

EAST TEXAS REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION PLAN



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PREAMBLE

The Steering Committee hopes and trusts that whatever entity may be determined by law or rule to carry into execution the East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan, said entity shall be as diverse as the original Steering Committee and this entity shall be designated in a timely manner.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document addresses Chapter 461 of HB 3588, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2003, requiring that State Planning Regions prepare regional coordination plans to be submitted to the Texas Transportation Commission by December 2006. The East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan (the Plan) is the regional coordination plan for State Planning Region 6, which encompasses 14 counties in East Texas, including Anderson, Camp, Cherokee, Gregg, Harrison, Henderson, Marion, Panola, Rains, Rusk, Smith, Upshur, Van Zandt, and Wood counties.

Section I of the Plan provides an overview of HB 3588 and the purpose and need for the Plan. The purpose and need is based on the existence of a large population of people in East Texas who depend on a “comprehensive, flexible, and sustainable public transportation service” to maintain their quality of life. The purpose of the Plan is to identify a set of concrete actions and projects that will fulfill the mission of the Steering Committee by creating a framework to implement the six priorities officially adopted by the Steering Committee:

1. People first, barrier free
2. Multi-modal interconnectivity across the region
3. Aggressive outreach and education to a broad base
4. Increased and flexible funding
5. Increased and expanded services
6. Emergency planning and homeland security

Section II of the Plan provides background information on the East Texas region, and a history of coordination activities. The background information focuses on the geography, demographic data, and public transportation providers in East Texas, while the history of coordination activities describes both past and present coordination.

Section III describes the plan development process, including planning activities that occurred prior to the organization of the Steering Committee in 2005. It then focuses on the process that has taken place to develop the Plan, including a description of the Steering Committee and consultants and their roles in the process. A summary of the other agencies that have participated in the development of the Plan is also included in this section of the document. Section III ends with a summary of public involvement activities, including a survey of agencies conducted by the East Texas Center for Independent Living, public meetings that took place in 2000 and 2001, agency and stakeholder meetings held in 2005, and the public involvement process associated with the development of the Plan. This process included monthly Steering Committee Meetings, a presentation by Ron Baumgart, Director of the Dakota Transit Association, a series of five public workshops, and an agency survey.

Section IV addresses the objectives and goals of the Plan, focusing on the six priorities identified by the Steering Committee.

Section V includes subsections detailing the determination of needs, barriers and constraints, projects, and the evaluation process. The determination of needs summarizes information obtained from public involvement, available demographic data, discussions with stakeholders, and documentation from previous planning efforts. A Technical Memorandum on Transportation Needs was submitted to the Steering Committee in October 2006.

The Barriers and Constraints section of the Plan explains the differences between barriers and constraints and focuses on specific barriers in East Texas that were identified through the planning process. The Steering Committee submitted a Technical Memorandum on Barriers and Constraints to the State in October 2006.

The purpose of the Plan was to identify a set of concrete coordination projects to implement. The Steering Committee identified a total of fifteen separate projects in Section V.C. They are listed below.

1. Centralize vehicle maintenance for small providers.
2. Bring all transit stops, train station platforms and approaching sidewalks up to compliance with ADA and TAS standards.
3. Establish transit centers to facilitate transfers among transit routes, especially between rural and urban service routes.
4. Establish a local vehicle sharing program.
5. Conduct targeted education and outreach to promote transit use.
6. Conduct a training program for HHS agency staff about regional transit services available for their clients.
7. Design, construct and implement a centralized call center, dispatching operation and information line or a phone routing system (bilingual and accessible).
8. Establish volunteer programs to assist with transportation needs.
9. Optimize use of Amtrak, Greyhound and Lone Star Coach.
10. Provide business-sponsored shopping day and special event transit service.
11. Conduct feasibility studies of specific new expanded transit services
12. Seek foundation grants to fund service expansion or vehicle purchases.
13. Prepare a regional application for JARC and New Freedom funding.
14. Implement an interagency automated fare card system.
15. Create efficiencies by identifying and eliminating duplication of services where possible.

Section V.D. summarizes the process that was used to evaluate each project. A Technical Memorandum on the evaluation process was submitted to the Steering Committee in October 2006. This section of the plan explains the criteria that were

used to evaluate each proposed project, as well as a matrix that was utilized as part of the evaluation process.

Section VI of the plan addresses the Implementation Plan, with subsections addressing the role of the State, governments and organizations in East Texas, and the Steering Committee in implementing the Plan. This section focuses on three key elements to successful implementation: cooperation, coordination, and consolidation. Section VI also includes an implementation schedule and a summary of the coordination plan's relationship to federal planning requirements.

I. INTRODUCTION

I.A. Review of HB 3588

A reliable and comprehensive public transportation network is vital to the residents of Texas, especially those who have no other means of transportation. To ensure that available transportation resources are utilized as efficiently as possible, the Texas Legislature passed HB 3588 in 2003, which amended the Texas Transportation Code to add Chapter 461 – Statewide Coordination of Public Transportation. Its overall purpose is to maximize transportation resources by coordinating services. The intent of coordination is to eliminate waste, generate increased efficiencies, and further the state's efforts to reduce air pollution (Texas Statutes Transportation Code, 2006).

The Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) assigned development of regional transit coordination plans in compliance with Chapter 461 to the Regional Planning and Public Transportation Study Group (Study Group). The Study Group concluded that each region in the state, as defined by TxDOT Transit Region boundaries, should develop a regional coordination plan to present to the TTC in December 2006.

The East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Planning Steering Committee (Steering Committee) was formed in 2005 to implement Chapter 461 of HB 3588. The mission of the Steering Committee is to create and connect a comprehensive, flexible, and sustainable public transportation service throughout and beyond the 14 counties of State Planning Region 6.

I.B. Purpose and Need

The East Texas Transportation Planning Steering Committee (Steering Committee) was formed in June 2005 as the vehicle for implementing the goals of Chapter 461 of HB 3588. Following its creation, the Steering Committee identified its mission “to create and connect a comprehensive, flexible, and sustainable public transportation service throughout and beyond the 14 counties of State Planning Region 6,” hereafter referred to as East Texas. East Texas covers an area of approximately 10,000 square miles, with a population approaching 800,000 people in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

The need for coordination among the numerous health and human service agencies and public and private transportation providers in East Texas derives from the varied needs of the people they serve. The public and stakeholder involvement undertaken in association with the preparation of the Transportation Coordination Plan (the Plan) has identified numerous areas of need related to the provision of public transportation in East Texas.

The purpose of the Plan is to identify the needs of health and human service agencies, public and private transportation providers, and the public so that the utilization of available resources is as efficient as possible. The Plan is also intended to identify a set of concrete actions and projects that will fulfill the mission of the Steering Committee by creating a framework to implement the six priorities officially adopted by the Steering Committee. These priorities are listed below.

1. People first, barrier free
2. Multi-modal interconnectivity across the region
3. Aggressive outreach and education to a broad base
4. Increased and flexible funding
5. Increased and expanded services
6. Emergency planning and homeland security

II. BACKGROUND

II.A. Regional Description

II.A.1. Geography

The East Texas region includes 14 counties: Anderson, Camp, Cherokee, Gregg, Harrison, Henderson, Marion, Panola, Rains, Rusk, Smith, Upshur, Van Zandt, and Wood County and covers an area of approximately 10,000 square miles. There are two standard metropolitan statistical areas within the region – Tyler, located in Smith County, and Longview, located in Gregg, Rusk, and Upshur Counties. **Figure 1** on the next page provides a map of the East Texas Region.

II.A.2. Demographics

According to the 2000 census, the 14 East Texas counties had a total population of 745,180 persons in the year 2000. By January 2005, the Texas State Data Center (TSDC) estimated that the population in East Texas increased by 4.9 percent, to a total of 781,684 persons (TSDC, 2005). Almost half of the region's population was concentrated in the Tyler and Longview/Marshall Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) as of the year 2000. The Tyler MSA encompasses Smith County and had a population of 174,706 persons in the year 2000. The Longview/Marshall MSA, which has now been changed to the Longview MSA and no longer includes Harrison County, encompassed Gregg, Harrison, and Upshur Counties and had a population of 208,780 persons in the year 2000. **Table 1** tabulates the population for each county in East Texas, the whole 14-county Region, and the State from 1970 through 2000 with the estimated population for 2005.

Figure 1 -
East Texas Regional
Transportation Coordination
Planning Steering Committee
Boundaries

- Roads
- Major Water Body
- Study Boundary
- City Boundary

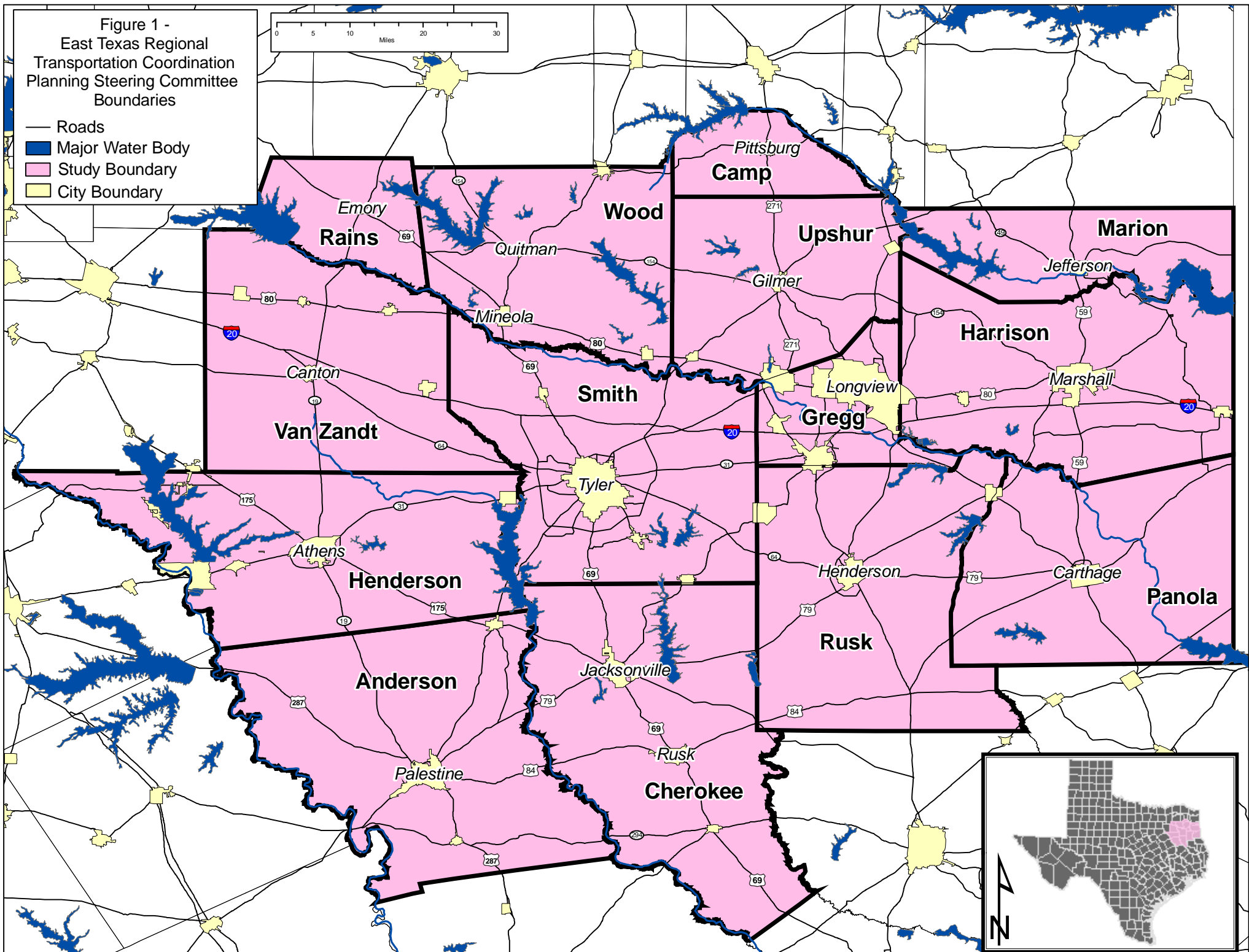


Table 1. Historic Population by County for the East Texas Region

County	Census 1970	Percent Growth 1970 to 1980	Census 1980	Percent Growth 1980 to 1990	Census 1990	Percent Growth 1990 to 2000	Census 2000	Est. Percent Growth 2000 to 2005	Estimate 2005
Anderson	27,789	38.1%	38,381	25.1%	48,024	14.8%	55,109	2.0%	56,195
Camp	8,005	15.9%	9,275	6.8%	9,904	16.6%	11,549	8.8%	12,561
Cherokee	32,008	19.1%	38,127	7.7%	41,049	13.7%	46,659	3.2%	48,144
Gregg	75,929	31.0%	99,487	5.5%	104,948	6.1%	111,379	2.9%	114,606
Harrison	44,841	16.6%	52,265	10.0%	57,483	8.0%	62,110	0.9%	62,659
Henderson	26,466	61.0%	42,606	37.4%	58,543	25.2%	73,277	7.3%	78,660
Marion	8,517	21.6%	10,360	-3.6%	9,984	9.6%	10,941	1.8%	11,137
Panola	15,894	30.4%	20,724	6.3%	22,035	3.3%	22,756	-0.1%	22,732
Rains	3,752	29.0%	4,839	38.8%	6,715	36.1%	9,139	11.6%	10,201
Rusk	34,102	21.3%	41,382	5.7%	43,735	8.3%	47,372	2.7%	48,674
Smith	97,096	32.2%	128,366	17.9%	151,309	15.5%	174,706	7.7%	188,122
Upshur	20,976	36.3%	28,595	9.7%	31,370	12.5%	35,291	3.9%	36,674
Van Zandt	22,155	41.8%	31,426	20.7%	37,944	26.9%	48,140	6.9%	51,465
Wood	18,589	32.9%	24,697	19.0%	29,380	25.1%	36,752	8.4%	39,854
East Texas Region	436,119	30.8%	570,530	14.4%	652,423	14.2%	745,180	4.9%	781,684
Texas	11,196,730	27.1%	14,229,191	19.4%	16,986,510	22.8%	20,851,820	8.8%	22,678,651

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000. Texas State Data Center, 2005.

Information from the agency survey indicates that people who are transit dependent often come from demographic groups that may not have the resources to own and maintain an automobile or who cannot drive. This is especially true for people living in poverty and the unemployed. Elderly people and the disabled also face greater obstacles than the general population in the operation of a motor vehicle. While speaking a language other than English is not a barrier to owning and operating an automobile, it can act as an obstacle to using public transportation.

Table 2 shows an overview of demographic data in East Texas, the State of Texas, and the United States that illustrates the level of potential need for public transportation. According to 2000 Census data, East Texas had a greater percentage of people age 65 and over than both the state and nation in the year 2000: 15.0 percent versus 9.9 percent and 12.4 percent, respectively. East Texas also had a higher percentage of disabled people, with, 23.6 percent of the non-institutionalized population over five years of age experiencing a disability. The rates of 19.2 percent in Texas and 19.3 percent in the United States as a whole were much lower. The poverty rate of 16.0 percent in East Texas was also higher than the state's rate of 15.4 percent and the United States' rate of 12.4 percent. As the population of East Texas ages, the percentage of elderly and disabled citizens is likely to rise. Such a rise is likely to be accompanied by an increased need for public transportation.

Table 2. Demographic Data for East Texas Region, State of Texas, and United States

	East Texas Region	Percent	State of Texas	Percent	United States	Percent
Total population	745,180	--	20,851,820	--	281,421,906	--
Population age 65 and over	111,672	15.0%	2,067,467	9.9%	34,978,972	12.4%
Disabled non-institutionalized civilian population over age 5	155,401	23.6%	3,605,542	19.2%	49,746,248	19.3%
Population living below poverty rate	107,577	16.0%	3,117,609	15.4%	33,899,812	12.4%

Table 2. Demographic Data for East Texas Region, State of Texas, and United States

	East Texas Region	Percent	State of Texas	Percent	United States	Percent
Households where a language other than English is spoken	26,494	9.5%	2,319,106	31.4%	19,905,503	18.9%
Annual average unemployed (2005)	19,280	5.1%	596,276	5.3%	7,591,000	5.1%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000. Texas Workforce Commission, 2006.

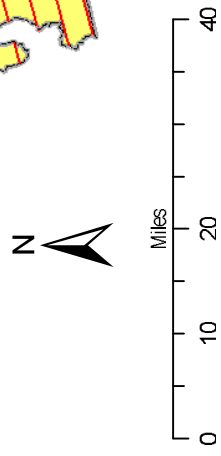
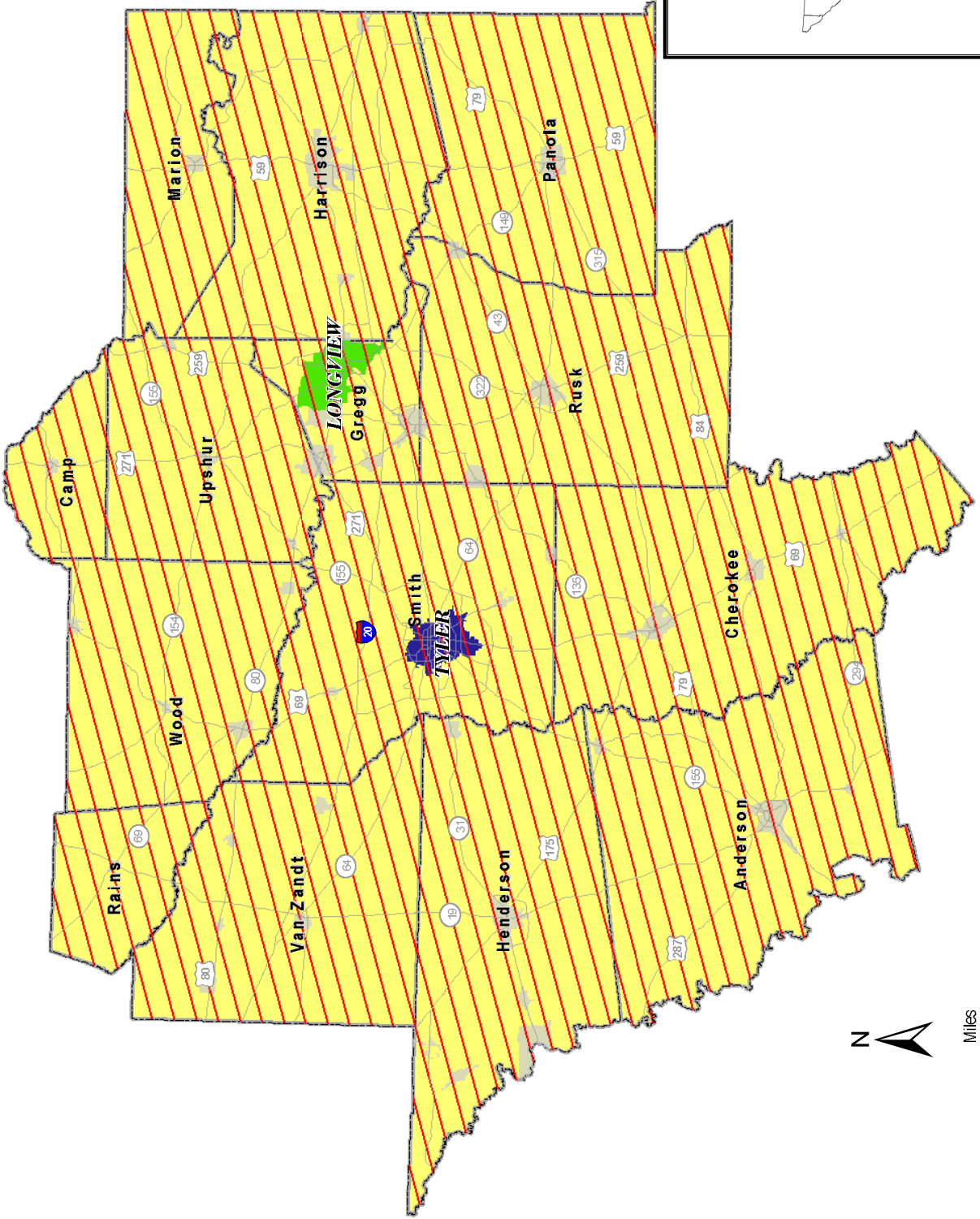
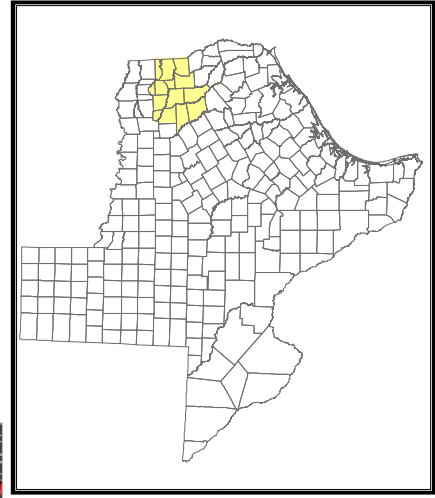
II.A.3. Existing Public Transportation Services

Many different transportation providers service the East Texas region. Longview Transit provides fixed route and a demand response system for the elderly and disabled, which will be referred to hereafter as paratransit services, within the Longview city limits. Tyler Transit's fixed route and paratransit services extend throughout the Tyler city limits. Tyler Transit also provides Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) service that extends beyond Tyler's city limits. Much of Tyler Transit's JARC service is subcontracted to a private provider, NDMJ, Ltd. The East Texas Rural Transit District (East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) Minibus) provides demand response transportation to the entire 14-county region. **Figure 2** illustrates the service areas of Tyler Transit, Longview Transit, and the East Texas Rural Transit District. East Texas Support Services, the official Medicaid-funded program under TxDOT, provides non-emergency medical transportation to the entire 14-county area through Judy's Carrier, Access, and Andrew's Center. Other public and private service providers, such as Health and Human Service (HHS) agencies, taxi and limo services, private bus lines, Amtrak, churches, nursing homes, and day care centers, provide transportation to their clients in different areas of East Texas.



**Figure 2 -
Transit Coverage Areas
Within East Texas**

- Longview Transit
- Tyler Transit
- East Texas Rural Transit District (ETCOG Minibus)
- East Texas Support Services (Medicaid)



II.B. History of Coordination Activities

II.B.1. Historical Context

ETCOG has been providing Rural Public Transportation since 1990. Along with the Rural Public Transportation Program, ETCOG administers the Older Americans Act Transportation Program, a coordinated effort many Public Transportation Operators are still challenged to coordinate.

Minibus, being an operator for over 30 years, has continued to collaborate with local Health and Human agencies such as Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Texas Department of State Health Services, Goodwill/Opportunities in Tyler Workshops, Lighthouse for the Blind, various Dialysis Centers throughout the 14 counties, Northeast Texas Health District in Smith County, Senior Retirement Centers, local hospitals and medical facilities, First Monday Transportation in Canton, East Texas Border Health Clinic in Marshall, after school programs with local school districts, transportation for the Wood County Dream Makers Program, and transportation for Veterans to the VA Hospital in Shreveport, Louisiana. Most of these coordination efforts continue today.

Since 1995, ETCOG has collaborated with its 17 Transportation Subcontractors, through Request for Proposals to reduce the number of Transportation contractors. This effort has reduced the number of transportation providers from 17 to one. In essence, ETCOG has created a One Stop Center for the delivery of Transportation Services throughout East Texas, outside the city limits of Longview and Tyler.

ETCOG has also been the Lead Agency in cooperative purchases for transit vehicles in which the City of Galveston, Tyler, Longview, and other Rural Transit Operators have participated.

Longview Transit and Tyler Transit have also coordinated mobility solutions with their regional partners. They have participated in the Greater East Texas Transportation Association (GETTA), which promotes mobility solutions within eight of the fourteen counties in East Texas. The City of Longview has developed mobility solutions while

serving on the East Texas Regional Transportation Board. The current coordination efforts of Longview Transit and Tyler Transit are discussed in greater detail in **Section II.B.2.**

To improve TxDOT's administration of the public transportation program funding it administers, the Department began enlisting the support of the local community through a consensus building process. The goal of the consensus building process is to help TxDOT and the local communities to better determine transportation needs. The consensus building process has two primary objectives: promote the availability of services and ensure coordination of providers.

To accomplish these objectives, in May of 2000 the TxDOT Tyler district began its focus on the consensus building process. This process was to be accomplished in three phases:

Phase I. Education and consensus building. Develop a local public transportation advisory committee or group of stakeholders comprised of basic need service providers, Texas service agencies, governmental agencies and both the rural and urban transportation providers.

Phase II. Construction of a database of information to include provider resources, funding resources and client needs.

Phase III. Continue investigating and evaluating alternative actions for meeting transportation needs. Design and assist with implementation of Section 5310 selected and/or funded projects.

Phase 1 of the public involvement planning process began in May 2000 by focusing heavily on education and consensus building. In June 2001, originating with a group of stakeholders that included basic need service providers, Texas service agencies, governmental agencies and both the rural and urban transportation providers, the Tyler District, representing eight of the 14 counties in East Texas, began to address its challenges with the formation of GETTA, which was formed in June 2001. GETTA consisted of a group of stakeholders that included health and human service providers,

rural and urban public transportation providers, advocates for the elderly and disabled and representatives from the TxDOT's public transportation program.

Phase II, a year long project, resulted in the construction of a contracted transportation resource database. In November of 2002, as an outgrowth of the coalition building planning process, TxDOT contracted with the East Texas Center of Independent Living (ETCIL) to construct an ACCESS database. By surveying human and health service agencies, and independent public providers, ETCIL staff was able to compile information about those contracting and non-contracting agencies who provide transportation services to their clients or who have a need for transportation service. Over 10,000 square miles were logged in the East Texas area with 235 agencies, organizations and providers surveyed. Throughout the TxDOT Tyler District, 60 human and health service providers were identified as having a combined total of 99 ADA accessible vehicles and 178 non-ADA accessible vehicles that could possibly be available for coordination of services.

Phase III began in FY2003 when the Tyler District transportation providers and ETCIL staff attended an Easter Seals sponsored Mobility Planning Service workshop. This project was designed to utilize the information collected in Phase II and to build on the strong foundation of stakeholders formed during Phases I and II.

II.B.2. Current and On-going Coordination Activities

Some coordination activities have already been initiated in the East Texas region. ETCOG and Minibus have collaborated with the Northeast Texas Community College (NETCC) in Mount Pleasant, which is located in the TxDOT – Atlanta District, and the Arkansas Texas Council of Governments (ATCOG), to provide transportation service to students in Upshur and Camp County to the NETCC. Because of the rural setting of NETCC, many of these students would not be able to get to school otherwise. ETCOG and Minibus are also developing new agreements with the new Border Health Clinic in Marshall. Minibus is coordinating with NDMJ, Inc. to assist in rural transportation trips in the Tyler/Smith County area.

Two additional agreements are described below, including one between ETCOG, Tyler Transit, and Longview Transit, and NDMJ, Inc. The other agreement is between Hope, Inc. and the Cherokee County Mental Retardation Association (CCMRA).

II.B.2.a. Tyler Transit and Longview Transit

Tyler Transit and Longview Transit obtained a grant that will pay for hardware and software to allow them to share a bulletin board of trips. The first phase of that sharing will be installed in Tyler and is known as an Internet portal. Anyone that has Internet access will be able to use the portal to request trips or see trips they have requested for both paratransit and Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC). Eventually, they will be able to see the fixed route buses on a map in real time. Some of the grant money will pay for more Mobile Data Computers for the three agencies so more of their fleet will have real time location information for trip scheduling purposes.

The grant was originally an earmark for Longview and Tyler Transit, but ETCOG and the private sector will be included in this program to benefit the entire East Texas region. The City of Tyler worked on the grant and set up a budget with guidance from the executive committee of the Steering Committee. The grant will pay for the following items:

- The hardware and compatible software needed to implement the project,
- Building improvements for a possible regional call center,
- Planning dollars to design the building rehabilitation, and
- Funds for furniture to equip the center.

II.B.2.b. HOPE, Inc. and CCMRA

Starting in October of 2003, the Cherokee County Mental Retardation Association (CCMRA) joined forces with HOPE, Inc., in a unique approach to obtain and use existing resources to provide expanded coordinated transportation services to the aged in the Jacksonville and surrounding community. HOPE is a non-profit, client-specific organization that provides a variety of services to aged and disadvantaged persons. A

meal kitchen, manna pantry, prescription services, and access to medical and social services for the elderly are made possible by the coordinated transportation program.

HOPE and CCMRA did a community-wide fund raising effort to purchase a 12-passenger van. The CCMRA is the fiscal agent for the van and provides it to HOPE who pays a pro-rated portion of the expenses of operation. The CCMRA uses this van to provide fixed route transportation to disabled persons to its day programs and uses the van at one of their group homes in the evenings and on weekends. HOPE uses the van between the hours of 8 am and 4 pm Monday through Friday. This van makes over 500 one way passenger trips each month. This same van has been made available to the Cherokee Crisis center for special outings.

The CCMRA also provides driver training classes to volunteer drivers from HOPE as well as developing emergency guidelines and policy and procedures for their combined driving force. Applicants are screened with both criminal history and Motor Vehicle record checks. All staff members are trained quarterly in a variety of safety related issues.

III. PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

III.A. Prior Planning Activities

In June of 2000, the Tyler District of TxDOT began planning the community transportation coordination project. Various public meetings were held throughout the district. Meetings were held in June, November, and December 2000, and January and August 2001, with the final submission of the annual program of projects being presented to the public on September 6, 2001.

The project grew out of two sets of interests: local and state. Locally, public transportation providers and users recognized that more service was needed to serve a growing population and that community members would need to be involved in a consensus-approach decision making process.

Support from local leaders and the general public were the keys to the successful implementation of identifying the transportation needs of the elderly and disabled within the community. This was done through a decision making model that included investigating existing needs and conditions, completing an inventory of resources, reviewing federal regulations that affect public transportation, identifying service gaps and overlaps, and choosing an approach to coordination that would work well for the district. Out of these meetings, a three-year Program of Projects was finalized in January of 2001. The Paris and Atlanta Districts of TxDOT have also carried out coordination efforts for the six East Texas counties under their purview.

ETCOG operates the rural public transportation program in East Texas through the East Texas Rural Transit District (ETCOG Minibus), which includes demand response transportation throughout the 14-county region. The City of Tyler's Tyler Transit System operates a fixed route and paratransit services. They implemented an additional fixed route in October 2001. The City of Longview's transit system began operating as a demand response service and was administered by the East Texas Council of Governments through an Inter-local agreement. It is no longer administered by ETCOG,

but is now operated by the City of Longview. In FY 2003, the City of Longview expanded service to include a fixed route system.

III.B. Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan

III.B.1. Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was formed in June of 2005. At a Stakeholders Meeting held in Marshall on October 25, 2005 it was decided that the Tri-Lead entities (ETCOG, GETTA and TxDOT) should develop the representative structure for the proposed Regional Steering Committee. The structure that was designed by the Tri-Leads and approved by the Stakeholders is explained as follows:

The Committee is comprised of 32 voting primary members along with 32 alternates. Fourteen members were appointed from each of the 14 counties of Planning Region 6 (Anderson, Camp, Cherokee, Gregg, Harrison, Henderson, Marion, Panola, Rains, Rusk, Smith, Upshur, Van Zandt and Wood). These appointees and their alternates were officially selected by the Commissioners Court in each of the respective counties. The Tri-Leads appointed a total of 12 primary members and their corresponding alternates – ETCOG's appointees represented the Tyler and Longview Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), the East Texas Rural Transit District and the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA); GETTA's appointees represented advocacy groups and health & human services organizations; TxDOT's appointees represented local transit providers (i.e., human health/MHMRs, etc.) and riders in East Texas.

The Tri-Leads also came to a consensus to add three appointees along with their alternates that would represent local transportation providers – Tyler Transit, Longview Transit and Medical Transportation. The remaining three members were selected as at-large appointees by the Stakeholders. The established Regional Steering Committee elected a Chair and Vice-Chair at its first official meeting and ratified a set of By-Laws to govern the process at a subsequent meeting.

Mr. Griff Hubbard of the East Texas Corridor Council is the Steering Committee Chairperson and Dr. Bob Peters of Horizon Industries is the Steering Committee Vice Chair. Task Force chairs are as follows: Alice Gervais – People First, Barrier Free; Helen Thornton – Multimodal Interconnectivity Across the Region; Jamal Moharer – Aggressive Outreach and Education to a Broad Base; Elton McCune – Increased and Flexible Funding; Dr. Bob Peters – Increased and Expanded Services; and Mark Sweeney – Emergency Planning and Homeland Security.

Table 3. List of Steering Committee Members and Nominating Agencies

Member	Nominating Agency	Alternate	Nominating Agency
Linda Thomas	ETCOG	Tab Beall	ETCOG
Karen Owen	ETCOG	Melissa Bechtold	ETCOG
Martha DeLaRosa	Rusk County	Luis Caberra	Rusk County
Mark Sweeney	ETCOG	Kay Dorman	ETCOG
Dietrick Johnson	Transit	Edward Esparza	Transit
Stephen P. Lane	At Large	Juanita Fletcher	At Large
Jeanne Wesley	At Large	Alice Gervais	At Large
James Pike	GETTA	Joe Hammerick	GETTA
Sarah Minton	Anderson County	Mona Hill	Anderson County
Dr. Bob Peters	GETTA	Billie Holloway	GETTA
Mary Hendricks	Harrison County	Flo Jasper	Harrison County
Jean Birmingham	TxDOT	Katie Jones	TxDOT
Tim Vaughn	Gregg County	LaDelle Kay	Gregg County

Table 3. List of Steering Committee Members and Nominating Agencies

Member	Nominating Agency	Alternate	Nominating Agency
Caroline Geer	GETTA	Tom King	GETTA
Helen Thornton	Henderson County	Wade McKinney	Henderson County
Kristy Range	GETTA	Sherea Merrick	GETTA
Mary Bohn	TxDOT	Jamal Moharer	TxDOT
Griff Hubbard	TxDOT	Bill Morales	TxDOT
Elton McCune	Cherokee County	Peggy Munsinger	Cherokee County
Cynthia Laney	TxDOT	Ned Muse	TxDOT
Stephanie Rollings	ETCOG	Heather Nick	ETCOG
Connie Ware	At Large	Roger Purdy	At Large
James R. Jordan	Camp County	Mike Reynolds	Camp County
Norman Schenck	Transit	Joe Skillerns	Transit
Marty Allen	Transit	Barbara Thomas	Transit
Jamal Moharer	Smith County	Bobby Van Ness	Smith County
Bill McMillen	Van Zandt County	Vick Wetherholt	Van Zandt County
Eugene Robinson	Marion County		Marion County
Hermon E. Reed, Jr.	Panola County		Panola County
Allen Bradford	Rains County		Rains County
Lloyd Crabtree	Upshur County		Upshur County
Michael Clanton	Wood County		Wood County

The Steering Committee played a pivotal role in the stakeholder involvement process. With its knowledge of the East Texas region and its public transportation infrastructure, the Steering Committee acted as the point of initial contact for identifying stakeholders and determining the times and locations of outreach activities.

III.B.2. Consultant Team

III.B.2.a. Companies

There are two companies on the Consultant Team: Chiang, Patel & Yerby, Inc. (CP&Y) and Wilbur Smith Associates. Contacts are listed in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Consultant Team Contacts

Name	Company
Andy Atlas, AICP	Chiang, Patel & Yerby, Inc.
Bonnie Doggett	Chiang, Patel & Yerby, Inc.
Linda DuPriest	Wilbur Smith Associates
Joe Savage, P.E.	Wilbur Smith Associates

III.B.2.b. Role of Consultants

The role of the Consultant Team includes communicating with and providing guidance to the Steering Committee in the tasks required to ensure that interested stakeholders can participate in the development of the Plan. To do this, the Consultant Team:

1. Prepared a Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP)
2. Set up and maintained a database of potential stakeholders within the 14-county region;
3. Distributed the database to the Steering Committee for updating;
4. Updated the stakeholder database, as needed;

5. Evaluated barriers and constraints;
6. Disseminated the Agency Survey to stakeholders;
7. Evaluated/Summarized responses to Agency Survey and prepared Technical Memorandum 4A;
8. Prepared information required for stakeholder involvement activities;
9. Evaluated transportation needs and prepared Technical Memorandum 4B;
10. Prepared Evaluation Methodology Technical Memorandum 5;
11. Presented information to stakeholders during outreach activities;
12. Composed draft Regional Transportation Coordination Plan; and
13. Coordinated the above activities, including stakeholder surveys, with the Steering Committee.

III.B.3. Other Involved Agencies

There are numerous other public and private agencies and organizations that have participated in the transportation coordination planning process. Their services may include providing public transportation, providing health and human services, or other support services. **Table 5** and **Table 6** list some of the public agencies and private organizations in East Texas that have participated in the planning process.

Table 5. Public Agencies

Agency	Description
TxDOT – Tyler, Atlanta, and Paris districts	The three TxDOT districts that have jurisdiction in the 14-county East Texas Region
East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG)	Operates the rural public transportation program in East Texas through the East Texas Rural Transit District (ETCOG Minibus), which includes demand response throughout the 14-county region
East Texas Workforce Development Board	Sponsored by the Texas Workforce Commission, the Board assists people in their search for employment by overseeing the integration and coordination of more than twenty separate employment and training

Table 5. Public Agencies

Agency	Description
	programs in East Texas
Tyler Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)	Provides continuity of various transportation planning and improvement efforts throughout the Tyler urban area
Longview Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)	Responsible for coordinated, comprehensive, and continuing transportation planning for the Longview Metropolitan Area
Tyler Transit	Provides fixed route and paratransit services within the Tyler city limits. Tyler Transit also provides Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) service that extends beyond Tyler's city limits.
Longview Transit	Provides fixed route and paratransit services within the Longview city limits.
Amtrak	Amtrak's Texas Eagle route passes through East Texas with stations in Marshall, Longview, and Mineola
City and County Governments	Provide knowledge of local needs and constraints to help shape coordination plan

Table 6. Private and Public HHS Agencies and Organizations

Agency	Description
Health and Human Services	Includes American Cancer Society, Gregg County Health Department, Pittsburg Nursing Center, Special Health Resources for Texas, Inc., Tyler AIDS Services, Inc.
Greater East Texas Transportation Alliance (GETTA)	Assists urban and rural public transportation systems in the eight counties of the TxDOT – Tyler District with 5310 funds to help them plan projects and expand and improve service.
Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) private	An important stakeholder in the planning process
Cherokee County Mental Retardation Authority (CCMRA)	An important stakeholder in the planning process
East Texas Center for Independent Living (ETCIL)	Non-profit agency in Tyler that provides services to the disabled
CJ Limo	Private transportation provider
Tyler Taxi	Private transportation provider

Table 6. Private and Public HHS Agencies and Organizations

Agency	Description
Judy's Carriers	Provides non-emergency medical transportation to the entire 14-county area for East Texas Support Services (Medicaid)
Anderson Cherokee Community Enrichment Services (ACCESS)	Provides non-emergency medical transportation to Anderson and Cherokee Counties for East Texas Support Services (Medicaid)
Andrew's Center	Provides mental health and mental retardation services, as well as non-emergency medical transportation to Smith, Wood, Henderson, Van Zandt, and Rains Counties for East Texas Support Services (Medicaid)

III.C. Outreach and Stakeholder Involvement

III.C.1. Prior Transportation-related Public Outreach

III.C.1.a. ETCIL Survey

In 2003, ETCIL completed an assessment of public transportation in eight counties of the region as part of GETTA Phase III studies. To complete Phase III, GETTA joined with ETCIL who had been awarded a CTAA grant. In May 2004, ETCIL released the results of their research.

Areas covered by ETCIL's research included determining barriers to public transportation experienced by people with disabilities; assisting Tyler Transit in implementing its JARC grant by assessing the area labor market, identifying the location of grocery stores, medical facilities, education centers and other services in relation to current transit routes; and, conducting customer satisfaction surveys. This data was collected for Tyler, Longview and the surrounding rural communities. However, many of the rural towns lacked the necessary Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data to accurately locate facilities for the use of transit planning.

The results of the ETCIL transportation research study have helped lay the groundwork for the Steering Committee's work on the East Texas regional transportation coordination efforts.

III.C.1.b. Public Involvement

In May 2000, the Tyler district of TxDOT began working on a consensus building process to address public transportation coordination. The results of this initial effort led to the formation of GETTA in June 2001. Between 2001 and 2005, GETTA sponsored many public meetings and forums that resulted in projects to improve transit service through Tyler Transit, Longview Transit, and the rural provider Minibus, under ETCOG. In addition, the surveys conducted as part of GETTA Phase III and Easter Seals Project Action brought valuable public input into coordination efforts.

III.C.1.c. Agency/Stakeholder Meetings

As a continuation of prior coordination efforts, the Steering Committee of the East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan was formed under the auspices of HB 3588 in 2005. Public forums were held to determine the makeup of the Steering Committee, the region's priorities and to identify goals. The six Priorities, the Mission Statement, and Goals were the result of these forums.

To build the foundation for the Planning Process, the following stakeholder events were held in the summer and fall of 2005:

- August 12th: The six public transportation priorities established.
- August 19th: East Texas Transportation Summit – open forum and discussion concerning rural and urban public transit issues.
- October 6th: Three “lead entities” were designated: ETCOG, TxDOT, and GETTA.
- October 25th: Established a procedure for selection of Steering Committee members.

III.C.2. Consultant-Led Public Workshops

The Steering Committee invited Ron Baumgart, Executive Director of the Dakota Transit Association, to come to Tyler on August 23, 2006 to address the public and stakeholders regarding the steps that he has taken in South Dakota to improve public transportation service, coordination, and funding. Prior to the presentation, attendees

were asked to complete a questionnaire. The results obtained from the questionnaire were incorporated with information obtained from other sources to determine transportation needs and potential projects for East Texas.

On September 26-28, 2006, a series of five consultant-led public workshops were conducted within the East Texas area. The workshops were held in the cities of Mineola, Jacksonville, Marshall, and Tyler, and were designed to inform basic need service providers, regional planning organizations, Texas health and human service agencies, governmental agencies, transportation users, rural and urban transportation providers, and the public about the Steering Committee's efforts to produce a public transportation coordination plan for the East Texas region (**Table 7**).

Table 7. Public Workshop Attendance

Date	Location	Time	Number of Attendees
September 26 th	Mineola	10:00 a.m.	25
September 26 th	Jacksonville	3:00 p.m.	29
September 27 th	Marshall	10:00 a.m.	59
September 27 th	Tyler	3:00 p.m.	62
September 28 th	Tyler	6:00 p.m.	19
TOTAL			194

The primary purpose of these workshops was to solicit input from the above-mentioned stakeholders in order to identify specific needs for coordination on public transportation issues and to identify projects to improve the efficiency and delivery of public transportation services in the East Texas region. The workshops consisted of interactive forums to introduce the project to stakeholders and to allow them to discuss coordination issues and share information and concerns.

The format of these workshops included completing a questionnaire when entering the room, followed by a presentation outlining information about the coordination planning process. After the presentation, attendees split into small breakout sessions to brainstorm ideas centered on the Steering Committee's priorities. At the end of the

workshop participants were given comment forms so that they could add any information that was not addressed by the workshop.

Information gathered from the workshops was used to identify transportation needs and assist in the development of projects proposed in the Plan.

III.C.3.Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held on November 13 and 14, 2006 in Tyler and Marshall to present the Plan to the public. Approximately 25 people attended the meeting in Tyler on November 13th and approximately 23 people attended the meeting in Marshall on November 14th. Representatives from the Steering Committee and many of the agencies participating in the preparation of the Plan were present at the meetings, including Tyler Transit, Longview Transit, ETCOG, Minibus, the TxDOT – Tyler District, and the TxDOT – Atlanta District. Elected representatives, including Harrison County Judge Richard Anderson and ex-Marshall City Council member Jean Birmingham, were also present.

The meetings consisted of a PowerPoint presentation that summarized the Draft Plan, including a brief history of the planning process and need for coordination, as well as a description of the proposed projects, evaluation methodology, and implementation process. Following the PowerPoint presentation, attendees were provided with comment cards, which were read aloud and addressed during the meetings. Oral questions and comments were also addressed during the public meetings. The questions and responses are summarized in **Appendix B**.

IV. OBJECTIVE AND GOALS

It is the objective of the Steering Committee to create and connect a comprehensive, flexible, and sustainable public transportation service throughout and beyond the 14 counties of State Planning Region 6. In addition, the Committee has set four goals: 1) submit in a timely manner planning documents as may be required by appropriate state and federal agencies; 2) secure the ongoing cooperation of city, county, other local government, and private sector entities in State Planning Region 6; 3) ensure to everyone within State Planning Region 6 a full and unfettered opportunity to affect the outcome of area public transportation service; and 4) partner with the Texas Transportation Commission to effect legislative change.

V. NEEDS AND PROJECT SELECTION

V.A. Determination of Needs

A variety of forums have been held to solicit input from citizens, stakeholders, and public officials throughout the development of the Transportation Coordination Plan. These forums have included monthly Steering Committee meetings, a public presentation by Ron Baumgart, Executive Director of the Dakota Transit Association, an online survey of agencies and transportation providers, and a series of five workshops conducted throughout East Texas from September 26 – 28, 2006. Two additional public meetings were held in Tyler and Marshall on November 13 and 14, 2006 to present the Plan to the public. The Steering Committee's outreach efforts and the resulting ideas and comments that were received at the different forums are discussed below.

Findings from Surveys and Public Workshops/Meetings

Responses to the agency survey and available demographic data indicate that public transportation is vital to the quality of life of people who depend on it. The data show that the disabled and people living in poverty are more likely to depend on public transportation than other groups of citizens. The high percentage of disabled residents living in East Texas further indicates that the region has a great need for a comprehensive and efficient system of public transportation. As the region's population ages, this need will likely increase.

The public and agency involvement process also indicate a need for information geared toward people who speak languages other than English. This is especially true for the large Spanish speaking population. The agency survey indicated that over one-fourth of the agencies queried provide services to immigrants. Census data show that almost ten percent of the East Texas population spoke a language other than English at home in the year 2000.

The input received from agencies and the public indicated a lack of awareness regarding available services. Agencies showed an interest in joining with others to identify ways to improve public transportation. They also showed a willingness to consider sharing vehicles, which was cited repeatedly as a way to increase service

during the public workshops. Agencies and the public both expressed interest in a system of central scheduling, with a centralized call center. More than anything, the public repeatedly called for increased service, ranging from expanded hours of operation to more fixed routes to shorter periods of time between buses on a route (headways) to more service between rural and urban areas.

The available information clearly indicates a need for improved, more efficient public transportation in East Texas.

V.B. Barriers and Constraints

The Steering Committee identified a number of barriers and constraints to coordination of regional transit services in the East Texas Region. The basis for determining specific barriers and constraints included surveys of East Texas residents and transit users by ETCIL, a survey of transit regions conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), a survey of 85 transit providers and health and human service agencies in October 2006, and comments from stakeholders attending the five workshops held throughout the region on September 26, 27, and 28. Many users were aware of the coordination issues among providers and HHS agencies, and provided valuable insights into the potential benefits and impacts of changes in regulations and policies to allow more coordination among the various participants.

The principal difference between a “barrier” and a “constraint” in regards to public transportation coordination is the action(s) needed to resolve it. The differences are outlined in **Table 8**. True “barriers” are usually codified in laws or regulations adopted by federal, state or local jurisdictions. Barriers typically require legislative or legal action to change them. “Constraints,” although often perceived as barriers by those encountering them, are usually the result of long standing practice (“that is the way we have always done it”), former barriers that have been removed by changes in laws or regulations, or issues and practices that no one wants to tackle because they are perceived as too difficult and time consuming. However, mostly it takes local initiative

with imaginative and original thinking to address and resolve constraints through negotiation and compromise toward a permanent solution.

Previous efforts by the Steering Committee and others have identified some issues of primary importance to East Texas. A survey of Rusk County residents identified four “barriers” to better public transportation service:

- People do not know about the services available.
- Current transportation resources are not as convenient as people believe they should be.
- The cost of transportation is a factor, especially for service organizations when they consider a referral for their clients.
- Empty buses – perceived as a waste of taxpayer money.

Discussions within the Steering Committee, comments by workshop participants, and responses from the Agency Survey generate a list of barriers and constraints to be addressed in this coordination effort. The most critical barriers to successful public transportation coordination in the East Texas region are listed in **Table 9**. These are summarized from Technical Memorandum 4A on Barriers and Constraints, which was submitted to TxDOT in October 2006.

Table 8. Definitions of Barrier and Constraint

Barrier - Something that obstructs; structure blocking access; structure intended to prevent access or to keep one program separate from another	Constraint - Limiting factor; something that limits the freedom to act spontaneously; a physical, practice or other force that limits freedom of action; restriction, limitation; challenge requiring initiative to resolve
What is a Barrier in the context of coordinated regional service? Federal Statute Federal Agency Regulation Federal Funding Policy Texas Statute (e.g., Transportation Code) Texas Regulation (e.g., Administrative Code) Texas Agency Policy, especially funding policy Regional Government Policy Local Agency Policy	What is a Constraint in the context of coordinated regional service? Historical practice Misinformation Reaction to perceived barrier Transportation myths Excuses Assumptions Reluctance to tackle challenges Institutional conflicts Personality conflicts

Table 8. Definitions of Barrier and Constraint

How to recognize a Barrier?	How to recognize a Constraint?
Written into code	Not codified as statute or regulation
Written into statute	Frequently reported but not referenced
Written into regulation	May be in contract language
Written into contract language for funding agreement	Challenge or problem that cannot be tied back to a specific barrier

Table 9. East Texas Region Barriers and Constraints

Barrier/Constraint	Description and Potential Solution	Cooperating Agencies
Service Boundaries (Barrier) <i>Priority: People First, Barrier Free</i> <i>Priority: Multimodal Interconnectivity Across the Region</i>	<p>Jurisdictional service boundary issues are a common complaint throughout the state. Buses operated by Tyler Transit and Longview Transit do not serve trips which originate or are destined to locations outside their city's boundaries (other than JARC-funded reverse commute work trips). Although many such boundaries are self imposed, they exist because taxpayers typically do not want to pay for services to benefit other jurisdictions.</p> <p>A solution would be adoption of broad enabling legislation that provides that any publicly funded public transportation vehicle may transport any person meeting the qualifications to ride in such vehicle on any public thoroughfare unless otherwise prohibited by state or federal statute.</p>	<p>State Legislature Municipalities</p>
Vehicle Reliability and TxDOT's Propane Fuel Requirements (Barrier) <i>Priority: Increased and Expanded Services</i>	<p>Many workshop participants, including service providers and transit users, complained about the unreliability of the new propane-fueled buses. The high failure rate of the vehicles appears to be directly related to the extension of the Texas Alternative Fuels Program to the purchase of new transit vehicles by the TxDOT Public Transit Division. These propane fuel propulsion systems require high maintenance, breakdown more frequently than diesel buses and must have their engines replaced more often.</p> <p>Potential solutions include eliminating TxDOT's recommended use of alternative fuel vehicles until vehicle reliability can be improved, convening a joint group of providers and regulators to develop more reasonable specifications, and changing the requirement to an emissions based standard rather than a fuel based standard.</p>	<p>TxDOT State Legislature Vehicle manufacturers</p>
Multiple Driver Training and Certification Requirements (Constraint) <i>Priority: Increased and Expanded Services</i>	<p>Different agencies and programs have different standards for their drivers, and few East Texas HHS transportation providers have adequate in-house training programs. In addition, the forthcoming requirement for door-to-door transportation service for certain clients will require additional training.</p> <p>TxDOT should create one set of basic standards for all "special needs" transit drivers, with supplemental certificates for unique situations. Regionally, one agency could take the lead in providing uniform driver training for private operators as well as public operators.</p>	<p>TxDOT Steering Committee Agencies and Providers</p>

Table 9. East Texas Region Barriers and Constraints

Barrier/Constraint	Description and Potential Solution	Cooperating Agencies
Inadequate Vehicle Lift Capacity (Constraint) Priority: Increased and Expanded Services	<p>Some manufacturers of mobility devices for the disabled have increased the weight of their devices, due largely to increased battery sizes for longer service times between recharging. Coupled with the weight of obese users, the combination can often greatly exceed the 600-pound lift capacity currently standard on any ADA accessible vehicle used for public transportation. The resulting excess stress on the lifts leads to breakdowns and maintenance issues. Although lifts with 800 and 1000 pound capacities are available, they cost more and are beyond current ADA standards.</p> <p>The solution lies well beyond the ability of East Texas transit providers, or more likely beyond the ability of the State of Texas. The need is a complete re-thinking of the standard specifications for both vehicle lifts and for wheelchairs and other personal mobility devices. This would be followed by legislative action implementing the new standards and specifications for lifts and mobility devices.</p>	<p>TxDOT TTI FTA Vehicle manufacturers Texas Legislature</p>
Infrastructure Accessibility Barriers (Barrier) Priority: People First, Barrier Free Priority: Multimodal Interconnectivity Across the Region	<p>Many of the small towns, municipalities and rural counties of East Texas do not have adequate sidewalks, curb cuts or paved paths for transit users to access the vehicles. Most do not appear to have prepared the federally-required ADA accessibility plans nor to program public works funding to provide/improve accessibility or the pedestrian environment. In addition to having physical barriers which often prevent disabled persons from reaching transit stops, these jurisdictions present an administrative barrier by their failure to adopt and implement ADA accessibility plans which were required by 1996.</p> <p>The solution is to place increased emphasis on jurisdictions to meet already mandated ADA requirements and to program funds (possibly with state or federal matching monies) to implement the improvements. Local jurisdiction should adopt rules to enforce the ADA requirements when approving funding for local projects and the state legislature should require that all ADA requirements be met when using state funds for local projects.</p>	<p>TxDOT State Legislature All municipalities, towns, and counties in East Texas.</p>

Table 9. East Texas Region Barriers and Constraints

Barrier/Constraint	Description and Potential Solution	Cooperating Agencies
Information and Outreach (Constraint) <i>Priority: Aggressive Outreach and Education to a Broad Base</i>	<p>One of the most pressing needs in East Texas is simply to inform all residents of the 14 counties, particularly those without access to an automobile or have special transportation needs, about the range of services available to them. As the Rusk County survey found, many residents do not know who their transportation provider is or how to contact them.</p> <p>None of the individual transit agencies or transportation providers has the resources for an extensive publicity campaign, so a multi-jurisdictional effort seems necessary. It appears that FTA funds are available for such activities under Sections 5307, 5310, 5311, 5316, and 5317 of SAFETEA-LU.</p>	All agencies involved in public transportation
Communications Technology (Constraint) <i>Priority: Increased and Expanded Services</i>	<p>Public transportation operators in East Texas use a variety of technologies and radio frequencies for their vehicle communications. TxDOT is implementing a common communications protocol throughout the state, and there is a variety of funding sources available for such investments in training and equipment.</p> <p>The solution is to adopt the TxDOT ITS architecture as the East Texas regional standard, and to implement the technology as funding becomes available.</p>	<p>TxDOT</p> <p>All public and private transportation providers</p>
Funding Silos (Barrier) <i>Priority: Increased and Flexible Funding</i>	<p>Competing and exclusionary regulations and procedures across both Federal and State agencies that allocate funding in some manner for transportation services present a significant barrier to efficient public transportation by limiting the ability of providers to combine and consolidate client trips. There is also an issue of unequal access to funding between public and private operators. Public funds are often denied to private operators, even though these carriers provide a significant portion of service to special needs transportation users in East Texas.</p> <p>Therefore, a suggested solution is to review, coordinate and/or consolidate regulations and requirements for transportation services among the various State agencies involved. Furthermore, the legislature should enact a statute granting private operators of public transportation services fair and equal access to public transportation funding.</p>	<p>TxDOT</p> <p>HHS agencies</p> <p>State Legislature</p>

Table 9. East Texas Region Barriers and Constraints

Barrier/Constraint	Description and Potential Solution	Cooperating Agencies
<p>Lack of Involvement by HHS Agencies (Constraint)</p> <p><i>Priority: Aggressive Outreach and Education to a Broad Base</i></p>	<p>When special needs transit coordination was placed under the purview of TxDOT as a result of HB 3588, many HHS agencies were not involved in the transition. As a result, HHS agencies on both the state and local level are not aware of coordination efforts or are not engaged or “bought in” to the process. With the East Texas region being mostly rural, plus the large percentage of elderly, disabled and low-income residents, it is impossible to get an accurate picture of HHS transportation needs without the involvement of every HHS agencies that provides or funds transportation.</p> <p>The solution is first to engage state and regional offices of DSHS and get an inventory of every entity in East Texas who handles federal or state funding for transportation. Then attempt to bring each of them to the table, so that the Steering Committee will have a complete picture of all available HHS transportation providers/funders.</p>	<p>DADS DSHS The East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Planning Steering Committee Regional and Local HHS Agencies</p>
<p>Insurance Restrictions (Barrier)</p> <p><i>Priority: Multimodal Interconnectivity Across the Region</i></p>	<p>Insurance restrictions in some cases prevent sharing of vehicles, Texas residents being transported into Louisiana, and other coordination efforts. If an HHS provider gets primary funding from a source with insurance restrictions, then that vehicle may not be available to transport clients from a different HHS program. This barrier also applies to vehicle accessibility requirements; some clients may not be allowed to ride in a vehicle without certain types of equipment.</p> <p>A solution is for the legislature to establish a type of “transit insurance funding pool” that provides liability coverage and indemnification protection for both public and private transit operators statewide</p>	<p>FTA State Legislature</p>

Table 9. East Texas Region Barriers and Constraints

Barrier/Constraint	Description and Potential Solution	Cooperating Agencies
<p>Implementation (Constraint)</p> <p><i>Priority: People First, Barrier Free</i></p> <p><i>Priority: Multimodal Interconnectivity Across the Region</i></p> <p><i>Priority: Aggressive Outreach and Education to a Broad Base</i></p> <p><i>Priority: Increased and Expanded Services</i></p> <p><i>Priority: Increased and Flexible Funding</i></p>	<p>Perhaps the largest constraint of all is the lack of an overarching organization to enforce implementation of the recommendations of the East Texas Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan. There are many competing interests within the region and the Steering Committee has not yet been able to agree on the appropriate agency to lead and monitor the implementation of projects.</p> <p>Therefore, it is recommended that, "There shall be created by January 1, 2011 a single entity covering the entire 14-county East Texas region that shall be the recipient of all public transportation funding and coordinator of all public transportation services within the region. This entity shall be responsible for determining common standards of service for all providers, and shall facilitate communication among all public transportation providers and vehicles to ensure efficient delivery of services to the public. The composition and structure of this entity shall be determined by either the state legislature or the Texas Transportation Commission."</p>	<p>State Legislature Transportation Commission</p>

V.C. Projects

From the determination of needs, the list of barriers and constraints in **Table 9**, and coordination projects/activities identified through the Agency Survey and stakeholder workshops, the Steering Committee generated a list of 15 projects for the East Texas Regional Coordination Plan. The Consultant Team prepared a detailed project description identifying what is being proposed, the key steps required, and the expected outcome. An outline of a typical project description is shown in **Table 10**.

Table 10. Project Description Outline

Project Name – A short descriptive name for the project of action being proposed.
Description/Background – a description of the project including a discussion of the issue/problem, necessary background, reasons for implementing the project and one or more examples of specific steps/actions as appropriate.
Partnering Agencies – a list of the agencies and/or organizations that would be involved in implementing the proposed action(s).
Benefits – a qualitative or quantitative discussion of the benefits to transit users, agency clients, operators, etc.
Estimated Start Up Costs – a very general estimate of initial costs in terms of low (less than \$50,000), moderate (between \$50,000 and \$500,000) or high (greater than \$500,000).
Necessary Agreements – Many activities will require the support and participation of multiple agencies and jurisdictions. These mutual activities may require formal or informal memoranda of understanding, contractual agreements, resolutions or ordinances by political jurisdictions, etc.
Performance Measures – a listing of potential data that could be gathered, analyzed and used to measure the performance of the project relative to the expected costs and benefits.
List of Actions/Activities – a general outline of the implementation steps necessary with an assigned lead organization.

The 15 recommended projects are discussed below. The complete project descriptions are provided in **Appendix A**.

1. Centralize vehicle maintenance for small providers.

Small transit providers would contract with larger providers for their vehicle maintenance and parts purchases.

Centralized vehicle maintenance was the fourth most desired coordination activity noted by the 85 respondents to the Agency Survey. It is one excellent way to provide reliable, uninterrupted service to people who depend on transit.

Not only would the economies of scale involved allow everyone to save money, but it would ensure that transit vehicles get repaired and returned to service more quickly. Particularly in dealing with repairs to wheelchair lifts, smaller providers could take advantage of technical expertise and efficiency that the larger providers have in their operations. Also, a larger provider may be in the position to loan a smaller provider a temporary vehicle until repairs are complete.

This project would require the appointment of a task force to explore options for the efficient provision of preventive maintenance services under agreements allowing the participation of small providers. This could include joint purchasing agreements between large and small providers of maintenance services. Under such agreements the providers could jointly purchase services from companies that provide maintenance throughout East Texas. This would allow economies of scale in the purchase of preventive maintenance services that would reduce costs for all providers.

2. Bring all transit stops, train station platforms, and approaching sidewalks up to compliance with ADA and TAS standards.

Municipalities, TxDOT, and transit agencies must work together to make sure transit stops and the immediately surrounding areas are accessible according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA and the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS)). This project addresses input received in the stakeholder and public workshops. In many locations, this will require construction of sidewalks (with curb cuts) and passenger waiting platforms at transit stops.

This effort is essential for two reasons: 1) public transit accessibility is required under the ADA, a civil rights law passed in 1990; and 2) it will enable a greater number of persons with disabilities to access fixed-route transit. The more transit customers with disabilities who can use rural or fixed route transit, the fewer who will have to use special or Paratransit trips. Addressing these needs would also improve access to transit in rural areas.

At the very minimum, all transit stops should be on an accessible route and should consist of curb cuts and sidewalks in the immediate area surrounding the stop. According to the ADA, all municipalities should have made government facilities and programs accessible by 1995. In addition to this basic goal, any new construction in the public right-of-way that costs over \$50,000 is required to be accessible. Each local government should team with its transit agency to create a plan for accessibility upgrades. In addition to designating new capital projects and timelines to achieve accessibility, municipalities should codify accessibility requirements for all new private developments. This would include requiring that sidewalks and curb ramps be built along with any new or remodel project even if gaps in the sidewalk network exist adjacent to the new project. Thus, any new transit routes established in the future would stand a better chance of being completely accessible, and at less cost to the municipality.

Those transit stops serving known areas of high concentration of mobility-impaired customers should be considered first for capital improvements. Examples of such areas are routes near assisted living facilities, nursing homes, sheltered workshops, accessible apartment communities, schools for the blind, MHMR etc. One facility in East Texas that needs fixing promptly is the Amtrak boarding platform in Marshall.

This project would allow a broad spectrum of public and private agencies to pursue funding for such facilities under New Freedom and other grant programs.

3. Establish transit centers to facilitate transfers among transit routes, especially between rural and urban service routes.

This project would locate and construct a series of transit transfer centers throughout the 14-county East Texas region to make it easier for riders to transfer among routes of various rural and urban providers.

This project addresses several barriers and constraints issues from the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops. It would involve public and private providers, make it easier to transfer between routes on the same

system, between demand-response and fixed route services, and between rural and urban services.

Until legislation or regulatory changes are made to allow urban providers to cross geographic boundaries, it will be difficult for people to make connections to travel out of county or city. This first step to making this easier is to determine logical transfer points between the urban and rural routes. The Medical District in Tyler and the Amtrak Stations in Marshall, Longview, and Mineola are examples of potential locations for transit/transfer centers. After these locations are determined, transit centers would be constructed to accommodate pick-up, drop-off and waiting time of passengers. Accommodations at these centers would range from basic—simple shelters with seating and schedule information—to more comfortable places with water fountains, lighting, restrooms, etc. These centers would be used by all providers regardless of funding source or municipal association. Costs to construct and maintain the transit centers would be shared by all providers, plus TxDOT and participating municipalities.

4. Establish a local vehicle sharing program.

This project would develop a prototype for a vehicle sharing program among providers to share vehicles (and potentially drivers) during low demand periods or days.

Enlist school districts, churches, HHS agencies with vehicle fleets, etc. to provide rides during their typical “down” times. This project addresses one of the top five coordination activities of interest in the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops.

Vehicle availability is one of the top three constraints to providing adequate public transportation service in the East Texas region. It was cited as the second most frequently encountered constraint and the third most important constraint needing to be addressed by the 85 agencies responding to the Steering Committee’s agency survey questionnaire. Creating and joining a network(s) of agencies to coordinate services and share vehicles was cited by 46% of the survey respondents as a coordination activity they would be interested in achieving.

The lack of vehicle availability is exacerbated by problems associated with the maintenance of wheelchair lifts and alternative fuel vehicles. TxDOT funded transit providers are encouraged to purchase vehicles that use only alternative fuels. The complexity and young technology of these vehicles has created hardships for transit providers operating under these recommendations. This results in many vehicles being out of service due to maintenance needs, which in turn results in missed trips and failure to deliver promised service to clients.

Another problem faced by transit providers is the frequent breakdown of lift equipment. The situation is likely to worsen over the next several years as powered mobility vehicles, carts, and wheelchairs get heavier. Current lift specifications are 600 pounds, but the combined weight of many new mobility vehicles and their users often exceeds 600 pounds.

Even though public transportation suffers from a shortage of funding and therefore, a shortage of vehicles, throughout East Texas there are publicly-funded buses and vans that sit unused for many hours of every day. Some examples are school buses, which sit idle for periods during the day, in the evenings, and on weekends; church buses and vans, nursing homes, and various health and human services agencies that are typically used only for the purpose of transporting clients to services during business hours Monday through Friday.

Any public entity's vehicle that typically sits idle for several hours at a time could be used by another agency to transport clients on short-duration trips, such as for grocery shopping, recreation, medical appointments, social visits, etc. Special weekend events, such as holiday events, festivals, and fairs are also good opportunities for gathering a community's vehicle resources to transport large numbers of people who need rides.

Other options for expanding local vehicle sharing include cooperative purchasing of vehicles by multiple providers; allowing smaller providers to "piggy-back" on the purchases of large providers, which would generate cost savings to the small providers; and, leasing programs among providers. This project also lends itself to coordinating vehicle sharing during emergencies and evacuations to enhance the safety and security of the citizens of East Texas. Doing so would address a priority of the Steering

Committee, while also responding to input received during the public meeting held in Tyler on November 13, 2006.

One key to making this kind of coordination possible is having a central billing system coupled with a fare “smart card” issued to each person that entitles them to ride on any approved publicly-funded or privately operated vehicle. Such a set-up is a goal of any coordinated system, but it could take some time to get it in place in East Texas. However, many vehicle-sharing efforts can begin even before an automated, centralized billing system is in place. Until a “smart card” system exists, some of the accounting of trips could simply be done on a paper vehicle log, to be followed by monthly invoices to client representatives and payments to providers.

5. Conduct targeted education and outreach to promote transit use.

Promote public transportation through a wide variety of media and methods, keeping in mind communication needs of potential users such as Spanish-speaking, blind and visually-impaired, hearing impaired, cognitively impaired, illiterate, etc.

This public transportation education project would target three main segments of the public: current transit-dependent people who may not know about all of the transit options available to them, or the best way to access the services, unimpaired people who need or would like to use public transportation services but don't know enough about it to utilize it, people who own and drive cars for transportation but who might use transit if they knew how to fit it into their lives.

With such a large geographical region, diverse target groups and the many media and promotion methods, creating one overarching program for this project would be too large and cumbersome a task. Therefore, each transit provider, municipality and HHS agency would commit to an education and outreach effort for their own users and clients. Two or more entities could certainly team up to pool funds to pay for their promotion programs.

It would be best to have a “Lead Agency” to make sure that each entity creates and implements an education and outreach plan in an allotted amount of time. In addition, a

Lead Agency could negotiate for discounts on advertising, printing, etc. based on the combined annual activities of all agencies.

6. Conduct a training program for HHS agency staff about regional transit services available for their clients.

A program would be developed and implemented to train HHS agency staff about how to inform their clients of public transportation options for their particular situation. The program would provide regular updates to HHS staff about changes in these services.

“Lack of awareness about transportation opportunities” was identified as the most significant barrier to improving transit service in the Agency Survey, and the second most important issue to be resolved (after “funding levels”). Thus, there is a critical need to educate agency staff members on the transit services that are available now, and to keep them informed as improvements, changes and expansions are made. Key agencies include: HHS agencies, local (city, county) public information officers, community agencies such as chambers of commerce, and the Texas Work Force Commission staff.

The program would address what services are available to their clients, what services their clients may already be using, and how to teach their clients to access the services in the most useful, convenient and cost-effective way.

7. Design, construct, and implement a centralized call center or telephone routing system, dispatching operation and information line (bilingual and accessible).

A common system would be implemented for receiving and processing transit ride requests including central fleet dispatching (regardless of carrier). The call center would have a toll-free number available throughout the 14-county region, and would provide information and referral services as well as dispatching of vehicles.

A significant coordination effort that results in both increased service and cost savings can not be achieved without some kind of centralized call center and dispatching system in which all providers participate. This would require an area-wide, common

and interoperable IT product supported by AVLs and GPS systems. Although billing for each ride would not have to be centralized, it would need to be automated, with card readers in every vehicle, plus a fare “Smart Card” issued to every person who receives assistance for transportation (the general public could also use fare cards, or pay cash for rides). This project addresses one of the top five coordination activities of interest in the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops.

With such a system, any person whose transportation is funded by a program could potentially use any participating service, regardless of who operates the vehicle or what source funds it. The ride would be arranged through one central entity. This central agency could also “piggy back” rides onto agency vehicles that have room for more riders or that were not being used at specific times of the day. The system would allow these agencies to actually earn revenues for the use of their vehicles during down times.

Fixed route systems such as Tyler and Longview transit could participate in the centralized system so that the general public could have easy access to transit information. Another option that would be investigated is the development of a centralized phone system that routes calls to the appropriate agency.

8. Establish volunteer programs to assist with transportation needs.

This project would assist agencies and groups in setting up and staffing a volunteer program to assist HHS clients, low income or out-of-work persons, or others with transportation needs.

Many HHS programs depend on volunteers to fill staffing needs. The transportation element of these programs is no exception. Having a pool of volunteers for driving, passenger assistance, dispatching and education/ promotion is a key enhancement to any local coordination effort. The potential for expanding service while saving money is great. There are likely many more potential volunteers in each community than we currently know of; it just takes a focused effort to find and recruit them.

An added bonus of volunteer pools is that their time can be calculated at market rate for hourly wages to be leveraged as matching funds for grants. Small HHS agencies that otherwise lack the funds for matching grants might then obtain funding to improve or expand services. A working group would be formed to pursue New Freedom funding to support passenger assistance and driver training. This project addresses a coordination activity of interest from the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops.

9. Optimize use of Amtrak, Greyhound and Lone Star Coach.

Many people in the East Texas region wish to travel between cities on days and during times when transit service is not available. Until more fixed routes or “commuter” routes can be established between cities, many of the intercity, regional or out of state trips people need to take may best be accomplished by Amtrak, Greyhound Bus, or the Lone Star Coach (Amtrak’s bus service). Even if these providers cannot necessarily add routes right away, they could do a better job of promoting what trips are available, then begin working towards adding more routes that connect with other providers in the region.

It is important to note that the East Texas region is fortunate to have a working Amtrak line connecting several communities, ensuring the region has a high potential for being truly “multi-modal”. It is possible that if the public’s use of Amtrak does not increase significantly, it could be discontinued in the future. This transit coordination effort has potential to increase Amtrak utilization, thereby maintaining both its viability in East Texas and its ability to contribute to an overall improvement in public transportation service to all citizens of the region. This project addresses a coordination activity of interest from the Agency Survey, as well as input received in stakeholder and public workshops.

10. Provide business-sponsored shopping day and special event transit service.

One way to reduce individual on-demand transit trips for grocery and other shopping is to schedule special shopping events for groups of transit users with large businesses such as Wall Mart. The business could help pay for a bus or van, plus designate staff to help people shop if necessary. This is an excellent opportunity for a large corporation such as Wall Mart to give back to the community and promote this involvement through their public relations efforts. It is also an opportunity for community groups to provide volunteers to assist shoppers, etc.

On a regional level, target a few special events every year to provide transit service to the event. Examples: County fairs, Rose Festival, Christmas events, 4th of July fireworks show, etc. This would create more opportunities for people to attend these events, as well as save money on Paratransit and other on-demand transit. It is also an opportunity for the business community to get involved by sponsoring the effort. Both of these efforts address input received in stakeholder and public workshops pertaining to utilizing flexible funding sources and expanding service, as well as addressing coordination activities of interest in the Agency Survey.

11. Conduct feasibility studies of specific new expanded transit services including potential changes in funding allocations to pay for added service.

The most frequently received comment during the agency and public workshops was, “More service”, including weekends, evenings, third shift, etc, for towns and counties throughout the region. There is no question that more service is needed; however, where, when, and how much can only be determined after careful study. Funding is also an important issue, and FTA is encouraging states to be more flexible and creative in transit funding approaches. Thus, these feasibility studies should also explore a range of evolving uses of FTA 5310 grants for purchase-of-service agreements and transit coordination planning activities; New Freedom funds for services geared towards disabled persons; JARC funds to assist in job access for welfare recipients and low-income people; and, FTA 5311 grants for new rural intercity bus service projects. These feasibility studies would evaluate the following options, including potential

adverse impacts on existing service while providing for the most efficient use of public funds, for selected areas of the region:

- Intercity transit routes which provide scheduled service connecting with local service at transit centers and transfer points
- Weekend service
- Evening and late night service
- Shorter headways on fixed route systems
- Additional fixed routes
- Partnerships with large employers, schools, public agencies, universities, etc. for carpools, vanpools, and other commute programs.

12. Seek foundation grants to fund service expansion or vehicle purchases.

There are many foundations in East Texas who may have grant programs to support the missions of health and human service organizations, work force programs, elderly and disabled programs, etc. There may even be funding available for efforts to improve the environment through alternative transportation modes such as transit. This project would first research all opportunities for foundation funding that may be available, and then determine which transit providers or HHS agencies may be most appropriate to seek that funding. This project addresses input received in the stakeholder and public workshops, as well as the Steering Committee's Priority 4: Increased and Flexible Funding.

13. Prepare a regional application for JARC.

Prepare an East Texas Regional application for JARC that would support mobility management and coordinated funding for the year 2007 once the Texas Transportation Commission adopts the rules and TxDOT issues the call for projects.

Many of the coordination activities identified by the Steering Committee, stakeholders and the public are expensive to implement, especially in a region so vast and rural as East Texas. One such activity is a centralized dispatch and information system (previously stated in Project #7). Most of the providers in East Texas have expressed a need for such a system, but no individual provider alone could afford to purchase and operate it. The three main providers—Longview Transit, Tyler Transit and ETCOG-Minibus have joined with a private transportation provider, NDMJ, Inc and ETCOG's Workforce planning staff to form a partnership for the purpose of applying as a region rather than as individual providers.

Other available options for JARC and New Freedom for FY07 and beyond will be explored. For FY07, 5310 funding has been allocated by GETTA as follows: \$101,726 to ETCOG for preventive maintenance and the purchase of ITS hardware and graphic servers; \$75,000 to Tyler Transit for preventive maintenance, contracted transportation service, and ITS hardware, software, and MDCs; and \$75,000 to Longview Transit for preventive maintenance and ITS hardware, software, and MDCs. . The use of 5310 funds for FY09 and beyond will be investigated.

14. Implement an Interagency Automated Fare Card System

Develop and implement a common automated fare card system ("Smart Card") for public transportation providers in the Region. This system should be fully compatible with the Medicaid Access Card/Integrated Benefits Card system being developed by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).

Any citizen who regularly uses public or participating private transportation could be issued a fare card that would be read by a terminal installed in every vehicle (or hand-

held version for different types of vehicles). Data on the card would include the person's information and the funding agency for the ride, or the amount of pre-paid fare. The funding agency would receive a report or bill at the end of a designated period and pay the provider accordingly, or pre-programmed accounts could be accessed in the system.

15. Create efficiencies by identifying and eliminating duplication of services where possible.

One of the primary objectives of Chapter 461 of HB 3588 is to eliminate inefficiencies in the delivery of public transportation services. By eliminating inefficiency and duplication of services, existing funding would be available for increased and expanded services. This project would identify duplicated services and endeavor to eliminate duplication, where possible.

V.D. Evaluation Process

Once the list of projects was prepared and the Project Descriptions drafted, the Consultant Team prepared a draft evaluation matrix for consideration by the Steering Committee. The Evaluation matrix addressed three categories of criteria:

- Benefits and Costs
- Impediments to Implementation
- Regional Priorities

This tri-level approach was used to make it easier for the Steering Committee and various reviewing agencies to understand both the relative value of the recommended actions, and those conditions which may make it difficult or time-consuming to implement a given project. **Table 11** identifies the evaluation criteria and describes how they were considered in the evaluation process.

The results of the project evaluations are presented in **Table 12**.

Table 11. Evaluation Criteria

Benefits and Costs	
Benefits	The descriptions of project benefits would be listed in tabular form (including both qualitative and quantitative benefits) and ranked relative to one another and to the do nothing alternative, as high, medium or low.
Costs	Similarly, costs from the Project Description would be listed and ranked in the same manner – high, medium or low.
Implementation Pre-Conditions	
Local Policy, Ordinance or Funding Changes Needed	What local changes in laws, ordinances, policies or procedures would be required before the project could be implemented? This would be a list of actions rather than a ranking and it would be up to the Steering Committee to attach the appropriate weight to this criteria when evaluating projects.
Local Paradigm Change	Continue innovative approaches in how transit and special needs transportation services have been provided
State/Federal Legislative or Regulatory Relief Required	Are changes needed in laws and regulations at the state or federal level? Many of these issues will have been addressed through the statewide analysis of Barriers and Constraints to regional transit coordination conducted by each of the state's 24 planning regions.
Regional Priorities	
Priority 1: People First, Barrier Free	Each project would be rated as high, medium, low or not applicable as to how well it helps achieve the Steering Committee's adopted Priorities for Regional Transit Coordination in East Texas.
Priority 2: Multimodal Interconnectivity Across the Region	
Priority 3: Aggressive Outreach and Education to a Broad Base	
Priority 4: Increased and Flexible Funding	
Priority 5: Increased and Expanded Services	
Priority 6: Emergency Planning and Homeland Security	

Table 12. Project Evaluation Matrix

Project	Benefit/Cost		Implementation Category			East Texas Regional Priority					
	Benefit	Cost	Local Policy or Funding Changes Required	Local Paradigm Change Needed	Legislative or Regulatory Relief Required	People First, barrier-free	Multi-modal interconnectivity across the region	Aggressive outreach and education to a broad base	Increased and flexible funding	Increased and expand services	Emergency planning and homeland security
Centralize vehicle maintenance for small providers.	Moderate	Low		Yes					✓	✓	
Bring all transit stops, train station platforms and approaching sidewalks up to compliance with ADA and TAS.	High	Moderate to High	Yes	Yes		✓				✓	✓
Establish transit centers to facilitate transfers among transit routes, especially between rural and urban service routes.	High	Moderate to High	Yes	Yes		✓	✓			✓	
Establish a local vehicle sharing program.	Moderate	Low to Moderate	Yes	Yes		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Conduct targeted education and outreach to promote transit use.	High	Low				✓		✓			✓
Conduct a training program for HHS agency staff about regional transit services available for their clients.	Moderate	Low				✓		✓		✓	✓
Design, construct and implement a centralized call center or telephone routing system, dispatching operation and information line (bilingual and accessible).	Low to High	High	Yes	Yes		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Establish volunteer programs to assist with the transportation needs.	Low to Moderate	Low				✓		✓	✓	✓	
Optimize use of Amtrak, Greyhound and Lone Star Coach.	High	Moderate		Yes		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Provide business-sponsored shopping day and special event transit service.	Low	Low to Moderate				✓		✓	✓	✓	
Conduct feasibility studies of specific expanded transit services.	High	Low				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Seek foundation grants to fund service expansion or vehicle purchases.	Moderate	Low					✓	✓	✓	✓	
Regional application for JARC.	High	Low		Yes			✓		✓	✓	
Implement Automated Fare Card	High	High	Yes	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Create efficiencies by identifying and eliminating duplication of services where possible.	High	Low	Yes	Yes					✓	✓	

VI. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Analyzing the coordination projects and the evaluation presented in **Table 12**, the Steering Committee developed a plan to achieve these projects to support their six Regional Priorities. The Steering Committee recognizes that the timely implementation of all fifteen action items depends on the availability of additional resources and funding for the East Texas Region.

The successful implementation of each of the action items listed above depends on the transit stakeholders' commitment to leadership and organizational structure, resources, oversight, and continuity. Each of these required elements is described below.

VI.A. State Leadership

Unequivocally, case studies of successful public transportation coordination programs point to state leadership as the driving force behind the success of coordination efforts. Strong state leadership enables participants to overcome many of the regional barriers commonly faced when implementing coordination projects. Without strong state leadership, starting a coordination project is daunting, and successfully implementing it is difficult. For example, coordination projects often require agencies that have had little or no working relationship in the past to cooperate and compromise on how they do business in the future. Also, since the benefits of many projects are not evenly shared by the participants, some agencies may not see the benefit of investing their agency's time and money on behalf of another. These obstacles are more easily overcome when the state makes coordination a priority and rewards communities that do.

HB 3588 provided the impetus for coordination, and the Texas Transportation Commission has responded with a statewide effort and initial funding to create the regional coordination plans. However, the accomplishment of each Plan's recommendations rests with regional leadership among local transit providers, client advocates, elected officials, and health and human service agencies.

VI.B. East Texas Governance

Different activities and projects will require different levels of integration among the participants. Cooperation, Coordination, and Consolidation are points along a continuum of organizational working relationships defined as:

Cooperation: Working together in some loose association, perhaps focusing primarily on information sharing, in which all agencies retain their separate identities and authorities, including control over the vehicles they own;

Coordination: Joint decisions and actions of a group of agencies with formal arrangements to provide for the management of the resources of a distinct system; and

Consolidation: Combining operations, services, or functions so that an entity provides these services according to agreements or other contractual relationships.

The agencies, transit operators and stakeholders in East Texas frequently **cooperate** on a project-specific basis to achieve a specific objective. Client advocates have a good track record of working with service providers, TxDOT and others to institute a particular service or resolve a specific problem for a relatively small number of HHS agency clients. The size of the 14-county East Texas Region (10,000 square miles) with its 745,180 inhabitants makes region-wide **coordination** extremely difficult. Effective **consolidation** of service providers will likewise be difficult because of the vast differences in size, mission and service areas of the public and private providers within the region.

While some of the projects can be implemented as part of the transportation community's existing work load, existing staff will have relatively little time to devote to the entire list of projects. The timely implementation of the entire list will depend on the identification of additional funding resources. Additional resources made available through existing agencies (i.e. FTA, TxDOT, etc.) would expedite the implementation of this Plan.

VI.C. Schedule

The Steering Committee believes that all of the projects listed above could be *initiated* over the next *two years*, assuming that adequate funding was in place to accomplish the indicated projects. Each project will move through four implementation phases:

- Project-specific implementation plan – prepare a step-by-step “to do” list (i.e. a project management plan) for each item indicating the specific task sequencing, responsible party(ies), and milestones. This step would include designating a specific point of contact (POC) for each project that would be responsible for preparing the project management plan.
- Funding commitments – Identify and execute agreements for resources and funding required to implement the project.
- Startup and “fine tuning” – Initiate and implement the project, with a feedback loop to ensure the activity is achieving the desired result.
- Monitoring, review and continuing commitment – Following the start-up period (six months to one year), a formal review of the project will be conducted. Possible actions include changes to the project implementation, committing to continue and possibly expand the activity, or deciding to stop the activities in favor of another action item that better achieves the original goals and objectives.
- A general implementation schedule for the 2007 calendar year is listed below:

First Quarter 2007

- All of the projects where *legislative remedy* is primary can be forwarded to the responsible authority (Texas Transportation Commission, State Legislature) for consideration and action by the 1st quarter of 2007
- Begin the project planning stage for those projects identified to require *no local policy or funding changes*

Second Quarter 2007

- Begin the project planning stage for projects identified to require only a *local paradigm change*

Third Quarter 2007

- Complete the planning and funding stages for those projects identified to require *no local policy or funding changes* with implementation following into 2008
- Begin project planning stage for the highest priority projects identified as *requiring local policy and/or funding change*

VI.D. Relationship to Federal Planning Requirements

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was signed into law on August 10, 2005. This federal transportation law authorizes federal expenditures for a range of transportation programs, including transit. The transit portion of SAFETEA-LU includes several programs that are targeted to achieving specific goals. These include:

- The “Section 5310” program that provides funding, allocated by a formula, to States for capital projects to assist in meeting the transportation needs of older adults and persons with disabilities.
- The Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program provides formula funding to States and designated recipients to support the development and maintenance of job access projects designed to transport welfare recipients and eligible low-income individuals to and from jobs and activities related to their employment. The JARC program also supports reverse commute projects designed to transport residents of urbanized areas and other than urbanized areas to suburban employment opportunities.
- The New Freedom Program is newly established in SAFETEA-LU. The purpose of the New Freedom program is to provide new public transportation services and public transportation alternatives beyond those required by the Americans with

Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) that assist individuals with disabilities with transportation, including transportation to and from jobs and employment support services.

SAFETEA-LU requires that projects selected for funding under these programs be derived from a “coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan” beginning in FY 2006 for JARC and FY 2007 for the Section 5310 and New Freedom programs. Transit projects selected for funding under these programs should be evaluated for compliance with the Priorities adopted by the Steering Committee. Any project determined to meet one or more of these Priorities may be considered as derived from this plan.

VII. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A
COMPLETE PROJECT LIST

Project 1: Centralize vehicle maintenance for small providers.

Project Description/Background:

Small transit providers would contract with larger providers for their vehicle maintenance and parts purchases.

Centralized vehicle maintenance was the fourth most desired coordination activity noted by the 85 respondents to the Agency Survey. It is one excellent way to provide reliable, uninterrupted service to people who depend on transit.

Not only would the economies of scale involved allow everyone to save money, but it would ensure that transit vehicles get repaired faster and get back into service. Particularly in dealing with repairs to wheelchair lifts, smaller providers could take advantage of technical expertise and efficiency that the larger providers have in their operations. Also, a larger provider may be in the position to loan a smaller provider a temporary vehicle until repairs are complete.

This project would require the appointment of a task force to explore options for the efficient provision of preventive maintenance services under agreements allowing the participation of small providers. This could include joint purchasing agreements between large and small providers of maintenance services. Under such agreements the providers could jointly purchase services from companies that provide maintenance throughout East Texas (i.e. Jiffy Lube). This would allow economies of scale in the purchase of preventive maintenance services that would reduce costs for all providers.

Partnering Agencies:

- Longview Transit
- Tyler Transit
- ETCOG
- Other public and private sector transit providers including HHS service agencies and group homes

Benefits:

- The reliability of the larger and smaller transit agencies' fleets will improve.
- The cost of maintaining vehicles will be lower.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low; project should result in a net savings for participants.

Necessary Agreements

- Any two transit providers would need to spell out terms of the maintenance and repair agreements, with maintaining service levels foremost in mind.

Performance Measures

- Annual costs to maintain and repair transit vehicles.
- Number of annual service interruptions and missed trips.

- Annual maintenance cost per vehicle by type and manufacturer
- Number of annual vehicle breakdowns
- Vehicle performance measures like fleet miles per gallon, tire replacement costs per vehicle, etc. that reflect improved vehicle efficiency.

List of Activities

- Large transit providers would join with small providers under joint purchasing agreements to procure contracts from companies that provide maintenance and repair services throughout East Texas. Prices would be negotiated as part of the contracting process.
- Either party could be a private sector provider. For example, a taxi company with its own repair facilities may be a good “large provider” that could perform maintenance and repairs for a smaller, public provider.

Project 2: Bring all transit stops, train station platforms and approaching sidewalks up to compliance with ADA and TAS standards.

Project Description/Background:

Municipalities, TxDOT and transit agencies must work together to make sure transit stops and the immediately surrounding areas are accessible according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS). This project addresses input received in the stakeholder and public workshops. In many locations, this will require construction of sidewalks (with curb cuts) and passenger waiting platforms at transit stops.

This effort is essential for two reasons: 1) Public transit accessibility is required under the ADA, a civil rights law passed in 1990; and 2) It will enable a greater number of persons with disabilities to access fixed route transit. The more transit customers with disabilities who can use fixed route transit, the fewer who will have to use special or Paratransit trips. Addressing these needs would also improve access to transit in rural areas.

At the very minimum, all transit stops should be on an accessible route and should consist of curb cuts and sidewalks in the immediate area surrounding the stop. According to the ADA, all municipalities should have made government facilities and programs accessible by 1995. In addition to this basic goal, any new construction in the public right-of-way that costs over \$50,000 is required to be accessible. Each local government should team with its transit agency to create a plan for accessibility upgrades. In addition to designating new capital projects and timelines to achieve accessibility, municipalities should codify accessibility requirements for all new private developments. This would include requiring that sidewalks and curb ramps be built along with any new or remodel project even if gaps in the sidewalk network exist adjacent to the new project. Thus, any new transit routes established in the future would stand a better chance of being completely accessible, and at less cost to the municipality.

Those transit stops serving known areas of high concentration of mobility-impaired customers should be considered first for capital improvements. Examples of such areas are routes near assisted living facilities, nursing homes, sheltered workshops, accessible apartment communities, schools for the blind, MHMR etc. One facility in East Texas that needs attention promptly is the Amtrak boarding platform in Marshall. Coordination with MPOs would be required to ensure that selected improvements are included in short-term and long-term transportation plans.

This project would allow a broad spectrum of public and private agencies to pursue funding for such facilities under New Freedom and other grant programs.

Partnering Agencies:

- TxDOT
- ETCOG
- MPOs

- All local governments (counties and cities)
- Tyler Transit, Longview Transit
- Amtrak

Benefits:

An increase in the number of customers with disabilities that can use fixed-route transit, and subsequent cost savings to paratransit programs. More transportation options available and accessible to mobility-impaired people.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Moderate. Although the cumulative costs of these improvements at all stops and service locations would be significant throughout the region, the individual improvements (sidewalks, pedestrian platforms, curb cuts, etc.) would generally be low compared to typical roadway construction projects.

Necessary Agreements

- Each municipality is responsible for ADA compliance, and therefore should take the lead on this project. Public and private agencies, such as cities or Centers for Independent Living (CIL), could take the lead on this project given the flexibility in funding options, including New Freedom grants. An Interlocal agreement that details sharing of costs and project management is necessary between local governments and other participating agencies. Projects on TxDOT roads will require an interlocal agreement among TxDOT, the local government and the transit agency.

Performance Measures

- Number of transit stops brought into compliance. After a base inventory of all transit stops, the lead agency would identify a goal for the number of transit stops to comply with ADA and TAS per year for five years. Goals and accomplishments will be evaluated after that time.

List of Activities

- Each municipality served by transit, air, intercity bus, or Amtrak initiates an accessibility improvement effort.
- Establish a committee of stakeholders to ensure oversight and a prioritized project selection process. This committee would include mobility-impaired transit users, advocates, local municipality public works staff and transit agency staff.
- Committee representatives conduct an “accessibility inventory” of stops and pedestrian approaches. Any municipality lacking technical knowledge of ADA/TAS requirements may contact the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) or a qualified consultant for assistance.
- Costs of improvements are determined for each location.

- Locations are placed on a priority list, with those serving government services and public facilities placed at the top. Next would come transit routes serving the largest numbers of mobility-impaired people, to be determined by the transit agency's records. Likely candidates would be grocery stores, shopping centers, medical complexes, accessible apartment buildings, etc.
- Funding is determined. City, County and TxDOT* capital budgets are logical sources, as well as the various programs that fund special needs transit such as 5310, 5311, 5307, New Freedom, JARC. In some cities in Texas, transit agencies help fund accessibility infrastructure improvements. (*TxDOT would be responsible for funding improvements on roads within their jurisdiction.)

Project 3: Establish transit centers to facilitate transfers among transit routes, especially between rural and urban service routes.

Project Description/Background:

This project would locate and construct a series of transit transfer centers throughout the 14-county East Texas region to make it easier for riders to transfer among routes of various rural and urban providers.

This project addresses several barriers and constraints issues from the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops. It would involve public and private providers, make it easier to transfer between routes on the same system, between demand-responsive and fixed route services, and between rural and urban services.

This project will make it easier for users to travel out of their county or city. The first step is to determine logical transfer points between the urban and rural routes. The Medical District in Tyler and the Amtrak Stations in Marshall, Longview, and Mineola are examples of potential locations for transit/transfer centers. After these locations are determined, transit centers would be constructed to facilitate pick-up, drop-off and waiting time of passengers. Accommodations at these centers would range from basic—simple shelters with seating and schedule information—to more comfortable places with water fountains, lighting, restrooms, etc. These centers would be used by all providers regardless of funding source or municipal association. Costs to construct and maintain the transit centers would be shared by all providers, plus TxDOT and participating municipalities.

Partnering Agencies:

- All transit providers, both public and private sector

Benefits:

Transit centers would make it easier for people to travel across city and county boundaries for work, services, visiting family, recreation, etc. Rural providers would save money and vehicle wear-and-tear by being able to transfer passengers to fixed-route urban systems. This project may also reduce costs by combining long-distance trips between centers from local collector routes.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Medium to High. Determining transfer locations and constructing basic shelters would fall in the Medium cost range, while more comfortable transit centers with lighting, restrooms, water fountains, etc, would certainly be more costly.

Necessary Agreements

- The primary agreements would be among the agencies involved in the formation of a transit center. These agencies might include cities, county governments, local community participants, and transit providers. Since some federal funding will be needed. TxDOT will also be included in the agreements.

Performance Measures

- Measured change in transit service accessibility.
- Increase in number of trips.
- Customer satisfaction with pick-up, drop-off and wait times. To be determined by questionnaire of customers and agencies.

List of Activities

- A working group will be formed to determine the most feasible transfer points.
- Agency transportation data and providers' trip data are analyzed to coordinate schedules and determine those transfer times that will complete the most trips with a minimum of wait times for passengers.
- Determine number of transit centers needed, and which minimum infrastructure for each.
- Estimate costs and identify funding sources.
- Identify several pilot projects and apply for grant funding. Coordinate projects with ADA/TAS accessibility improvements.
- Providers and municipalities decide what entity will manage projects to construct transit centers.
- Notify public of new routes / transfer services available.

Project 4: Establish a local vehicle sharing program.

Project Description/Background:

This project would develop a prototype for a vehicle sharing program among providers to share vehicles (and potentially drivers) during low demand periods or days.

Enlist school districts, churches, HHS agencies with vehicle fleets, etc. to provide rides during their typical “down” times. This project addresses one of the top five coordination activities of interest in the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops.

Vehicle availability is one of the top three constraints to providing adequate public transportation service in the East Texas region. It was cited as the second most frequently encountered constraint and the third most important constraint needing to be addressed by the 85 agencies responding to the Steering Committee’s agency survey questionnaire. Creating and joining a network(s) of agencies to coordinate services and share vehicles was cited by 46% of the survey respondents as a coordination activity they would be interested in achieving.

The lack of vehicle availability is exacerbated by problems associated with the maintenance of wheelchair lifts and alternative fuel vehicles. Unless a waiver is granted, TxDOT funded transit providers are required to purchase vehicles that use only alternative fuels. The complexity and young technology of these vehicles has created hardships for transit providers operating under these requirements. This results in many vehicles being out of service due to maintenance needs, which in turn results in missed trips and failure to deliver promised service to clients.

Another problem faced by transit providers is the frequent breakdown of lift equipment. The situation is likely to worsen over the next several years as powered mobility vehicles, carts, and wheelchairs get heavier. Current lift specifications are 600 pounds, but the combined weight of many new mobility vehicles and their users often exceeds 600 pounds.

Even though public transportation suffers from a shortage of funding and therefore, a shortage of vehicles, in every town in East Texas there are publicly-funded buses and vans that sit unused for many hours of every day. Some examples are school buses, which sit idle for periods during the day, in the evenings and on weekends; church buses and vans, nursing homes, and various health and human services agencies that are typically used only for the purpose of transporting clients to services during business hours Monday through Friday.

Any public entity’s vehicle that typically sits idle for several hours at a time could be used by another agency to transport clients on short-duration trips, such as for grocery shopping, recreation, medical appointments, social visits, etc. Special weekend events, such as holiday events, festivals and fairs are also good opportunities for gathering a community’s vehicle resources to transport large numbers of people who need rides.

Other options for expanding local vehicle sharing include cooperative purchasing of vehicles by multiple providers; allowing smaller providers to “piggy-back” on the purchases of large providers, which would generate cost savings to the small providers;

and, leasing programs among providers. This project also lends itself to coordinating vehicle sharing during emergencies and evacuations to enhance the safety and security of the citizens of East Texas. Doing so would address a priority of the Steering Committee, while also responding to input received during the public meeting held in Tyler on November 13, 2006.

One key to making this kind of coordination possible is having a central billing system coupled with a fare “smart card” issued to each person that entitles them to ride on any publicly-funded and approved privately operated vehicle. Such a set-up is a goal of any coordinated system, but it could take some time to get it in place in East Texas. However, many vehicle-sharing efforts can begin even before an automated, centralized billing system is in place. Until a “smart card” system exists, some of the accounting of trips could simply be done on a paper vehicle log, to be followed by monthly invoices to client representatives and payments to providers.

Vehicle sharing is naturally related to other coordination activities like centralized maintenance, forming networks of providers, transit services for special events, etc.

Partnering Agencies:

- Local HHS agencies
- School districts, churches and other community entities with vehicles
- ETCOG
- Tyler Transit
- Longview Transit
- Interested private sector participants

Benefits:

Increase in trips provided to the public without the expense of purchasing additional vehicles. An additional benefit is revenue increase for those agencies adding more trips by transporting other agencies’ clients. These revenues may be reinvested back into the business for the purchase of more vehicles, salaries for an expanded driver force, etc, which results in more service for everyone.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low. Vehicle sharing for similar agency/providers could be established locally with low staff time and costs. As vehicle sharing programs become successful, they could be expanded to include a “smart card” program with an automated billing system which would require regional collaboration and higher costs.

Necessary Agreements

- Agreements would be necessary between any two entities doing business together. In the case of school districts providing buses for HHS trips, there may need to be a financial incentive for them to participate, perhaps a payment above the cost of the trip as a way to raise funds for school programs. In these agreements, driver training requirements, insurance issues, scheduling,

fueling/maintenance and dealing with unforeseen circumstances would all be covered.

Performance Measures

- Number of trips provided. After an inventory of available vehicles, times/days of availability and an assessment of need, a goal of X percentage increase in service would be determined. Hopefully this number would increase each year as more coordination strategies are implemented.
- No reduction in service to clients of vehicle owner agency. For vehicle sharing to work, the service level of the agencies offering their idle vehicles to others must be maintained. Any effect on service would need to be monitored. It may be wise to survey clients to ascertain that service has not suffered.

List of Activities

- A working group could be formed to identify potential “sharers” such as schools and churches, and other willing participants, such as HHS service providers, within the district.
- Working group reviews all vehicle inventories, ride schedules, budgets, driver availability and customer need to identify all opportunities for sharing of rides and/or vehicles. Timeline is determined for the first group of sharing projects to begin.
- Establish interlocal agreements for the shared use of vehicles during emergencies.
- Sharing opportunities are grouped by “easy” and “challenging”, with the easy ones to be implemented first. An example of an easy project would be one in which a driver and vehicle from one agency could simply add a trip or trips into their schedule to transport outside clients without need for additional driver training, insurance, etc. Accounting and trip logs could be done on paper, with invoice and payments occurring once per month. Challenging projects would involve additional driver training and recruitment, regulatory or insurance changes, etc, and would be implemented long-term.
- Once the easy projects are implemented, they would be monitored for alignment with performance measures, with an evaluation report due after six months (or mutually agreed upon time period).

Project 5: Conduct targeted public education and outreach to promote transit use.

Project Description/Background:

Promote public transportation through a wide variety of media and methods, keeping in mind communication needs of potential users such as Spanish-speaking, blind and visually-impaired, hearing-impaired, cognitively impaired, illiterate etc.

This public transportation education project would target three main segments of the public: current transit-dependent people who may not know about all of the transit options available to them, or the best way to access the services, unimpaired people who need or would like to use public transportation services but do not know enough about it to utilize it, people who own and drive cars for transportation but who might use transit if they knew how to fit it into their lives.

With such a large geographical region, diverse target groups and the many media and promotion methods, creating one overarching program for this project would be too large and cumbersome a task. Therefore, each transit provider, municipality and HHS agency would commit to an education and outreach effort for their own users and clients. Two or more entities could certainly team up to pool funds to pay for their promotion programs, such as a rural transit provider and MHMR centers or an urban transit provider and MHMR centers and/or other groups, such as Centers for Independent Living.

It would be best to have a “Lead Agency” to coordinate the education and outreach plans of the different entities and to ensure that such funds and resources are allocated efficiently. In addition, a Lead Agency could negotiate for discounts on advertising, printing, etc. based on the combined annual activities of all agencies.

The following are among the communication methods for promoting public transit:

- Public Service Announcements (PSA's) on radio, T.V. and newspaper. PSA's are often produced free of charge for community events and groups.
- Flyers at grocery stores, recreation centers, community centers, food pantries, medical complexes, public assistance housing. Remember that some of these written pieces will need to be bilingual.
- Churches, schools, programs such as Meals-on-Wheels are all outlets for outreach.
- Municipal web sites, regular newspaper spots and other media commonly utilized by cities and counties for communication with citizens such as utility bill inserts, door hangers, etc.
- Medical offices that accept Medicaid patients, particularly those whose patients utilize public transit.
- Ads on buses, bus shelters and taxis.
- Special P.R. campaigns to place features in newspapers and on TV at key times of the year.

Partnering Agencies:

- MPOs
- Public and private transit providers
- Amtrak, Greyhound, Lone Star Coach, 211 Referral Centers, and Centers for Independent Living
- Municipal and/or Public Information Officers (PIOs)
- Regional Medical Transportation Program office

Benefits:

Current users of public transportation who are dependent on it will be better served if they learn about all of their options, and learn the most efficient and cost-effective ways to access the services. People not currently using transit may decide to do so, thus helping increase ridership numbers, which helps transit providers and municipalities win more funding to improve service.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low to Moderate. By creating and placing PSAs or taking advantage of free community listings in newspapers and other media, any entity can increase their outreach efforts by not spending much money. Municipalities can add transit information to their existing PIO efforts for little cost. Advertising programs, new web sites, printing brochures and graphics on buses, taxis and bus shelters will reach into the Moderate category of costs.

Necessary Agreements

- No special agreements appear to be necessary beyond a simple cost-sharing agreement for those agencies that decide to combine resources and programs.

Performance Measures

- Market penetration estimates. Best obtained through random household surveys about citizens' knowledge of the transit system.
- Number of HHS clients that know about transit services. Accomplished by annual survey of HHS transportation program recipients.

List of Activities

- Identify a Lead Agency/entity.
- Lead Agency recommends deadlines for each entity to complete an education and outreach plan for the year.
- Transit providers, municipalities, MPOs and HHS agencies submit education/outreach plans to Lead Agency.
- Education/outreach plans implemented and evaluated after one year.

Project 6: Conduct a training program for HHS agency staff about regional transit services available for their clients.

Project Description/Background:

A program would be developed and implemented to train HHS agency staff about how to inform their clients of public transportation options for their particular situation. The program would provide regular updates to HHS staff about changes in these services.

“Lack of awareness about transportation opportunities” was identified as the most significant barrier to improving transit service in the Agency Survey, and the second most important issue to be resolved (after “funding levels”). Thus, there is a critical need to educate agency staff members on the transit services that are available now, and to keep them informed as improvements, changes and expansions are made. Key agencies include: HHS agencies, local (city, county) public information officers, community agencies such as chambers of commerce, and the Texas Work Force Commission staff.

The program would address what services are available to their clients, what services their clients may already be using, and how to teach their clients to access the services in the most useful, convenient and cost-effective way.

Partnering Agencies:

- MPOs
- Public and private transit Providers
- HHS agencies and Work Force Commission—local, regional, state
- Centers for Independent Living

Benefits:

HHS clients would be better informed about their public transportation choices, and become more efficient users of the system.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Moderate.

Necessary Agreements

- None appear necessary.

Performance Measures

- Knowledge of transit options by HHS agency staff obtained through random telephone surveys.

List of Activities

- Best practices of similar systems in other areas would be analyzed for guidance on how to implement in East Texas.

- Lead Agency creates goals, strategy and deadline for completing training of all HHS agency staff in the position to inform their clients about transportation options.
- After HHS agency and Work Force Commission staff are trained, they will educate their clients through their regular communications and also with new methods.

Project 7: Design, construct and implement a centralized call center or telephone routing system, dispatching operation and information line (bilingual and accessible).

Project Description/Background:

A common system would be implemented for receiving and processing transit ride requests including central fleet dispatching (regardless of carrier). The call center would have a toll-free number available throughout the 14-county region, and would provide information and referral services as well as dispatching of vehicles.

A significant coordination effort that results in both increased service and cost savings can not be achieved without some kind of centralized call center and dispatching system that all providers participate in. This would require an area-wide, common and interoperable IT product supported by AVLs and GPS systems. Although billing for each ride would not have to be centralized, it would need to be automated, with card readers in every vehicle, plus a fare “Smart Card” issued to every person who receives assistance for transportation (the general public could also use fare cards, or pay cash for rides). This project addresses one of the top five coordination activities of interest in the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops.

With such a system, any person whose transportation is funded by a program could potentially use any publicly funded service, regardless of who operates the vehicle or what source funds it. The ride would be arranged through one central entity. This central agency could also “piggy back” rides onto agency vehicles that have room for more riders or that were not being used at specific times of the day. The system would allow these agencies to actually earn revenues for the use of their vehicles during down times.

Fixed route systems such as Tyler and Longview Transit could participate in a centralized system so that the general public could have easy access to transit information. Another option that would be investigated is the development of a centralized, interoperable telephone system that would route the public’s calls to the appropriate agency, thus allowing for a seamless and accessible communication system among providers.

A working group will be formed to investigate whether it would be preferable to operate one centralized system for the entire 14-county region or to create several systems throughout the region grouped geographically.

Partnering Agencies:

- Public and private transit providers
- Interested private sector providers
- HHS agencies—local, regional, state

Benefits:

People would be able to arrange rides quicker and easier, and wouldn’t have to wait as long for a ride since they would have all the information on available rides in one spot. More choices in rides would be available since this system would utilize vehicles in their

agency's "down time". Money would be saved by filling up vehicles with passengers, sharing vehicles between agencies and consolidating trips.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low to High

Necessary Agreements

- Carefully crafted procedures and agreements would be needed to guarantee levels of service to all transit customers.
- Periodic evaluation of the system will be written into these agreements.

Performance Measures

- Riders per revenue mile.
- Overall transit ridership for the area.
- Average, median and 85th-percentile waiting times for transit users.

List of Activities

- Working group or providers, HHS agencies and transportation officials formed to determine timeline, plan, and funding for setting up regional dispatch and information centers.
- Best practices of similar systems in other areas would be analyzed for guidance on how to implement in East Texas.

Project 8: Establish set-up and recruitment for volunteer programs to assist with transportation needs.

Project Description/Background:

This project would assist agencies and groups in setting up and staffing a volunteer program to assist HHS clients, low income or out-of-work persons, or others with transportation needs.

Many HHS programs depend on volunteers to fill staffing needs. The transportation element of these programs is no exception. Having a pool of volunteers for driving, passenger assistance, dispatching and education/promotion is a key enhancement to any local coordination effort. The potential for expanding service while saving money is great. There are likely many more potential volunteers in each community than we currently know of; it just takes a focused effort to find and recruit them.

An added bonus of volunteer pools is that their time can be calculated at market rate for hourly wages to be leveraged as matching funds for grants. Small HHS agencies that otherwise lack the funds for matching grants might then obtain funding to improve or expand services. A working group will be formed to pursue New Freedom funding to support both passenger assistance and driver training. A driver training would be used to ensure that a pool of drivers certified under a standardized program for East Texas would be available to serve clients throughout the region. Similarly, trained volunteers in passenger assistance would allow agencies and providers to provide “door-to-door” service while serving multiple clients. This project addresses a coordination activity of interest from the Agency Survey, as well as input received in the stakeholder and public workshops.

Partnering Agencies:

- Public and private transit providers
- HHS agencies—local, regional, state
- Colleges & universities, churches, service organizations, business groups, media outlets.

Benefits:

Improvement and increase in service to people needing assistance to access and use public transportation. Cost savings in salaries to HHS agencies and transportation providers. Ability to leverage volunteer hours for grant matching funds.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low to Medium

Necessary Agreements

- There should be no special agreements needed beyond insurance or liability agreements typical of agencies that share volunteers.

Performance Measures

- Number of hours of service functions added.

- Monetary value (savings) of volunteer hours performed.
- Number of volunteer hours leveraged for grant matches.
- Standardized certifications.

List of Activities

- HHS agencies and transportation providers assess needs for staffing that could be fulfilled through volunteers.
- Develop standardized certification program.
- “Volunteer coordination” becomes a functional area of any agency or provider that needs additional staffing.
- Volunteer coordinators form a network and share information on all community entities seeking volunteer opportunities.
- Volunteer coordinators keep track of volunteer hours to leverage as grant matches.

Project 9: Optimize use of Amtrak, Greyhound and Lone Star Coach.

Project Description/Background:

Many people in the East Texas region wish to travel between cities on days and during times when transit service is not available. Until more fixed routes or “commuter” routes can be established between cities, many of the intercity, regional or out of state trips people need to take may best be accomplished by Amtrak, Greyhound Bus, or the Lone Star Coach (Amtrak’s bus service). Even if these providers cannot necessarily add routes right away, they could do a better job of promoting what trips are available, and then begin working towards adding more routes that interconnect with other providers in the region.

It is important to note that the East Texas region is fortunate to have a working Amtrak line connecting several communities, ensuring the region has a high potential for being truly “multi-modal”. It is possible that if the public’s use of Amtrak does not increase significantly, it could be discontinued in the future. This transit coordination effort has potential to increase Amtrak utilization, thereby maintaining both its viability in East Texas and its ability to contribute to an overall improvement in public transportation service to all citizens of the region. This project addresses a coordination activity of interest from the Agency Survey, as well as input received in stakeholder and public workshops.

Partnering Agencies:

- Amtrak
- Greyhound
- Public and private sector transit providers

Benefits:

Provides additional “links” in a multi-modal transportation system that serves the entire region, plus allows people to travel outside the region, state and country (by connecting the airports). There is also potential to provide intraregional trips.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low to High

Necessary Agreements

- Interlocal agreements between Greyhound, Amtrak, and Lone Star Coach and transit providers to fund trips on these carriers.

Performance Measures

- List of additional “trips” in the East Texas region
- Increase in ridership by region residents after promotion effort and education of HHS agencies.

Schedule of Actions/Activities

- Form working group of representatives of Amtrak, Greyhound, Lone Star Coach, other private transportation providers, Tyler Transit, Longview Transit, ETCOG, and the medical transportation providers.
- Analyze rider data to determine what routes Greyhound, Lone Star Coach and other private providers currently cover and at what cost to the customer and/or the agency or program who funds that person's ride.
- Analyze rider data and conduct needs surveys to determine if Amtrak could cover some interregional or interstate rides such as transporting veterans to the hospitals in Dallas/Ft. Worth area or Shreveport.
- Publicize current routes and services provided by Amtrak, Greyhound, Lone Star Coach and other private providers. (These entities' services should be included in the education and outreach efforts described in Project #5).
- Contact HHS agencies in the region to promote the services of Amtrak, Greyhound, Lone Star Coach and other private providers, looking for specific agencies with facilities along these providers' fixed routes.

Project 10: Provide business-sponsored shopping day and special event transit service.

Project Description/Background:

One way to reduce individual on-demand transit trips for grocery and other shopping is to schedule special shopping events for groups of transit users with large businesses such as Wall Mart. The business could help pay for a bus or van, plus designate staff to help people shop if necessary. This is an excellent opportunity for a large corporation such as Wall Mart to give back to the community and promote this involvement through their public relations efforts. It is also an opportunity for community groups to provide volunteers to assist shoppers, etc.

On a regional level, target a few special events every year to provide transit service to the event. Examples: County fairs, Rose Festival, Christmas events, 4th of July fireworks show, etc. This would create more opportunities for people to attend these events, as well as save money on Paratransit and other on-demand transit. It is also an opportunity for the business community to get involved by sponsoring the effort. Both of these efforts address input received in stakeholder and public workshops pertaining to utilizing flexible funding sources and expanding service, as well as addressing coordination activities of interest in the Agency Survey.

Partnering Agencies:

- Public and private transit providers
- HHS agencies—local, regional, state
- Interested retailers

Benefits:

All public transportation programs would save money by combining many customers' individual shopping trips into one. Businesses and organizations are given the opportunity to contribute to people in need. Transit-dependent people will benefit by the freeing up of rides. And, group shopping days and special event rides could even provide a social time for people who depend on others for help with errands.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low.

Necessary Agreements

- There should be no special agreements needed beyond making sure standard insurance is in place.

Performance Measures

- Reduction in number of individual shopping trips requested and provided.
- Reduction in number of individual on-demand rides to special events.

List of Activities

- Transit providers and HHS agency/provider examine rider data to determine any typical “clusters” of shopping destinations.
- On a local basis, providers work with HHS agencies to determine the best dates for shopping events. The Thanksgiving to Christmas holiday season may be an excellent time to try a pilot project.
- A committee of providers and HHS agency staff chooses someone to approach a large retailer such as Wall Mart and other local businesses with an interest in community involvement.

Project 11: Conduct feasibility studies of specific new transit services including potential changes in funding allocations to pay for added service.

Project Description/Background:

The most comment frequently received during the agency and public workshops was, “More service”, including weekends, evenings, third shift, etc, for towns and counties throughout the region. There is no question that more service is needed; however, where, when and how much can only be determined after careful study. Funding is also an important issue and FTA is encouraging states to be more flexible and creative in transit funding approaches. Thus, these feasibility studies should also explore a range of funding involving uses of FTA 5310 grants for purchase-of-service agreements and transit coordination planning activities; New Freedom funds for services geared towards disabled persons; JARC funds to assist in job access for welfare recipients and low-income people; FTA 5307 grants for large urban areas; and, FTA 5311 grants for new rural intercity bus service projects. These feasibility studies would evaluate the following options for selected areas of the region:

- Intercity transit routes which provide scheduled service connecting with local service at transit centers and transfer points
- Weekend service
- Evening and late night service
- Shorter headways on fixed route systems
- Additional fixed routes
- Partnerships with large employers, schools, public agencies, universities, etc for carpools, vanpools, and other commute programs.

Partnering Agencies:

- Counties
- Municipalities
- TxDOT as funding agent
- MPOs
- Public and private sector transit providers
- HHS agencies—local, regional, state

Benefits:

Expanded transit services would provide an improved basic quality of life for all people who depend on public transportation.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Medium to High

Necessary Agreements

- In parts of the region where two or more transit providers participate in one feasibility study, they would need agreements detailing how much funding each entity was to contribute to pay for the study. If federal money is being used, interlocal agreements between TxDOT and transit providers would be necessary. Such agreements could be used for both regional and local feasibility studies.

Performance Measures

- Number of feasibility studies successfully completed
- Increased service available per dollar invested

List of Activities

- Form working group of representatives listed above
- Identify possible funding sources for the study, either as the region or each entity.
- Determine highest priority areas/counties/towns for expansion feasibility study.
- Issue RFP's for study/s.
- Review results/recommendations of feasibility studies and decide what specific actions to take (if any)

Project 12: Seek foundation grants to fund service expansion or vehicle purchases.

Project Description/Background:

There are many foundations in East Texas who may have grant programs to support the missions of health and human service organizations, work force programs, elderly and disabled programs, etc. There may even be funding available for efforts to improve the environment through alternative transportation modes such as transit. This project would first research all opportunities for foundation funding that may be available, and then determine which transit providers or HHS agencies may be most appropriate to seek that funding. This project addresses input received in the stakeholder and public workshops, as well as the Steering Committee's Priority 4: Increased and Flexible Funding.

Partnering Agencies:

- Public and private sector transit providers
- HHS agencies

Benefits:

Provides for the expansion of services to people who depend on public transportation. Would also help educate the general public about the need for more public transportation to serve those who cannot drive. Fulfills Priority 4: Increased and Flexible Funding.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low

Necessary Agreements

- No agreements would be needed to seek this type of funding. But, individual foundations and other funding entities would most likely require agreements in the implementation of the projects.

Performance Measures

- Number of rides or services added that are funded through foundation grants or other community-based sources.

Project 13: Regional application for JARC and New Freedom funding.

Project Description/Background:

Prepare an East Texas Regional application for JARC that would support mobility management and coordinated funding for the year 2007 once the Texas Transportation Commission adopts the rules and TxDOT issues the call for projects.

Longview Transit, Tyler Transit and ETCOG, and the Workforce Board, along with private transportation provider, NDMJ, Inc, are in discussions to form a partnership for the purpose of applying for JARC funds as a region rather than as individual providers. This project would benefit from the investigation and determination of other available options for JARC and New Freedom for FY07 and beyond.

For FY07, 5310 funding has been allocated by GETTA as follows: \$101,726 to ETCOG for preventive maintenance and the purchase of ITS hardware and graphic servers; \$75,000 to Tyler Transit for preventive maintenance, contracted transportation service, and ITS hardware, software, and MDCs; and \$75,000 to Longview Transit for preventive maintenance and ITS hardware, software, and MDCs.

GETTA will also allocate 5310 funds for FY08. A working group and TxDOT will investigate the possible uses of 5310 funds for FY09 and beyond.

Partnering Agencies:

- Public and private transit providers
- ETCOG Workforce Board
- TxDOT

Benefits:

Increases chances of the region receiving a large amount of funding by having a larger amount of match to offer, and demonstrating regional cohesiveness and coordination. This project will also help the entire East Texas coordination plan to succeed, as so many of the projects hinge on a centralized information source and dispatching.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low.

Necessary Agreements

- Many of the TxDOT administered public transportation funds are federal and state and will require interlocal agreements with each entity receiving funds. In addition, each of the providers in the partnership will enter into an agreement that spells out each share of the funding, responsibilities, accounting procedures, etc.

Performance Measures

- List of JARC and New Freedom funds obtained for East Texas.

Schedule of Actions/Activities

- Form working group of representatives of each entity listed above.

- Monitor progress of the Texas Transportation Commission's rules adoption and TxDOT's call for projects.
- Determine timeline for application, desired content of application and assign tasks to each entity.
- Determine who is responsible for final proposal writing and submission.

Project 14: Implement an interagency Automated Fare Card System.

Project Description/Background:

Develop and implement a common automated fare card system (“Smart Card”) for public transportation providers in the Region. This system should be fully compatible with the Medicaid Access Card/Integrated Benefits Card system being developed by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).

Any citizen who regularly uses public transportation could be issued a fare card that would be read by a terminal installed in every vehicle (or hand-held version for different types of vehicles). Data on the card would include the person’s information and the funding agency for the ride, or the amount of pre-paid fare. The funding agency would receive a report or bill at the end of a designated period and pay the provider accordingly, or pre-programmed accounts could be accessed in the system.

Partnering Agencies:

- Public and private transit providers in the East Texas Region
- State and local HHS agencies and service providers
- TxDOT

Benefits:

A single fare card with an accompanying automated billing system would improve user accessibility and reduce administrative costs.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- High.

Necessary Agreements

- MOUs with transit providers and state HHS agencies

Performance Measures

- Administrative costs

List of Activities

- Coordinate with other regions where such a system has been implemented in order to identify costs, benefits, and feasibility of an automated fare card system.
- Form a working group to identify the steps necessary to implement the fare card in cooperation with the Texas Health and Human Service Commission’s plan for a single HHS benefits card to be implemented statewide by 2010 or 2011.

Project 15: Create efficiencies by identifying and eliminating duplication of services where possible.

Project Description/Background:

One of the primary objectives of Chapter 461 of HB 3588 is to eliminate inefficiencies in the delivery of public transportation services. This project would require the identification of programs where existing services are duplicated. The determination of duplicate services in East Texas would be made after careful study.

Partnering Agencies:

- Public and private transit providers
- State and local HHS agencies and service providers
- TxDOT

Benefits:

The elimination of duplicate services would increase the efficiency of the remaining service, potentially lowering the cost of each trip. It would also potentially free funding for increased and expanded service.

Estimated Start-up Costs

- Low.

Necessary Agreements

- MOUs and/or interlocal agreements between transit providers and agencies providing duplicate services.

Performance Measures

- Cost per trip
- Measure total trips, with no net reduction in trips

List of Activities

- Issue RFP's for study/s.
- Review results/recommendations of studies and decide what specific actions to take (if any)

APPENDIX B
NOVEMBER PUBLIC MEETINGS SUMMARY

**East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan
November Public Meetings Summary**

I. November 13, 2006 – Tyler, Texas

This public meeting was held at the United Heritage Credit Union in Tyler, Texas on the evening of November 13, 2006. Approximately 25 people attended. The meeting consisted of a PowerPoint presentation that summarized the Draft Plan, including a brief history of the planning process and need for coordination, as well as a description of the proposed projects, evaluation methodology, and implementation process. Following the PowerPoint presentation, attendees were provided with comment cards, which were read aloud and addressed during the meetings. Oral questions and comments were also addressed during the public meetings.

There were nine written and oral comments/questions addressed in the meeting as follows.

1. Why is a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) necessary?

Response: Dr. Bob Peters explained that there must be an organization with governmental authority to regulate and oversee transit issues across the region. However, the Steering Committee chose to not include forming a RTA in the Plan at this time.

2. “I would like to publicly state that concerning Project #14, calling for a Regional Transit Authority, that the plan should state that this could be explored as to the feasibility of this project.”

Response: The project was modified to be entitled “Explore the Feasibility of Forming a Regional Transit Authority”. However, as a result of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Steering Committee held on November 15th, this project was entirely deleted from the list of proposed projects.

3. “Did we miss an opportunity to include emergency use of “grouped” vehicles? This might lead to additional funding opportunities. See Project #6 of priorities leads to Project #12 (funding).”

Response: Project #4 in the Plan was revised to include the following sentence, “This project also lends itself to coordinating vehicle sharing during emergencies and evacuations to enhance the safety and security of the citizens of East Texas.”

4. “Coordinate general activities with the Northeast Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NETRMA).”

Response: The Plan is intended to be generic and general, so it can be inclusive rather than exclusive. It includes coordination with all entities in the East Texas region that are willing to participate. In essence, the Plan includes NETMRA even though it may not name it specifically.

5. “Specific use for grocery shopping, especially refrigerated groceries, and shelters for riders...convenient pick-up points and locations...much better publicity” (are some of the things East Texas public transportation needs).

Response: Amenities such as these will be considered under Project #11. It is a balancing act to put funds towards more transportation services or to put them towards amenities. There is a fixed amount of funds to use and what is spent on one facet cannot be spent on the other.

6. “A brief review of the Plan revealed a detailed history of the performance of this Steering Committee. I noticed emphasis on low-capacity bus service. Rail service was not focused on enough. Infrastructure as it currently exists should use bus service to feed long distance transportation (Amtrak) – regular scheduled bus service to Amtrak stops – Marshall, Longview, and Tyler.

“Tyler Transit should make two trips per day to Mineola. Longview Transit to serve two per day Longview Amtrak stop. Marshall public transportation – two per day to Marshall Depot.

“Use existing short-haul bus transit to feed and retrieve at train stations at Marshall, Longview, and Mineola.”

Response: The following sentence was added to Project #3 in the Plan: “The Amtrak Stations in Marshall, Longview, and Mineola are examples of potential locations for transit/transfer centers”.

7. For those who do not have or use computers, it would be nice to get information about public transportation (schedules, times, etc) through other means of media, such as local newspapers, radio stations, and television.

Response: This comment is addressed in Project #5, which states that public transportation would be promoted through a wide variety of media and methods.

8. Is the public transportation advisory committee going to be involved with directing the federal rules?

Response: The committee has been addressing those rules and got JARC and New Freedom rules sent to the Texas Transportation Commission. They will be meeting on December 3rd. They will also be looking at a consolidated version of the barriers and constraints document.

9. Add an additional project to eliminate duplicative services around the region. Doing so will also make the Plan more attractive to commissioners.

Response: Project #15, Create efficiencies by identifying and eliminating duplication of services where possible, was added to the Plan.

II. November 14, 2006 – Marshall, Texas

This public meeting was held at the Texas State Technical College in Marshall, Texas on the evening of November 14, 2006. Approximately 23 people attended. The meeting format was similar to the previous evening's public meeting.

There were six main comments and/or questions addressed in the meeting as follows.

1. Is there currently a large amount of duplication of services in the East Texas Region?

Response: The goal of Project #15 is to *identify* the duplication. It has not been done yet, so it is unknown whether there is a large amount of duplication of services or not.

2. The visually-impaired people in Marshall have an extremely difficult time of getting around the city. Sidewalks are needed along the roads. More public transportation services and information about the services are also needed.

Response: ETCOG is working on implementing a fixed-route system with a dependable schedule in Marshall. However, ETCOG currently runs a demand-response service in Marshall. Project #2 addresses the need for additional ADA compliant sidewalks.

3. There was much discussion on former Project #16 (Exploring the Feasibility of Forming a Regional Transit Authority).

Response: The Executive Committee of the Steering Committee met on Wednesday, November 15th and discussed the issues associated with this project. After some deliberation, the Executive Committee chose to remove this project from further consideration.

4. Are other Council of Governments (COG) around the state having this same problem (of coordinating services)?

Response: Yes, they are.

5. Projects #7, #11, and #15 sound somewhat duplicative. How would these projects be implemented so they do not duplicate services? For example, regarding Project #11, ETCOG already has a centralized call center. Creating a new one would be duplicative.

Response: The Plan must be general enough to allow different agencies to do the projects that would best suit their needs and resources. It would be up to the coordinating entities to make sure services were not duplicated unnecessarily.

6. “Concern that representatives from the Steering Committee are not in attendance at this meeting to review the Plan. Because the 14 counties involve multiple TxDOT districts, we need to be careful that no one part of the 14 counties dominates this process. ETCOG is the rural transit district and could be hampered by the Steering Committee’s projects.”

Response: All Steering Committee members will have access to the draft Plan prior to November 29th and may review and comment as necessary.

III. Comments Received by Mail

Three comments were received by mail as of November 20th, 2006. They are as follows.

1. “Project #4: Review Insurance Issues among different providers.

“Project #9: Utilize Greyhound/Lone Star Coach for intercity service from Marshall to Longview to Tyler. Implementation of Service – negotiate an hourly rate with Greyhound/Lone Star Coach, then determine an appropriate fare structure.

“Project #16: The implementation of a Regional Transit Authority would provide an organization, in which would allow the projects of consolidation to occur in a timelier manner.”

Response: The comment regarding Project #4 would be addressed by the coordinating entities during implementation. The comment regarding Project #9 would also be addressed by the coordinating entities during implementation. The

comment regarding Project #16 (even though Project #16 was removed from the list of proposed projects) is addressed in the Preamble of the Plan.

2. One of the letters stressed the comment about added amenities such as refrigerated grocery trips and bus stop shelters.

Response: These concerns will be considered in Project #11.

3. “East Texas has a special and rare opportunity. Most transportation regions will not have long distance train service at all. Others will have a rail service but with only one stop in the region or none! East Texas has rail service with three stops that span the region west to east. Existing and soon-to-be local transit (bus) service should be utilized to connect with the three rail stations in the region. Amtrak stations could be utilized as multi-modal hubs. This would increase usage by enhancing connectivity. Rail and bus schedules would be shared information between municipal and private transportation companies. By creating connectivity, the accessibility greatly improves!

“Fossil fuels are going to only go up in the future! Motorists will eventually reach a crisis that will need a solution. I believe that by using existing infrastructure, we can build and expand a multi-modal interconnected transportation network which will be the alternative and the solution to the future needs. Rail transportation is large capacity, short and long haul capable, and best of all fuel efficient. Creating hubs at Amtrak stations should be a cornerstone of our plans for inter-connectivity. All the services are there, we even have the facilities ready and waiting. We need to ardently pursue this direction.”

Response: The following sentence was added to Project #3 in the Plan: “The Amtrak Stations in Marshall, Longview, and Mineola are examples of potential locations for transit/transfer centers”.

IV. Conclusion

These two public meetings aided in shaping the Draft Plan to address the concerns, questions, and comments of the general public, stakeholders, and many different agencies and entities in the East Texas Region. One project was added to the Plan (Identifying and Eliminating Duplication of Services) and one was removed from the Plan (Exploring the Feasibility of Forming a Regional Transit Authority) as a result of the input received at the public meetings. Many of the existing projects were amended to include new ideas from those attending the public meetings.