

CHAPTER 10



PARKER AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES



INTRODUCTION

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

EXISTING TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

Parker County and Palo Pinto County are both served by Public Transit Services (PTS), which is the designated public transportation service for these two counties. PTS provides demand-response and has provided route services as needed throughout both counties. Their services are available to the general public but are heavily utilized by aging individuals and those with disabilities, as vehicles are all accessible per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and services are largely curbside-to-curb. Fares for the demand-response service are based on zones within a 5-mile radius in Palo Pinto and Parker counties, starting at \$2.00 a trip. PTS offers 50% discounted fares for Seniors 60 or older. Operating hours include Monday through Friday from 6:00am to 6:00pm throughout Parker and Palo Pinto counties.

In addition to other transportation options and services, Trinity Metro operates a commuter vanpool program within the North Central Texas region. As of May 2022, Trinity Metro operated up to 2 vanpools with origins in Palo Pinto County

and 5 vanpools with origins in Parker County. The number of vanpools may change month to month as the program expands offering shared commuter transportation opportunities.

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

Some agencies within these counties have developed plans which will likely shape the future of transit in Parker and Palo Pinto. Among these are the Parker County Thoroughfare Plan of 2020, the Weatherford Thoroughfare Plan of 2020 and the Mineral Wells Economic Development Plan of 2019. The Parker County Thoroughfare Plan states that Parker County's goals for the future of mobility include transit expansion, a more multimodal transportation environment, and increased connectivity. The Weatherford Thoroughfare Plan suggests the development of roadway connectivity will impact transit development into the future. Finally, the Mineral Wells Economic Development Plan indicates increased economic focus on transportation facilities, parking, and streets, which will likely impact roadway planning and on-demand transportation services in Mineral Wells. These plans show Parker and Palo Pinto's continued focus on roadway planning with some additional attention on multimodal transit planning in the area.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

U.S. Census demographic data in Parker and Palo Pinto counties were used to identify populations that may have high potential need for public transportation. Parker and Palo Pinto counties have each experienced some degree of growth over the course of the last few years, with Parker

County’s population growing by 10.2% since 2015 and Palo Pinto County growing slower with a 2.2% population growth since 2015, according to the American Community Survey’s (ACS) 2019 5-year estimates.

Parker County’s total population is made up of more than 133,800 individuals and more than 44,000 households according to the same ACS estimates. Of this total population, over 20,500 individuals are 65 years of age and older, making up 15.3% of the population. Over 16,000 individuals in Parker County have a disability, making up 12% of the population, and over 14,700 individuals are considered low-income, making up 11% of the population. Parker County also houses a relatively low percentage of zero-car households at just 2.6% of households.

Palo Pinto’s total population is made up of more than 28,500 individuals and more than 10,200 households according to the ACS 2019 5-year estimates. Of this total population, over 5,500 individuals are 65 years of age and older, making up 19.4% of the population. Over 5,000 individuals within Palo Pinto County have a disability, making up 17.6% of the population, and over 7,000 individuals are considered low-income, making up 25% of the population. Palo Pinto County also hosts a higher percentage of zero-car households at 6.3% of households.

Both Parker and Palo Pinto have very heavily White populations, with the White population making up 83.5% of Parker County and 75% of Palo Pinto County. There are Hispanic populations in each county, making up 12.3% of Parker County

Palo Pinto & Parker Counties Persons with Disabilities



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

and 19.9% of Palo Pinto County. The racial composition of each county then includes less than 3% of any other single racial group. Parker County includes 1.3% Black population, 0.9% total American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.6% Asian, 0.06% total Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 1.5% Some Other Race, and 2.4% total Two or More Races.

Palo Pinto County includes 2.5% Black population, 0.7% total American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.8% Asian, 0.1% total Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 2.8% Some Other Race, and 1.6% total Two or More Races. Parker and Palo Pinto counties both contain a portion of the population with limited English proficiency, making up 3.5% of the population of Parker County and 6.2% of the population of Palo Pinto.

PROCESS

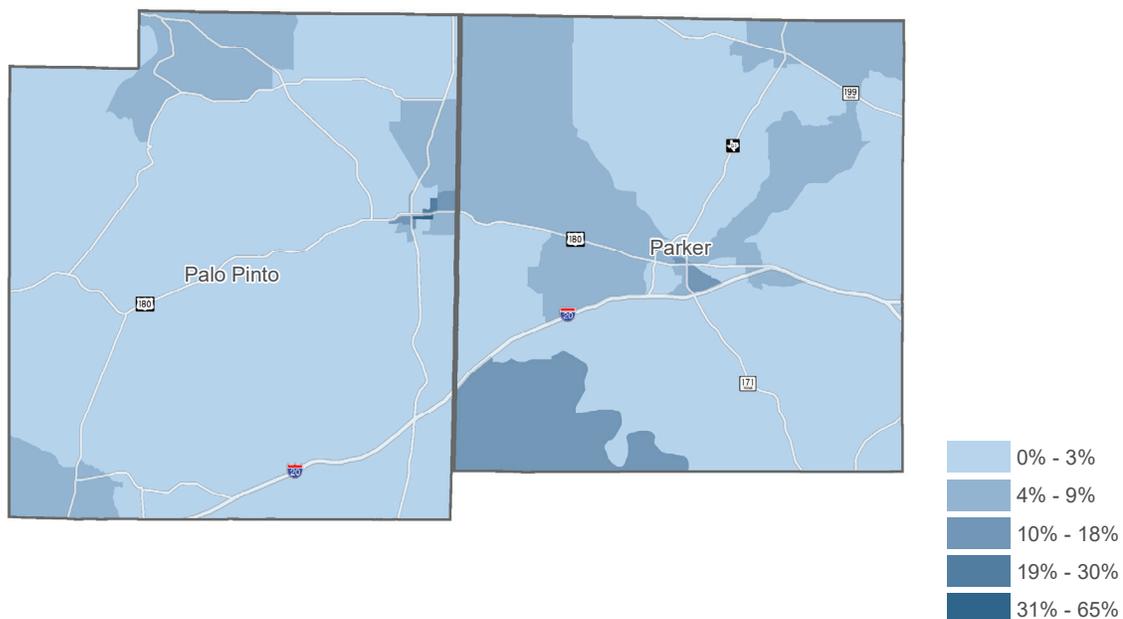
Outreach

Public outreach for Parker and Palo Pinto was conducted through a series of virtual public meetings, surveys, and public mapping data. Outreach efforts were advertised through email invitations, the Access North Texas website, NCTCOG’s Local Motion publication, a press release, and social media.

NCTCOG conducted virtual meetings and sent out 89 emails inviting Parker and Palo Pinto stakeholders and contacts to participate in public outreach efforts. Virtual public meetings saw 5 attendees including members of the public and representatives from local transit providers.

A transportation survey was also given to Parker and Palo Pinto County residents and stakeholders; made available online and translated into English and Spanish. Due to COVID-19 limitations, paper copies were available upon request or through

Palo Pinto & Parker Counties Zero-Car Households



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

transportation partners. The virtual public survey received 3 responses from Parker and Palo Pinto County residents and 2 responses from Parker and Palo Pinto stakeholders and organizations. The survey helped NCTCOG staff to collect first-hand data about public transportation in the region from riders and organizations that work with transit-dependent populations.

Data Sources

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

Discussions with Parker and Palo Pinto representatives highlighted a need for expanded transit services days and hours. While PTS operates on weekdays during business hours, many individuals in Parker and Palo Pinto would like to see weekend and after-hours services in the area. Some noted concerns with accessibility of vehicles, stating that even with accessible vehicles some seniors struggle to board or load their items for trips. Others indicated that it is sometimes difficult to travel with additional bags or groceries, noting that it is difficult or time-consuming to utilize baskets and totes.

Another common theme among discussion with those in Parker and Palo Pinto counties is that there are complications associated with driver shortages. Issues related to driver recruitment and retention impact the services that transportation agencies can provide for their service area; this impact is sometimes felt in their capacity to conduct trips.

Staff received 5 survey responses from Parker and Palo Pinto Counties including 3 responses from the public surveys and 2 responses from the agency survey. The survey revealed that among barriers to public transportation

experienced in these counties, the most common barriers to public transportation ridership include health concerns, disabilities, affordability of fares, and limited knowledge of transportation options.

When prompted to note the kinds of missed trips individuals were experiencing, 4 out of 5 respondents indicated that local riders are missing trips to medical appointments and an individual indicated that they are missing shopping trips. Respondents most frequently noted that their desired mode of transportation is fixed-route bus and expanded demand-response or on-demand services. Respondents noted that the enhancements they would like to see in Parker and Palo Pinto public transportation include expanded service areas, expanded service times, and increased frequency in transit services.

All information gained through outreach meetings and transportation survey was gathered to develop the prioritized strategies for Parker and Palo Pinto Counties.

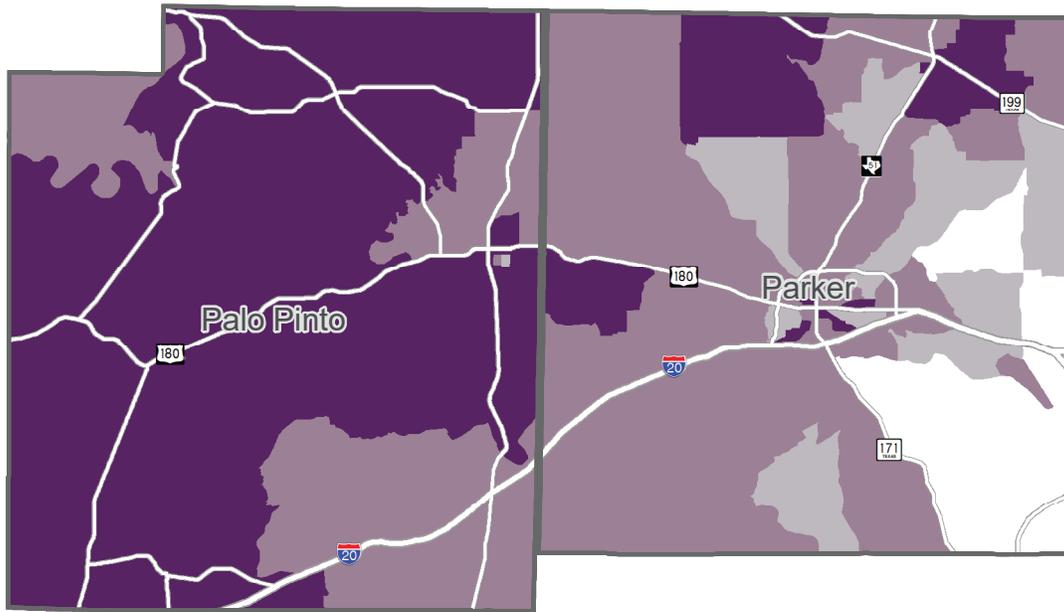
TAIT Tool and Environmental Justice

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) identifies communities who face transportation disadvantages and may have greater potential need for public transit. This tool is updated by NCTCOG and is based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Based on information from TAIT, in Parker and Palo Pinto Counties there are several census block groups where populations of individuals age 65 and over, below poverty, and with disabilities are above the regional percentages.

Analysis

The maps for Parker and Palo Pinto reveal that these counties contain several Census blocks wherein the proportion of populations of seniors, individuals with disabilities, and people below the poverty line is above the regional average. This is especially true in Palo Pinto County, the

Palo Pinto & Parker Counties Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)



Legend

- All Variables At or Below Regional Percentage
- One Variable Above Regional Percentage
- Two Variables Above Regional Percentage
- All Variables Above Regional Percentage

0 10 20 Miles



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

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

western of the two. The populations which fit this description are in western and central Palo Pinto County and in the western and northern portions of Parker County, near Weatherford and Springtown. These counties also host several Census block groups in which just two variables are above the regional average, making up the remaining portion of Palo Pinto County and the southwest portion of Parker County.

Development of Strategies

The prioritized strategies were developed once information from outreach meetings, the transportation poll, and research data was compiled and analyzed for patterns and gaps of service. Observations and recommendations were coded into 5 main categories to identify themes across the 16-county region and inform regional goals. Those goals provide a framework for the Access North Texas and individual strategies were identified for Parker and Palo Pinto Counties to further those goals and provide a plan for transit providers and organizations in future implementation of services. Drafted goals and strategies were provided to the stakeholders for additional feedback and review prior to the finalization of the plan.

FINDINGS

Outreach efforts within Parker and Palo Pinto revealed that the counties' residents would like to see expanded transit service times and weekend services. However, outreach also revealed that service limitations are likely tied to transit providers' limitations due to driver shortages. Additionally, outreach revealed that Parker and Palo Pinto residents are missing medical and shopping trips.

In Parker and Palo Pinto counties, 5 individuals completed the Access North Texas public survey. Among these 5 responses, 2 indicated desire for increased frequency, 3 indicated desire for expanded service areas, 2

indicated desire for expanded service times, and 1 indicated a desire for better connectivity to other counties. The survey revealed that Parker and Palo Pinto residents specifically requested better connectivity to Fort Worth, Azle, and Weatherford. Outreach efforts revealed that 4 respondents noted that they frequently missed medical trips, and 1 respondent indicated that they frequently had to miss shopping trips in Parker and Palo Pinto.

Parker and Palo Pinto residents and stakeholders are interested in seeing a more frequent transit service, that operates for longer hours, in expanded service areas throughout the counties. Respondents would like to have better access to destinations outside of county and municipal boundaries through the expansion of fixed-route bus and on-demand and demand-response solutions. Parker and Palo Pinto County residents would like better access to medical appointments and other destinations as well as easier access to information about the public transit options available for them to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Implementing the Plan

Transportation providers and partners may begin to implement some of these strategies in Parker and Palo Pinto Counties by working on driver recruitment and retention strategies, which could give the opportunity to expand transit service times or increase connectivity into other areas. Also, transportation providers and stakeholders

REGIONAL GOAL

PARKER AND PALO PINTO COUNTY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Plan and Develop Transportation Options by Assessing Community Need and Challenges

- A) Invest in programs that facilitate transportation trips to medical and healthcare appointments
- B) Launch a mobility toolbox to educate on and promote public transportation options such as fixed route, demand-respond, on-demand services, etc.

Implement Services by Enhancing Transportation Options and Expanding Where Service Gaps Exist

- A) Establish additional assistance or more specialized public transportation options for customers who are not ADA paratransit eligible or physically capable of utilizing regular public transportation services
- B) Expand service hours to support needs of low-income individuals in the service industry and outside traditional 9am-5pm jobs
- C) Expand public transportation services to key destinations throughout the region without comprehensive service and support regional integration of new services.

Coordinate with Transportation Providers, Public Agencies, and Stakeholders to Increase Efficiencies

- A) Develop partnerships across transportation providers to improve access to trips in the evening and weekends
- B) Create and support partnerships between public transit providers and local organizations to increase opportunities to make fares more affordable for those in need

Support Public Transportation Recovery and Growth

- A) Promote safe and healthy practices on public transportation services
- B) Advocate to integrate funding sources to maximize efficiency and increase availability of affordable public transportation options
- C) Establish driver recruitment and retention programs for public transportation services to address difficulties in retaining drivers

Promote Access and Information about Available Transportation Options

- A) Enhance communication and outreach programs to improve awareness of existing or new transportation options
- B) Conduct travel training to educate the public on available services and policies
- C) Partner with agencies, recreation centers, senior residencies, housing assisted living centers, and other organizations to publicize information

may desire to increase public awareness of transit services through travel training programs or marketing efforts in the area.

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

REFERENCE TO THE APPENDIX

For more detailed information about Parker and Palo Pinto Counties, please see Appendices A-E, available online at www.accessnorthtexas.org.

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

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

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

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

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