, alongside security, law enforcement, homeless and mental health outreach workers, and cleaning crews. According to a Metro survey, nearly two thirds of riders who have encountered an ambassador agree that their presence helps riders feel safer, and ambassador interactions result in improved rider satisfaction.



reassures riders and encourages transit use. By coordinating resources and developing shared protocols, the TAs can create a consistent, safe transit experience across the region and improve the perception of transit together.

O4. Develop an integrated regional bus action plan

An integrated regional bus action plan would improve service coordination across North Central Texas, particularly in outlying areas. By aligning schedules, routes, and service frequencies among DART, DCTA, and Trinity Metro, a cohesive plan would help facilitate a seamless experience for riders, reduce service duplication, and provide better transit options for residents outside central urban areas. Importantly, this integrated plan could address the need for longer, continuous routes to enhance regional coverage, and establish a framework for how to administratively and operationally provide services that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

CASE STUDY: LONDON'S BUS ACTION PLAN: MODERNIZING THE LONDON BUS NETWORK TO IMPROVE SERVICE AND ATTRACT CUSTOMERS

In 2022, Transport for London (TfL) launched its Bus Action Plan, aiming to enhance the bus network's performance and sustainability across the Greater London area. This plan focuses on increasing bus reliability, improving safety, and providing better connections to key destinations while addressing the needs of underserved communities. The Bus Action Plan includes strategies for route optimization, service frequency adjustments, and the implementation of low-emission buses to support environmental goals. By enhancing the integration of bus services with other modes of transit and engaging with local communities to identify specific needs, TfL aims to create a more responsive and user-friendly transit system. Implementing a similar action plan in North Central Texas would enable DART, DCTA, and Trinity Metro to streamline services across jurisdictions, fill gaps in outlying areas, and deliver a more reliable and cohesive regional transit network.

With a unified plan, the TAs could identify high-priority areas for investment, such as improved connections between microtransit zones and fixed routes. The plan would also standardize both fare policies (to ensure equitable and accessible transit options across the region) and procurement policies (to ensure interoperability of equipment and facilitate regional sharing of resources). This standardization could be expanded to operational contracts so buses and drivers could be shared across TAs if and when needed. Such a plan would also have the potential to lay the groundwork for a phased approach to significantly expand regional services as regional population and mobility demands grow.

O.5 Collaborative Procurement

When multiple agencies procure the same goods or services, they can create economies of scale that reduce overall costs and streamline procurement processes, especially for large purchases of rolling stock and frequently used equipment and supplies. An example of



such collaborative efforts can be seen in the FTA's Joint Procurement Clearinghouse, an online tool developed to assist transit agencies in exploring joint procurements. Through this platform, procurement staff can share information about upcoming needs for buses, railcars, and ferries, and specify details such as bus size and engine type. The Clearinghouse enables both large and small transit providers to post their requirements and search for compatible joint procurement opportunities. Similarly, the State of Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DPRT) maintains statewide procurements for many types of rolling stock to meet the requirements of the Federal Transit Administration and Virginia Public Procurement Act, reducing effort for transit authorities purchasing new vehicles in the state.

Among the TAs, DART has purchased buses via the State of Washington Department of Enterprise Services' (DES) transit bus purchase program, a procurement mechanism similar to that of the State of Virginia.

According to DES staff, transit agencies using the contract have achieved average savings of \$50,000 in bus customization costs per vehicle and have saved six to twelve months of staff time per procurement due to the fact that in-house solicitations can be avoided; faster procurements can also reduce inflation costs.

At a minimum, the three TAs should regularly utilize resources like the Joint Procurement Clearinghouse or establish shared procurements similar to those managed by DPRT and DES, but should also schedule regular meetings between key procurement and executive staff to align on upcoming purchases and discuss areas for standardization of equipment for long-term procurement efficiency. One key opportunity for collaborative procurement is standardization of commuter rail rolling stock and associated PTC. For example, the DART Silver Line and Trinity Metro TEXRail leverage the same Stadler rolling stock—albeit with different on-board amenities such as bathrooms on Trinity Metro's stock but not on DART's. The Trinity Railway Express and DCTA A-train use older rolling stock. Similarly, all Trinity Metro and DART trains operate the same PTC system, while DCTA uses a different system. By standardizing procurement across the TAs, future procurement efforts should be consolidated for improved regional interoperability and cost savings and to improve and more consistently provide a regional customer experience.

CASE STUDY: BUS FLEET EFFICIENCIES

In the Seattle region, Sound Transit and local transit agencies jointly procure buses and periodically move vehicles among agencies to accommodate Sound Transit's shifting service needs. NCTCOG already does this by conducting cooperative vehicle procurements for small and rural providers. The NCTCOG region should consider collaborating on these types of joint procurements across the TAs as well.



In tandem with other recommendations in this report (e.g. development of an integrated regional bus action plan), the TAs can collaborate both on the types of equipment they buy and the procurements they use to obtain it.

O6. Plan and prioritize opportunities for cross-TA system networking and interlining

Interlining—when multiple train routes are run together on the same track infrastructure—can help optimize connectivity, reduce transfers, reduce travel times, and enhance customer convenience. However, interlining requires all rolling stock to be technically compatible, including consistent PTC systems, coordinated scheduling, and shared operational standards. When done well, interlining expands the reach of services and reduces administrative redundancies, ultimately benefiting riders and transit agencies alike. The interface between Trinity Metro’s TEXRail line and DART’s planned Silver Line is an intuitive location where two rail systems will intersect at the DFW Airport North Station, though amenities across each TA’s rolling stock may vary. Both DART and Trinity Metro could work together to run a regional express service that could connect riders in the north Dallas suburbs and Fort Worth more quickly.

See recommendation *C1. Establish a regional rail authority*, for an alternative regional framework that could help prioritize opportunities for interlining.

Collaborative Fare Strategies

Strategies for collaboration on fares and fare payment systems aim to improve customer experiences associated with regional travel. The current lack of integration in these areas is confusing for riders and serves as an impediment to true regional integration. Three proposals are discussed below. Transit 2.0 Task 7, *Review of Fare Collection Strategies to Increase Ridership Without Lowering Revenues*, will expand upon these concepts in greater detail.

F1. Provide a regionally integrated customer-oriented payment experience through a “mobility wallet”

In regions outside of the US, fare and ticket policy integration is focused on modal integration and universal fare subsidies. Cities have created passes that promote mixed transportation options that work together, by having a single payment platform usable across all modes of public transportation. This includes rail and bus transit, bike share and other shared modes – even if these systems are run by different providers. A North Texas universal mobility wallet could provide a single payment system for all public and shared transportation options regionwide. It could work across different transport types and



operators, offer monthly passes or pay-as-you-go options and could be a platform to provide subsidies to low-income or frequent riders.

CASE STUDY: INTEGRATED PAYMENTS IN SINGAPORE

In Singapore, SimplyGo enables an integrated mobility wallet experience, allowing users to conveniently pay for various forms of public transport using integrated cards. By pairing with the SimplyGo app, users can remotely top up their cards, check their travel history, and track spending across all modes of transit, including buses and trains. This system simplifies fare management and supports seamless travel throughout Singapore, helping to reduce the need for multiple cards or payment systems and enhancing the overall commuter experience.

Fortunately, many services in the region already use the GoPass app as a mobility wallet. GoPass can be used to access information, plan trips, and make payments on these services. The region should expedite integration of GoPass for any remaining services or investigate if a privately procured app could provide similar services to the region at a reduced cost.

By integrating into an app many riders already know and understand, or by universally adopting a new app, DCTA, DART, and Trinity Metro can simplify the fare payment process across modes (e.g. bike share), eliminate confusion regarding different payment methods, and encourage greater transit use by making it easier for riders to navigate the entire regional system and connect seamlessly.

F2. Develop and implement a regionally integrated fare structure

While a cohesive trip planning and payment system like GoPass can support regional ridership, its utility is limited if fare structures are not intuitive to riders. While each of the TAs has a clear fare structure for services within its jurisdictions, there is limited information available for what it costs a rider transfer between TA services. In many cases, riders must pay multiple times for multiple legs of a trip if they cross service providers, which becomes an expensive disincentive for regional travel via transit.

The three TAs should leverage GoPass (or similar) payment integration or transition to account-based ticketing (Recommendation F3) to integrate the cost of day passes and fares into new or revamped regional fare products to reduce customer confusion and costs associated with transfers across TAs. While each TA may set their own service fees individually, electronic trip planning apps can be a useful tool to offer fare products that work for everyone in the region.

F3. Offer account-based ticketing (ABT) on all modes of transportation



For infrequent riders, account-based ticketing can be the difference between gaining a repeat rider and customer alienation. This is because people who ride North Texas transit infrequently, such as those attending a sporting event or when visiting from out of town, are often unfamiliar with transit apps like GoPass and ticket vending machines (TVMs). They often do not know what fare product to purchase and find themselves debating if they will get sufficient value out of a day pass to make it worth it.

Account-based ticketing, which allows passengers to use contactless bank cards, mobile phones, or other digital wallets and IDs for travel, can eliminate the payment confusion for infrequent travelers—so hopping on a bus or train is as easy as purchasing a cup of coffee. In a regional network, this can make travel and transfers more seamless and can be integrated with other fare policies such as fare capping or fare rewards. Riders can tap the same bank card for multiple rides over the course of a day, week, or month, and after reaching a certain limit, are “capped” such that they never pay more than the cost of daily, weekly, or monthly pass. In a regional system, this can also reduce confusion around different fares across services, and back-end programming can allow customers to be charged the correct rate for transfers—entirely tracked through their payment method rather than a physical or digital transit pass.

CASE STUDY: MAKING TRANSFERS AS EASY AS BUYING COFFEE

Four Northern California transit agencies have purchased contactless open-loop fare systems to accept contactless bank cards as payment for travel on buses. This allows for seamless transfers between the agencies' dial-a-ride vehicles and local and regional lines at shared bus stops—without expecting customers to download multiple agency apps, purchase or reload multiple agency farecards, or juggle exact change.

Consolidation Strategies

Collaboration and integration of services will always be difficult if the North Texas transit system is not set up to prioritize regional connectivity. By collaboratively consolidating select services as outlined here, TA leadership will have greater bandwidth to focus on pressing regional challenges and long-term authority aspirations. Nine strategies are proposed.

C1. Establish a regional rail authority

During interviews, executives at Trinity Metro and DART expressed interest in exploring the benefits of a regional rail authority to manage regional commuter rail operations. For DART and Trinity Metro, this desire stems from the slow and cumbersome process the two authorities endure to split costs and obtain DART and Trinity Metro board approvals for decisions regarding their shared Trinity Railway Express (TRE).



For DCTA, the need for a regional rail authority is less clear. DCTA operates the A-Train independently. It leases A-train right of way from DART; however, executives shared that collaboration with DART on station infrastructure and amenities at Trinity Mills station, where the A-train connects to the Green Line, is relatively streamlined between the two agencies. Despite this, efficiencies of passenger rail service on DART right-of-way should be explored.

Benefits of a regional rail authority extend beyond the streamlining of accounting and board approvals and into the customer experience. If one cohesive body were responsible for the planning, operation, and maintenance of all regional rail, schedules, interlining, and transfers, the system could be optimized to serve the customer on a regional scale. By consolidating two or more of the existing regional rail lines—Trinity Railway Express, the A-train, TEXRail, and the Silver Line—commuter rail services would benefit from:

- Streamlined governance agreements;
- Improved long-term strategic decision making;
- A clear external voice to government and investors;
- Improved alignment, coordination, and delivery of economic development and transportation related initiatives; and
- A means by which to steer significant streams of work.

To establish a combined authority, constituent local authorities would have full decision-making authority over which of their functions the combined authority would take on. Most combined authorities bring together a cohesive strategy for transportation, economic development and housing, but they may also include strategy for skills and inward investment as well.

An immediate opportunity for improved rail connectivity that would improve station amenities for transfers between TEXRail and the Orange Line at DFW Airport, where passengers must walk or roll a long distance that is exposed to the elements. Interlining between the soon-to-be-complete Silver Line and TEXRail near the DFW Airport North Station is also an opportunity to run a regional express service that could connect riders in the north Dallas suburbs and Fort Worth more quickly.

A regional rail authority would only encompass regional commuter rail and would not include proposed high-speed rail, though the expansion of passenger rail service outside of the current TAs service areas could be explored.

See recommendation *O6. Plan and prioritize opportunities for cross-TA system networking and interlining*, for an alternative regional framework that could help prioritize opportunities for interlining.



C2. Consolidate commuter rail operations and maintenance responsibilities

Consolidating commuter rail operations and maintenance activities would involve the potential procurement of an operations and maintenance contractor to operate all four commuter rail lines: DCTA's A-train, DART's Silver Line, Trinity Metro's TEXRail, and the co-owned TRE. This would involve TAs' collaboration on the O&M procurement, with separate management of each contract based on the ownership structure of each commuter rail line.

This recommendation does not require the administratively challenging process of creating a regional rail authority but maintains some of the benefits of joint operations and maintenance activities. However, it is comparatively less efficient due to the continued need for multiple board approvals, an issue that DART and Trinity Metro are interested in overcoming. This recommendation could be made more effective by a commitment on the part of all TAs to invest in the same rolling stock and associated PTC infrastructure to maximize interoperability and contract efficiency.

C3. Establish an integrated, region-wide vanpool program

Before the Covid-19 Pandemic, DCTA, Trinity Metro, and DART each operated separate regional vanpool programs. This created unfair competition between the programs due to overlapping service areas and competing rates, alongside duplicate overhead costs for program management. DCTA and Trinity Metro continue to provide this service to the region, but these issues remain. To help rectify the financial imbalance, the RTC has subsidized costs using Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funding to ensure that DCTA and Trinity Metro's vanpool programs are equivalently priced, regardless of the managing agency. This is not a long-term solution, and regional consolidation of vanpool contracts under one TA or NCTCOG could create efficiencies for both TAs and the RTC.

NCTCOG, DCTA, and Trinity Metro will need to collaboratively explore the implications of such a measure on FTA formula funding credits. Currently vanpool is subsidized with STBG, so the agencies are not utilizing FTA funds on the vanpool program. NCTCOG staff has explored the impact of FTA formula funding and has found that vanpool trips must be reported in NTD under the correct geography/UZA for individual TAs to continue to receive funding for trips in their UZA. This may change if RTC decides to no longer subsidize the vanpool program, which would leave TAs dependent on FTA funds to operate vanpool services.

C4. Establish an integrated, region-wide paratransit dispatch provider

Establishing a region-wide paratransit dispatch system across DART, DCTA, and Trinity Metro would streamline paratransit service delivery and, if effectively structured,



improve coordination among the TAs. This shared dispatch system could centralize trip scheduling, fleet management, and driver assignments, resulting in faster response times and improved service coverage, especially in areas along jurisdictional boundaries. By integrating technology platforms and dispatch protocols, the agencies could eliminate overlapping service areas and overhead, reduce wait times, and optimize route planning. A region-wide system could also create a seamless experience for riders who travel across multiple service areas, ensuring more consistent paratransit availability and simplifying the booking process. Implementing this approach would require initial investments in technology alignment and shared training for dispatch staff, but it could lead to substantial long-term savings and provide a more accessible and efficient transit solution for users.

Sharing and tracking funds is a potential barrier to this approach, as each jurisdiction has different coverage areas and ridership—so contributions to this regional effort would be uneven. Two approaches could be taken to address this regional contribution question:

Regional Paratransit Authority: Similar to a regional rail authority, a regional paratransit authority would provide the region with cohesive planning, consolidated overhead, and a single entity focused on optimization for regional customer experiences. TAs would have full control over how this consolidation would occur, potentially resulting in a more efficient collaborative approach than management by one TA. This could be established as a new Authority or managed by NCTCOG.

Dispatch Consolidation: Consolidating dispatch under one TA would allow each TA to continue to operate its own paratransit fleet, with one TA managing dispatch. This TA could integrate online booking functions across the region, with agreed-upon contributions from the other two TAs for overseeing this administrative function. However, this would not achieve the same degree of operational efficiency as a Regional Paratransit Authority could provide.

Should Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-required paratransit services be successfully integrated via a regional paratransit authority or dispatch consolidation, there may be an opportunity to further integrate on demand services that are not provided by the TAs.

C5. Establish an integrated, region-wide microtransit provider

Many TA member and non-member cities in the NCTCOG region are interested in the expansion of microtransit (also known as on-demand service) because of the flexibility and efficiency it offers. By dynamically routing vehicles to meet real-time passenger demand—something that is particularly effective in low-density areas that are not efficiently served



by traditional fixed-route transit—agencies can reduce costs and improve first mile/last mile connectivity for customers.

Currently, the TAs each operate their own microtransit service in specified zones throughout their service areas. However, non-member jurisdictions including Arlington and Grand Prairie have procured their own contractor-run on-demand programs, demonstrating the appeal these programs have.

Consolidating microtransit under a single regional provider would enhance efficiency by reducing administrative costs and centralizing resources like dispatch and fleet management. Private-sector opportunities are further expanded upon in the Task 5 report, *Develop Strategies to Foster Transit Authority Board Partnership and Teamwork*. A unified system would also simplify the user experience, offering consistent booking platforms and fare structures across jurisdictions. Aggregated ridership and trip data from a consolidated service could be leveraged to identify regional patterns and unmet demand, informing decisions to adjust or expand fixed-route services that may impact one or more TA. This approach ensures microtransit complements the regional transit network effectively, creating a seamless system that evolves with customer needs.

As with recommendations C4 and C6, the management of co-mingled paratransit and on-demand transit could be managed through dispatch and contractor consolidation or through the establishment of a regional authority. Funding for co-mingled paratransit and on-demand transit would leverage existing jurisdiction and TA funding sources currently used for these services. Other state-level funding has been constrained by the current legislative environment.

C6. Co-mingle paratransit and microtransit under one regional provider

Co-mingling paratransit and microtransit services across the three TAs would allow shared use of vehicles and drivers, optimize resource allocation across jurisdictions, and reduce redundant routes. By combining paratransit and on-demand operations, transit authorities can offer a more flexible, responsive system for riders with disabilities and those requiring flexible transit options, addressing gaps in underserved areas more efficiently. Pooling scheduling and dispatching systems could streamline operations and reduce costs associated with separate vehicle fleets and operational systems.

This coordinated approach would require agreement on standardized policies across the agencies to ensure consistent service quality, but it could significantly improve user experience and operational sustainability. After the initial consolidation, the region could evaluate opportunities to integrate other rural transit providers, as DCTA and Span are currently discussing.



As with recommendations C4 and C5, the management of co-mingled paratransit and on-demand transit could be managed through dispatch and contractor consolidation or through the establishment of a regional authority.

C7. Evaluate potential transition to a region-wide authority with the mandate to establish regional multimodal priorities

While NCTCOG, in conjunction with the RTC, is the MPO for transportation in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area, it is not currently in the MPO's priorities to plan regional multimodal priorities on behalf of TAs, municipalities, and counties. If the North Texas region is committed to reducing congestion, then the region needs an authority with the ability to plan at that scale.

NCTCOG or a new authority could support comprehensive region-wide planning for transportation projects of regional significance by preparing a North Texas Multimodal Regional Transportation Operations Plan. This plan would cohesively evaluate regional needs associated with transit. It would be able to consider everything from transit routes and fleet needs to transit signal priority infrastructure. A body with planning goals at this level would enable the region to consider opportunities for regional connectivity cohesively, beyond the current boundaries and funding restrictions the existing TAs face. This effort extends beyond the scope of the current Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) prepared by NCTCOG and into the realm of developing organizational frameworks to implement regional planning initiatives. A North Texas Multimodal Regional Transportation Plan could, if within its interests, also imagine a future where transit service is compulsory for the entire region. If deemed of interest, a North Texas Multimodal Regional Transportation Plan might present legislative concepts that could move the region in this direction. See the Task 2 report, *Transit Legislative Program*, for a discussion of potential legislative concepts.



An example for this kind of cohesive regional planning authority exists in the Jacksonville, Florida region (see inset). In this region, a Transportation Commission was established with a five-year sunset clause to undertake a regional planning effort without creating permanent administrative overhead. Such a model could be copied in the NCTCOG region, including its formation method via recurring per capita assessments.

C8. Consolidate the three TAs into one regional Integrated Transportation

CASE STUDY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

In 2013, through an interlocal agreement between the six counties of Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns, the Northeast Florida Regional Transportation Commission (NFRTC) was established. The NFRTC was funded with a recurring \$0.30 per capita assessment for five years and overseen by the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization (the MPO for North Florida) and representatives from each of the six counties. The NFRTC was tasked with the development of a Multimodal Regional Transportation Plan for the greater Jacksonville area in Northeastern Florida, which would advance significant projects by focusing on coordinating regional transportation and creating the organizational framework to implement the plan. The plan was adopted in 2016 and the NFRTC was sunset that year.

Authority (ITA)

The member-jurisdiction funding paradigm obligates TAs to plan around jurisdictional boundaries, not regional connectivity, so resources are limited for regional-level planning. This has resulted in disparate fares, inconsistent trip planning and wayfinding experiences, and dissatisfaction from passengers. When viewed in combination with regional roadway, freeway, and active transportation planning in the NCTCOG region, it becomes even clearer that transit is often an afterthought as compared to auto-oriented infrastructure.

By consolidating the three TAs, as well as regional transit operational planning, into one regional ITA, there could be a cohesive, consolidated management of regional transportation systems, including regional commuter rail, buses, streetcars, and active transportation routes across functional economic areas, including collaboration from TxDOT, Amtrak, and regional rail. By integrating all transit modes of transportation planning, the ITA would be able to, without bias, plan for the current and future transportation needs of North Texas in a way that is most effective and sustainable for the region. This consolidation would result in significant cost savings by removing duplication between agencies, reducing the costs of managing contracts, improving regional planning and scheduling, and increasing institutional flexibility to respond to changing demographic



CASE STUDY: TRANSPORT FOR LONDON AS A MODEL OF EFFECTIVE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION INTEGRATION

Created in 2000 as part of the Greater London Authority (GLA), Transport for London (TfL) is a [municipally-owned transport body that integrates all transport modes within one city](#). However, rather than approaching this huge task from the top down, TfL is decentralized, which means that decisions around local transportation planning and provisioning are made at the lowest appropriate level of governance. Chaired by the Mayor of London, TfL's administrative structure forces politicians to advance policies that improve transportation service for everyone. TfL's power to integrate all transport modes into one network allows it to plan for major issues like rapid urbanization.

and economic conditions. This would also free up resources to invest in and promote local public transportation networks, including new rail and bus stations, as well as public transportation information services that focus on regional connectivity.

Additional ITA benefits include the ability to advocate for regional (not just local) funding sources, developing a strategic role in transportation prioritization, integration, and investment. These coordinating powers help integrate transportation into the wider economic strategy of the region, linking transportation to housing, employment, alongside environmental, air quality, and health concerns.

An ITA would be funded via the same federal sources that currently support the TAs, combined transit fares, and local sales and use taxes. Legislative efforts should be undertaken to expand local tax commitments to regional fees or sales and use taxes to the ITA for more integrated regional planning. This recommendation may have to be administered through separate boards depending on the taxing authority structure.



C9. Increase the role of NCTCOG in regional decision making to expedite and optimize regional coordination

NCTCOG is a voluntary association of, by and for local governments, and was established to assist local governments in planning for common needs, cooperating for mutual benefit, and coordinating for sound regional development. However, regional decision-making on topics like TA membership, collaborative procurement, standardization of rolling stock and equipment, and payment and fare integration are left to the TAs.

Because the current TA membership structure obligates TAs to prioritize planning within their jurisdictions, opportunities for regional collaboration are often missed.

Increasing the role of NCTCOG in these types of decisions could expedite and optimize regional coordination, though would need to be handled carefully to ensure a clear delineation of responsibilities between NCTCOG and the TAs. Two potential options for this increased responsibility could be considered:

NCTCOG as Regional Manager: As a regional manager, NCTCOG would take on an official, direct, and formal responsibility in regional decision making. As a metropolitan areawide regional transit coordinator, NCTCOG could coordinate across TAs to ensure that schedules between modes are synchronized, long-range planning among the modes and TAs is coordinated, and that there is a single regionwide fare policy.

NCTCOG Engagement in Regional Management: This would involve an extension of NCTCOG’s administrative role to include supervision and oversight of regional decision

CASE STUDY: CHICAGO AUTHORITY CONSOLIDATION

In Chicago, legislators are currently considering the consolidation of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra, and Pace into a new transit authority, the Metropolitan Mobility Authority (MMA). Proponents of the plan argue that the three authorities have all operated in silos and regional connectivity is not maximized. Authority boards disagree, saying that operational inefficiencies are due to chronic under-funding, citing a misalignment between ridership and outdated formula funding levels. The NCTCOG region should watch Chicago closely in the coming months as this conversation advances.

BEST PRACTICES: CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSIT

Researchers at the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) examined the regional aspects of public transit for ten metropolitan areas in Europe, Australia, and Canada to identify the specific characteristics, policies, and practices that are associated with well patronized worldclass metropolitan transit systems. This analysis was conducted for an entire metropolitan area rather than focusing on individual agencies or modes. Researchers found that in all ten cases, the region had a metropolitan areawide regional transit coordinator which ensures that schedules between modes are synchronized, long-range planning among the modes is coordinated, and that there is a single regionwide fare policy. In most cases, like in the NCTCOG region, regional transit coordination evolved over a period of decades.



making. It would be less active than the Regional Manager role and would involve increasing the coordination activities that NCTCOG already provides to the region.

This recommendation is also included in the Task 3 report as it would support decision making around TA membership.

DRAFT



4. Next Steps

The Transit 2.0 team recommends that the TAs and NCTCOG continue to prioritize building habits of collaboration through the proposed O&M and collaborative fare strategies, all of which could be pursued and implemented without any organizational transformation. However, the scale at which regional collaboration impacts connectivity is significant, and NCTCOG should foster a conversation with the TAs around the proposed consolidation strategies that could result in more transformational regional collaboration. Basic buy-in already exists between DART and Trinity Metro regarding the creation of a regional rail authority, and synergies likely exist in other consolidation areas.

Strategy Strengths Matrix

The strategies proposed in this report were evaluated based on three criteria:

- Ability to improve the regional customer experience
- Ability to create operational efficiencies
- Ability to improve regional effectiveness

Alignment with each of these criteria was rated on a scale of low, medium, and high alignment, depicted graphically as:

- Low alignment: ○
- Medium alignment: ◐
- High alignment: ●

The strategy strengths matrix serves as an at-a-glance snapshot of the strategies proposed in this report and where they may have differing abilities to improve access to transit for non-member jurisdictions. It is not meant to be a prioritization tool, as the strategies proposed in this report require variable degrees of regional change to achieve. For example, coordinating regional safety and security efforts primarily requires a will among the TAs and jurisdictions to collaborate, while consolidating the three TAs into one regional authority would require completely reconceptualizing the way transit is provided.



Figure 2. Strategy Strengths Matrix for Task 4 Concept Strategies

		Improves Regional Customer Experience	Creates Operational Efficiencies	Improves Regional Effectiveness
O&M STRATEGIES				
O1. Traffic Signal Infrastructure	Improve traffic signal timing and infrastructure for transit prioritization	●	●	●
O2. Mobility Hubs	Strategically build and enhance mobility hubs	●	◐	◐
O3. Safety and Security	Coordinate regional safety and security efforts	●	◐	◐
O4. Bus Action Plan	Develop an integrated regional bus action plan	◐	●	●
O5. Collaborative Procurement	Identify opportunities for collaborative procurement across TAs	○	●	●
O6. Cross-TA Interlining	Plan and prioritize opportunities for cross-TA system networking and interlining	●	●	●
COLLABORATIVE FARE STRATEGIES				
F1. Mobility Wallet	Provide a regionally integrated customer-oriented payment experience through a mobility wallet	●	◐	●
F2. Fare Structure	Develop and implement a regionally-integrated fare structure	●	○	●
F3. Account-Based Ticketing	Offer account-based ticketing (ABT) on all modes of transportation	●	◐	◐
CONSOLIDATION STRATEGIES				
C1. Regional Rail Authority	Establish a regional rail authority	●	●	●
C2. Commuter Rail O&M Consolidation	Consolidate commuter rail O&M responsibilities	○	◐	◐
C3. Regional Vanpool	Establish an integrated, region-wide vanpool program	◐	●	●
C4. Regional Paratransit Dispatch	Establish an integrated, region-wide paratransit dispatch system	◐	●	◐
C5. Regional Microtransit Provider	Establish an integrated, region-wide microtransit contract	◐	●	◐
C6. Co-Mingle Paratransit and Microtransit	Co-mingle paratransit and microtransit under one regional provider	◐	●	●
C7. Region-Wide Multimodal Planning Authority	Evaluate potential transition to a region-wide authority with the mandate to establish regional multimodal priorities	◐	●	●
C8. Integrated Transportation Authority	Consolidate the three TAs into one regional Integrated Transportation Authority (ITA)	●	●	◐
C9. Increase NCTCOG Role	Increase the role of NCTCOG in regional decision making to expedite and optimize regional coordination	◐	●	●