

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 Rockwall County. 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 Rockwall County.

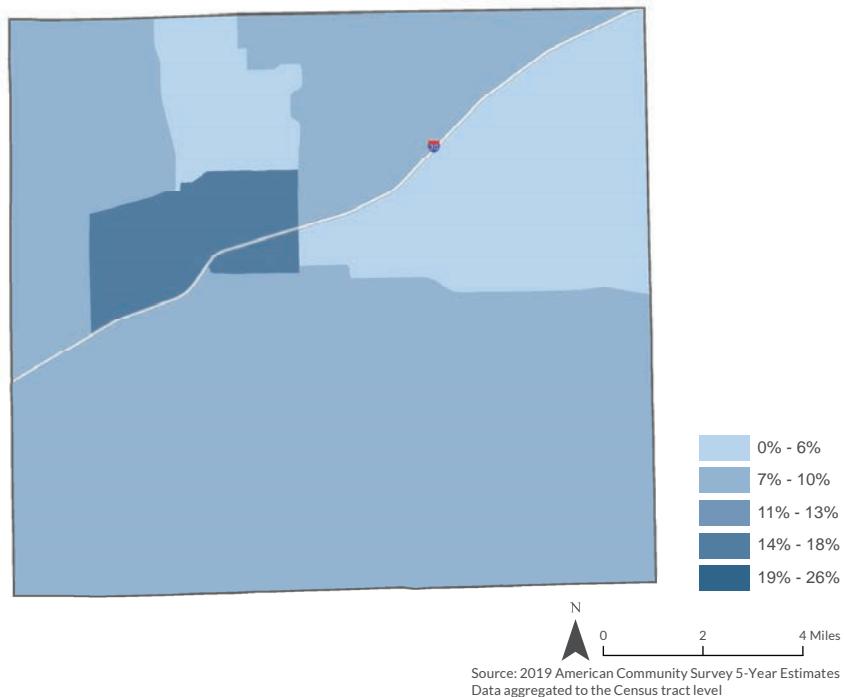
Existing Transportation Resources

STAR Transit is the main public transit provider in Rockwall County and offers a variety of services. Service to the general public is offered in and around Rockwall County. STAR also provides Medicaid transportation specifically in the cities of Fate, Glen Hill, Heath, McLendon-Chisholm,

Mobile City, Rockwall, and Royse City. These services are available in most areas from 6:00 am – 6:00 pm, Monday – Friday. Fares are based on distance and range from \$2 - \$12 for the general population and \$1 - \$6 for a reduced fare. Children 12 and under can ride for free with another paying adult rider. Client Advocates are available to riders who may need assistance while traveling to medical appointments and limited shopping trips. This is available at no additional cost. Tickets can be purchased online or in person at STAR Transit.

A small portion of western Rockwall County is also served by Dallas Area Rapid Transit's (DART's) Rowlett GoLink Zone. DART provides service in cities, such as Rowlett, who currently dedicate, or have plans to dedicate, a portion of sales tax to becoming a DART member city. The GoLink program provides on-demand service within designated zones throughout the DART service area. The Rowlett GoLink Zone operates from 5:00 a.m. – 8:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday and provides a connection to the DART Blue Line at Downtown Rowlett Station. GoLink one-way

Rockwall County Persons with Disabilities



fares are available for \$2.50, \$1.25 reduced, and can only be purchased on the GoPass app or by using the GoPass Tap Card. Cash can be added to the GoPass Tap Card in person at several retail locations such as participating 7-Eleven stores. Local and regional multi-trip passes can also be used for GoLink but only through contactless payment. GoLink vehicles do not accept cash fares, paper passes or vouchers.

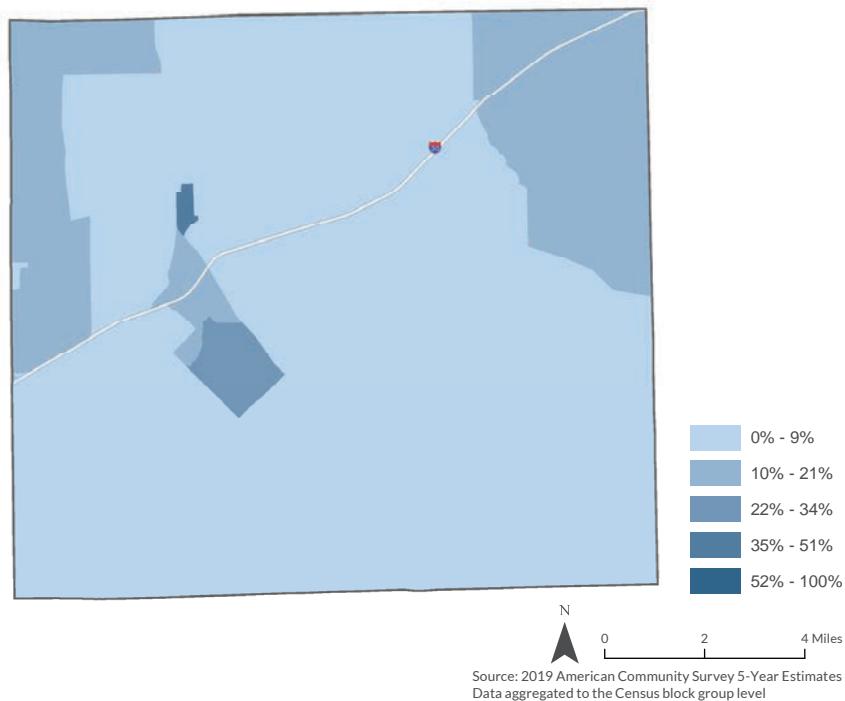
In addition to other transportation options and services, The Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) operates a commuter vanpool program within the North Central Texas region. As of May 2022, DCTA operated 1 vanpool with an origin in Rockwall County. The number of vanpools may change month to 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.

Naturally, gaps in service still exist in Rockwall County due to various factors, but efforts exist to address this. Several comprehensive plans have been completed in Rockwall County by local municipalities since the last plan update and many of these plans address public transportation, even if just minimally. The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) is currently preparing for a transit study that will cover East Dallas, Kaufman, and Rockwall counties. This study aims to develop a comprehensive public transportation plan for cities in Eastern Dallas County that are not members of DART, as well as Kaufman and Rockwall counties. Efforts will focus on strategic implementation and coordination with other planning efforts. The initial stakeholder meeting was held in February 2021 and the study is expected to kick off in Spring 2022.

Rockwall County Low-Income Individuals



DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Rockwall County continues to experience significant growth. According to the American Community Survey's 5-year estimates, Rockwall County's population increased by 13.6% between 2015 and 2019. This puts it in the top 3 counties in our region for population growth by percentage over that period. Rockwall County's population is expected to reach just over 181,000 by 2045. According to those same estimates, the county currently has just over 97,000 people and over 33,000 households. 11,754 of these people are 65 years of age or older, making up 12% of the population, which is slightly higher than the percentage for the region. Rockwall County also includes 7,671 individuals with disabilities who make up almost 8% of the population, as well as 6,537 low-income individuals who make up 6.8% of the population. Individuals with disabilities, individuals over 65, and low-income individuals exist at a higher concentration than the overall county percentage in the northwestern portion of the county, above the I-30 line and east of Lake Ray

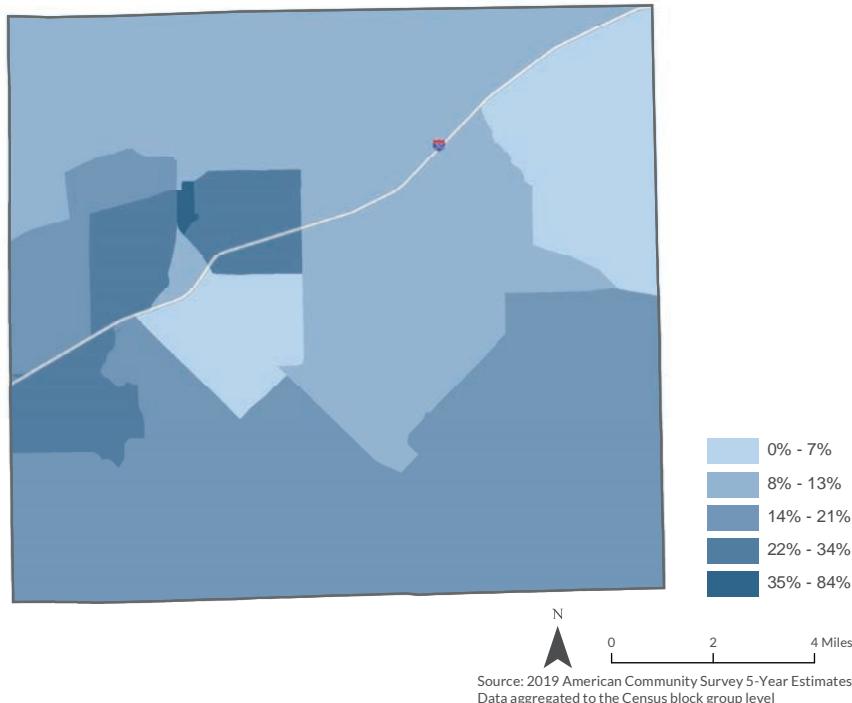
Hubbard (see maps below). This hotspot should be a particular priority in efforts to promote existing or new transit services.

Rockwall County's racial composition is majority White at almost 85%. This is 16% higher than the regional percentage. Similarly, the county's ethnic breakdown shows that it has a lower percentage of individuals with Hispanic or Latino origin at just 17% compared to 28% in the rest of the region. At 2.2%, zero-car households are slightly higher but still comparable to the regional percentages. The percentage of individuals with limited English proficiency is much lower than the regional percentage, at 4.9%. However, Rockwall County has almost double the percentage of veteran individuals than the region at 8.2% (see figure below). Veterans should also be a priority population to reach when promoting new or existing services.

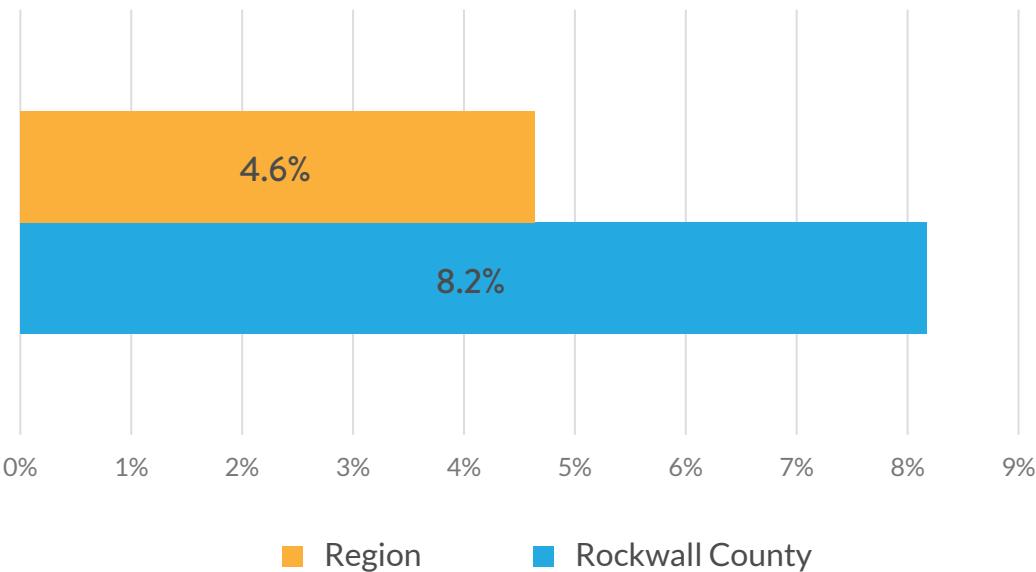
OUTREACH PROCESS

Public outreach for Rockwall County was conducted through a series of virtual public

Rockwall County Population Over 65



Rockwall Veteran Population Compared to Regional Percentage



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 a total of two virtual outreach meetings in Rockwall County. Email invitations were successfully shared with 47 stakeholders. 7 individuals registered for these meetings and 5 attended. Attendees included members of the public as well as representatives from local transit providers and non-profit agencies.

A transportation survey was also available to residents and stakeholders, online and in paper and in English or Spanish. This survey collected input on public transportation in the region. A similar survey was also available online for organizations and agencies that work with transit-dependent populations. In total, 4 responses were received for Rockwall County. Of these, 2 were received from Rockwall County residents

and 2 were received from agency/organization representatives.

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 main concerns about transit access in their area.

Discussions with Rockwall County residents and stakeholders highlighted several key concerns. Riders feel that limited-service times and lack of weekend service is a considerable barrier. Additionally, connections are needed to regional destinations and major events. One attendee even mentioned wanting better connections to DART light rail. Some felt that knowledge of available transit options, or lack thereof, created another barrier.

Meeting attendees shared that STAR has made multiple enhancements recently to address some of these issues. The fare structure was recently

adjusted to be mileage based with the intent of improving trips outside of the county. STAR also added discounts on bulk tickets as well as passes for veterans. They implemented day and month pass options and generally continue to work to make service more affordable. Finally, additional on-demand zones will be added by STAR in the near future that may benefit Rockwall residents. From the agency perspective, one need shared was the ability to transport more people to medical destinations, particularly in Dallas.

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

Responses to the transportation surveys totaled 4 for Rockwall County. Of these, 2 were received from Rockwall County residents and 2 were received from agency/organization representatives. The top 3 reported barriers were lack of car ownership or someone to drive them, lack of knowledge of transit options, and service not being available at desired locations. Most of these responses aligned with the feedback received in outreach meetings. Despite lack of car ownership being a popular response, Rockwall County has a relatively low percentage of zero-car households, as seen in the demographic analysis. One respondent highlighted that additional buy-in is needed from elected officials in the county and that services should be offered to more than just the elderly populations. Another echoed the need for expanded service hours and connections

to destinations outside the county. Although the DART GoLink Rowlett Zone provides connection to the rest of the DART network through the blue line, only a very small portion of this zone serves Rockwall County. Expanded service either from STAR or DART is needed to provide meaningful connections. All information gained through outreach meetings and transportation surveys was gathered to develop the prioritized strategies for Rockwall County.

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 Rockwall County there are several census block groups where populations of individuals aged 65 and over, below poverty, and with disabilities are above the regional percentages.

Development of Strategies

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

REGIONAL GOAL

ROCKWALL 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

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

- A) Improve existing public transportation options to better fit the needs of riders and households with 1 or zero cars by increasing service frequency and availability
- B) Expand public transportation services to key destinations throughout the region without comprehensive service and support regional integration of new services.
- C) 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.

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

- A) Work with regional and local organizations to increase ease of travel across municipal and county boundaries
- B) Develop partnerships across transportation providers to improve access to trips in the evening and weekends

Support Public Transportation Recovery and Growth

- A) Promote safe and healthy practices on public transportation services

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

FINDINGS

All Rockwall respondents to the Access North Texas survey indicated some type of barrier preventing them from getting where they need to go. Those that completed the survey mentioned lack of access to a vehicle to be a large barrier, and this was confirmed by participants in the virtual outreach meetings. Across the board, feedback from both the survey and meetings showed that riders are looking for expansion of service to new locations and new times. Many want to be connected to destinations across the region and several respondents specifically mentioned the need for connections to Dallas for medical trips. On-demand service is the most desired mode and riders would prefer the flexibility to schedule less than 1 or 2 days in advance. Finally, individuals in Rockwall County could benefit from better information about how to use transit and the available options, as this was seen as a barrier to use of the current options.

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

STAR Transit recently made several changes that relate to the identified strategies. The provider recently adjusted its fare structure to a mileage basis to help improve trips outside of the county. The agency recently added discounts on bulk tickets and tickets for veterans. STAR is also planning to launch additional on-demand zones in the future with the possibility of expanding service in Rockwall County.

While NCTCOG's East Dallas, Kaufman, and Rockwall Counties Transit Study has not officially commenced, the study will focus on coordination with other planning efforts to identify transit options, implementation strategies, potential impacts, and more. The information developed in this plan will help to inform that study.

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 Rockwall County, please see Appendices A-E, available online at www.accessnorthtexas.org.

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

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

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

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

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