

ELLIS 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 Ellis 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 Ellis 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 Ellis 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

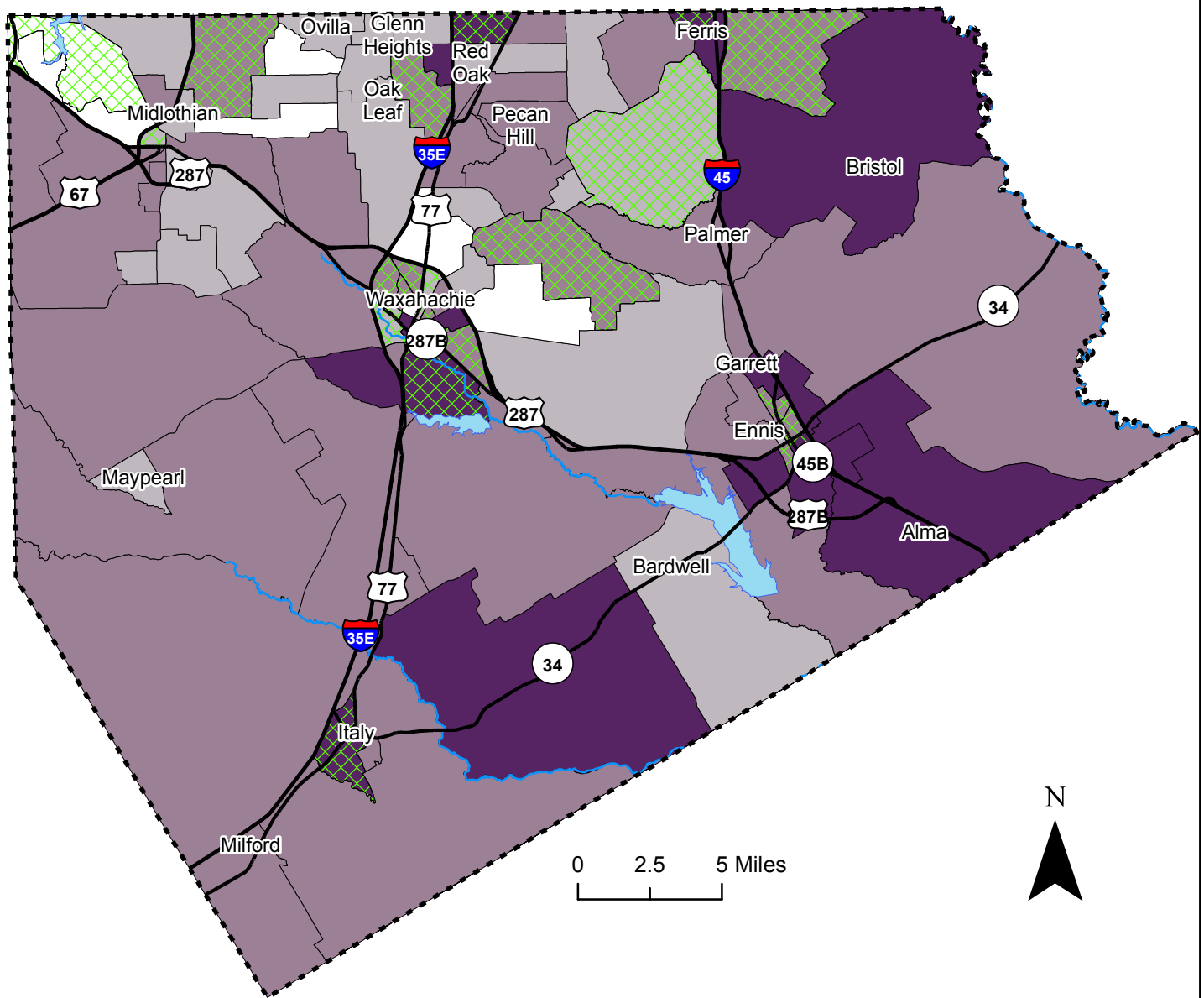
transit-dependent individuals may live; and identifying existing public transportation providers. The people-based research included reaching out to communities, organizations, and individuals to obtain feedback about the existing public transportation system and how it could be improved. Feedback was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

Ellis 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



North Central Texas
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In Ellis 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 percentage. Census block groups where all three variables are above the regional percentage are in Italy, the rural area along SH 34 east of Italy, Ennis, Alma, Bristol, block groups along Business 287 in Waxahachie, Ferris, and along 135E in Red Oak. The vast majority of the census block groups with two variables that exceed the regional percentage have populations of individuals age 65 and over and persons with disabilities that are above the regional percentage. The census block group directly to the north of Maypearl, northeast of Bardwell along SH 34, and the block containing the Pecan Hill label are the only block groups that are different, with the two variables above the regional percentage being persons below the poverty line and persons with disabilities. All census block groups with only one variable above the regional percentage, except the block group directly west of Garrett, contain a higher percentage of either persons age 65 and over or persons with disabilities. The block group directly west of Garrett is the only block where the single variable is persons below the poverty line. Census block groups at or below the regional percentage for all three categories are located north and east of Waxahachie along US 287 and in northwest Ellis County along US 287. Areas where households without cars above the regional percentage are most prevalent in Italy and Waxahachie, as well as much of northern Ellis County.

Additional Demographic and Commuter Information

Ellis County continues to experience steady growth. According to the American Community Survey's 2015 5-year estimates, since the 2010 Census, Ellis County's population has increased by 5%. In comparison, the 16-county region has grown 6.3% in that same time period. Public transportation needs will change as the population grows. Additionally, within Ellis County, 8.5% of residents speak English less than very well and information about available transit services

may be difficult for these individuals to access if it is provided only in English.

According to U.S. Census employer information as of 2014, Ellis County had just over 42,000 jobs, with 19,000 of these employees living within the county. Around 23,000 commuters enter the county each day for work, while approximately 52,000 workers leave the county. Just over one-third of workers in Ellis County lived within 10 miles of their jobs, with the majority of commuters coming from the north and west. The economy is somewhat diverse in Ellis County, with the manufacturing industry being the largest employer in the county with nearly one-quarter of all jobs. The workforce is fairly well educated, with around four in ten having some college education or a degree.

Transportation Resources

Community Transit Services (CTS) and STAR Transit provide demand response public transportation in Ellis County. CTS is the primary general public transportation provider and serves all of Ellis County. STAR Transit provides some transportation in Ellis County including Medicaid transportation and contracted service for older adults who have doctor's appointments in Dallas County. The closest fixed-route transit service to Ellis County is an express bus operated by DART that links Glenn Heights park and ride, just across the county line, with downtown Dallas. Commuter vanpools are another option in Ellis County through DART and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority (FWTA). In total, 15 vanpools originate in Ellis County, with 1 vanpool traveling to Ellis County.

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 joint public meeting for Ellis County and Navarro

County took place at Navarro College in Waxahachie on November 9, 2016. 174 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 identified that Ellis County currently does not have enough public transportation to meet the existing needs. Furthermore, many residents (including veterans) do not know about the existing public transportation resources. Attendees noted that trips to Dallas for medical appointments, trips to work, and education opportunities are the highest transit needs within Ellis County. Access to employment for individuals working the third shift is especially difficult since there isn't any public transportation provided during these hours. Lastly, attendees noted that trips into Dallas-Fort Worth (or even within the county) can be cost prohibitive for riders with limited incomes.

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. Respon-

dents totaled 22 from Ellis County.

41% of individuals indicated that they get a ride with a friend or family member while 55% of respondents said they use a bus or van of a community organization or other agency. Only 32% indicated they use existing public transit. The transportation services that sounded most appealing to poll takers were local bus service and community-wide dial-a-ride service. Poll responders identified that the available level of transportation isn't meeting the need. Additional capacity is needed as well as better internal connections to Midlothian, Ennis and Waxahachie. Transit service on Saturday evenings and Sundays would improve quality of life. Improved regional connections to Dallas County and Tarrant County are also needed.

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.

Ellis County Prioritized Strategies

Ellis Strategy 1 Improve local and regional access to medical appointments in Dallas County

Ellis Strategy 2 Improve transportation options for local access to job and education opportunities

Ellis Strategy 3 Explore partnerships to increase the affordability of fares for those most in need

Ellis Strategy 4 Expand transportation services to provide service for late-shift workers

Ellis Strategy 5 Explore partnerships with local employers, medical centers, cities, and other agencies to fund additional transit services

Ellis Strategy 6 Conduct targeted marketing to local agencies about existing transportation resources, including transit resources for veterans

Ellis Strategy 7 Work with 2-1-1 at least twice a year

to ensure public transportation resources are up-to-date

Ellis Strategy 8 Create and maintain a coordinating committee to discuss ongoing transportation needs

Ellis Strategy 9 Explore partnerships with existing transportation providers to reduce the number of transfers for regional trips

Ellis Strategy 10 Establish consistent and effective driver recruitment and retention programs for public transportation services to address difficulties in retaining drivers in Ellis County

Regional Strategies for Coordinated Public Transportation

Much like the county strategies, the regional strategies may also be applicable to Ellis 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 Ellis County, please see Appendix C-Ellis, 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 Ellis 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.