

HUNT COUNTY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Access North Texas is to improve public transportation for older adults, 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 Hunt County. This chapter will give an overview of the planning process, research conducted and collected, the public outreach meeting, the transportation poll used to collect personal input on public transit needs, and the prioritized strategies for Hunt County.

PROCESS

This plan is required by federal guidance to be updated every four years. The plan must be developed and approved through a process that included participation by seniors; individuals with disabilities; representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation; human services providers and other members of the public. The plan is updated to address current public transportation needs of the residents of Hunt County. Through the process and methods described, prioritized strategies were developed so that future public transportation projects can be implemented when federal and state funding becomes available. Two different types of research were conducted during this plan update: data-based and people-based.

Data-based research included obtaining, reviewing, and analyzing Census data; using Census data to develop a mapping tool to identify locations where transit-dependent individuals may live; and identi-

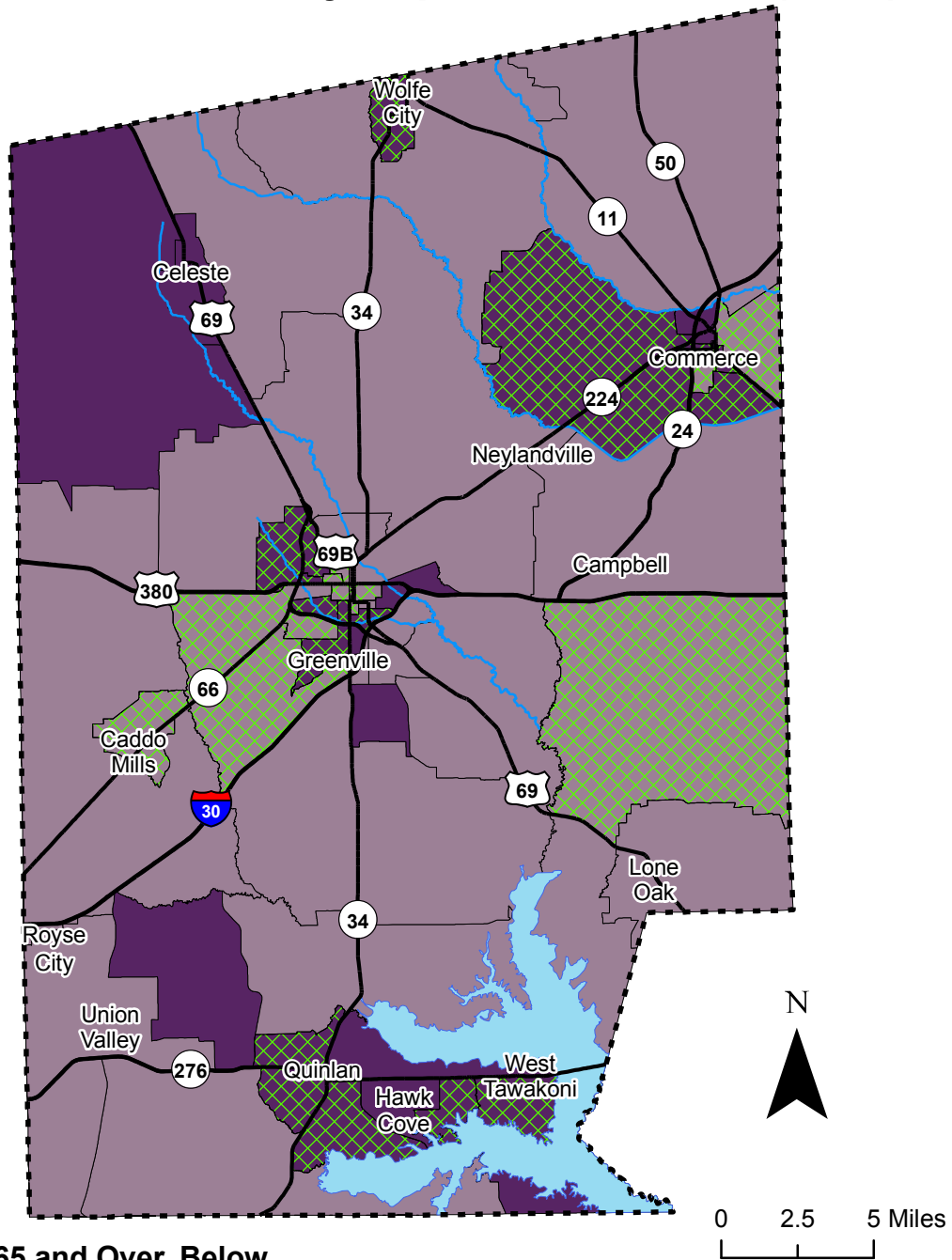
fying existing public transportation providers. The people-based research included reaching out to communities, organizations, and individuals to obtain feedback about the existing public transportation system and how it could be improved. Feedback was obtained through a public outreach meeting and a transportation poll. Through an interactive process, stakeholders prioritized concerns about transit access.

RESEARCH






The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)

The TAIT was developed to identify locations with certain demographic factors that may indicate a greater need for public transportation. The populations of individuals over age 65, residents below the poverty line, and persons with disabilities were each compared to the regional percentage of the population in that demographic. A map was created based on areas that were above the regional percentage in zero, one, two, or all three of the demographic categories. The more categories that an area is deemed above the regional percentage, the more likely it is that area is to need transit. Zero car households was provided as a supplemental layer to identify households above the regional percentage that do not having a working vehicle available. The tool is useful in identifying groups of people who could benefit from transit services, but is not intended to be the deciding factor in decisions regarding public transportation.

Hunt County Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)



Variables: Age 65 and Over, Below Poverty, and Persons with Disabilities

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

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

Source: 2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



In Hunt County, there are census block groups where the populations of individuals age 65 and over, below the poverty line, and with disabilities are all above the regional percentages. The areas with all three variables are dispersed throughout the county, mainly around incorporated cities and towns rather than more rural areas, including west of US 69 in Celeste, Wolfe City, Commerce, along SH 34 in Greenville, and along the SH 279 corridor that runs through the cities of Quinlan, Hawk Cove, and West Tawakoni. The remainder of the county has two of the three variables above the regional percentage. All census block groups except for the block groups north of Caddo Mills between SH 66 and US 380, one north of Greenville between US Business 69 and SH 34, and one east of SH 50 in Commerce have persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities as the two variables above the regional percentage. The census block groups listed previously are above the regional percentage in persons below the poverty line and persons with disabilities. There are no census block groups in the county with zero or one variable above the regional percentage. Zero car households above the regional percentage are in Wolfe City, Commerce, mostly west of SH 34 in Greenville, and along the SH 276 corridor in Quinlan and West Tawakoni. There is also a rural census block south of US 380 and east of US 69 above the regional percentage for zero car households. All of Hunt County has a higher proportion of persons with a disability than the 16-county region. Additionally, the highest proportions of persons with disabilities live within Greenville and Commerce.

Additional Demographic and Commuter Information

Hunt County continues to experience a steady amount of growth. According to the American Community Survey's 2015 5-year estimates, since the 2010 Census, Hunt County's U.S. Census' population has increased by 2.2%. In comparison, the 16-county region has grown 6.3% in that same time period. Public transportation needs will change as the population grows. Within Hunt County, 5.4% of residents speak

English less than very well. Efforts to promote existing or new transit services should include strategies to reach this population.

According to U.S. Census employer information as of 2014, Hunt County is home to approximately 26,000 jobs, with 11,500 of those workers living within the county. Around 14,500 commuters enter Hunt County for work, while almost 22,000 leave the county for work. Around one-third of workers in Hunt County live within ten miles of their jobs, with the majority of commuters entering the county from the west and southwest. The economy is not overly diverse in Hunt County, with nearly 25% of jobs in the county in construction alone. The county's workforce is fairly well educated, with about 45% of the workforce having some college experience or a degree.

Transportation Resources

The main public transportation provider in Hunt County is The Connection, operated by Senior Center Resources and Public Transit, which serves the general public, including older adults and individuals with disabilities. The Connection operates a commuter route connecting Greenville to Dallas Area Rapid Transit's light rail system at Downtown Rowlett Station, which is the terminus of the Blue Line. This service provides a regional transportation link to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) also operates vanpools in Hunt County, with 13 vanpools going to Hunt County as their destination. Texas A&M University – Commerce also operates two shuttle routes (known as Pride Ride) to help students, faculty and staff get around campus.

See Appendix B4, Private Carriers 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), or organizations can contract with to provide specific service for clients.

OUTREACH MEETING

A public meeting for Hunt County took place at

Senior Center Resources and Public Transit in Greenville on September 20, 2016. 106 invitations were mailed and emailed to interested parties throughout the county. Meeting announcements and information were also posted online, and invitees were encouraged to share the invitation with partner organizations and clients to help promote the meetings. A total of 24 people attended the meeting.

Following a general welcome and presentation about public transit within the county, staff led an interactive keypad polling session to instigate discussion of transportation issues with attendees. Based on discussion question answers, community members prioritized current issues in the county and re-prioritized strategies from the 2013 Access North Texas Plan.

Comments and discussion during the Hunt County outreach meeting identified that many community members were not aware of the available public transportation options. For individuals that do know about The Connection, there is still confusion about how to use the service, cost of the trip, and how to schedule a trip in order to arrive to an appointment on time. Attendees also noted that regional connections to Dallas County and Denton County for medical appointments and work opportunities were difficult. The service connecting Greenville to the Downtown Rowlett Station was not operating at the time of the outreach meeting, but started in October of 2016.

TRANSPORTATION POLL

A transportation poll was also available to residents and stakeholders, online and in paper, and available in English and Spanish. The poll collected first-hand data about public transportation in the region from riders and organizations that work with transit-dependent populations. Individual poll data revealed personal experiences with transportation. Polls completed by organizations on behalf of their clients explained issues seen by advocates of the people served by each organization. Both forms of the poll provide personal views of the public transportation system.

In Hunt County, four residents submitted responses to the transportation poll. The average age of the respondents is 49, with the youngest 22 and the oldest 67. Three of the four respondents said they drive themselves, and two stated they get a ride with a friend or family member for their transportation needs. Three of the four respondents cited they had not missed any trips in the previous six months, with one respondent missing religious activities, social or entertainment events, and shopping trips. The one respondent who missed trips noted they do not have a car available for use and that public transportation does not meet their needs. Two respondents would be interested in both local bus service and community wide dial-a-ride services.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The strategies below identify ways to address the most important public transportation needs stakeholders thought should be implemented over the next few years. These strategies build upon the progress that has taken place since the 2013 Access North Texas plan and should be referenced when state and federal funds for public transportation become available.

Hunt County Prioritized Strategies

Hunt Strategy 1 Improve awareness of available public transportation services and how to use them

Hunt Strategy 2 Create and maintain a coordinating committee to discuss ongoing transportation needs

Hunt Strategy 3 Improve regional connections to Dallas County and Collin County, particularly for medical appointments and work opportunities

Hunt Strategy 4 Continue to explore partnerships with nonprofits, private companies, and others to increase service within the county

Hunt Strategy 5 Reduce scheduling pick-up windows

Regional Strategies for Coordinated Public Transportation

Much like the county strategies, the regional strategies

may also be applicable to Hunt County.

Regional Strategy 1 In areas with no public transit service, assess community needs and implement transit

Regional Strategy 2 Continue and expand projects that have a no-wrong-door approach to accessing transit or information about available transit

Regional Strategy 3 Create partnerships to simplify regional trips and reduce the number of transfers between providers

Regional Strategy 4 Explore partnerships to increase the affordability of fares for those most in need

Regional Strategy 5 Work towards uniform, regional fares to simplify and reduce the cost of regional trips for riders

Regional Strategy 6 Advocate to integrate funding sources to maximize efficiency and increase available affordable public transportation

Regional Strategy 7 Identify, evaluate, and implement where appropriate non-traditional ways to deliver public transportation service, including partnerships among public transit agencies, private transportation providers, and transportation network companies

Regional Strategy 8 Identify, recruit, educate, and support influential champions for public transportation (elected officials, community leaders, or business leaders) to promote and support public transit through leadership or policy initiatives and to advocate for increasing investment in public transit

Implementing the Plan

Transportation providers and local stakeholders will collaborate to determine next steps, form needed partnerships, identify and pursue funding, and ultimately implement selected strategies. Organizations that want to implement a strategy listed in this plan will need to develop strong partnerships with transportation providers, stakeholder agencies, communities, and counties. NCTCOG staff is available to help organizations identify potential partners and coordination opportunities. Organizations should also identify potential funding sources, which can be a mix of

private and public funds, including funds from local, state, and federal sources. Local funds from public and private sources are important to demonstrate a community or organizational commitment to implementing specific strategies. Local funds are especially important to leverage state and federal dollars. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and NCTCOG have regular calls for projects to award federal funds that support projects and strategies listed in this plan.

Characteristics of a highly competitive project:

- Is multi-year. A three year request is recommended for projects providing transit service;
- Identifies an existing public transit provider or existing non-profit transportation provider when proposing to provide transit service;
- Targets individuals with lower incomes for requests of Urbanized Area Formula Program (Job Access/Reverse Commute projects) funds;
- Targets older adults and individuals with disabilities for requests of Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program funds; and
- Supports one or more strategies outlined in this plan.

If a project is funded through NCTCOG or TxDOT, staff will document the project funding in the Transportation Improvement Program, coordinate necessary approvals, develop contract agreements, and work with implementing agencies to manage the project and all compliance activities associated with federal or state funding.

APPENDIX

For more detailed information about Hunt County, please see Appendix C-Hunt, available online at www.accessnorthtexas.org. The Public Transportation Toolbox (see Appendix B-3) highlights transit services that can be implemented in the near term to meet specific

needs within Hunt County.

See Appendix B-4, Private Carriers 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), or organizations can contract with to provide specific service for clients.

See Appendix B-5, Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool, for additional information on how the tool was developed.

See Appendix B-6, Transportation Poll, for more information about the transportation poll.