



# EASTEXCONNECTS

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION MARKETING AND OUTREACH PLAN

MAY 2012

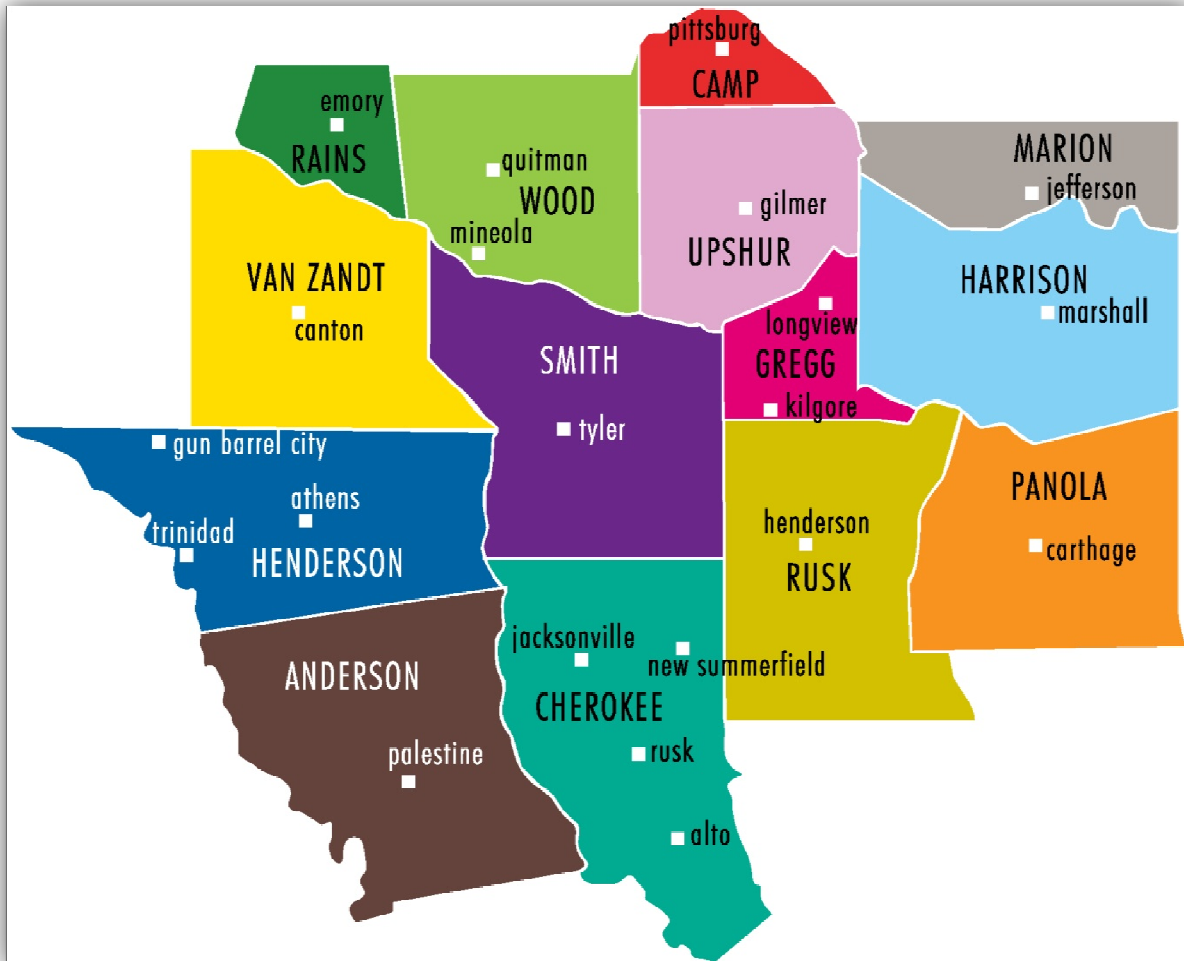


# Table of Contents

<b>1. Situational Analysis</b>	<b>[02]</b>
<b>2. Public Communications</b>	<b>[17]</b>
<b>3. Advertising</b>	<b>[21]</b>
<b>4. Customer Experience</b>	<b>[23]</b>
<b>5. Promotion and Outreach</b>	<b>[27]</b>
<b>6. Timeline</b>	<b>[32]</b>

## 1. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Ten thousand square miles of rolling hills, piney woodlands and large freshwater lakes comprise the landscape of rural East Texas. This sparsely populated region is divided into 14 counties: Anderson, Camp, Cherokee, Gregg, Harrison, Henderson, Marion, Panola, Rains, Rusk, Smith, Upshur, Van Zandt, and Wood.



Though each community has its own unique characteristics and needs, they all share a common desire for efficient, accessible transit region-wide.

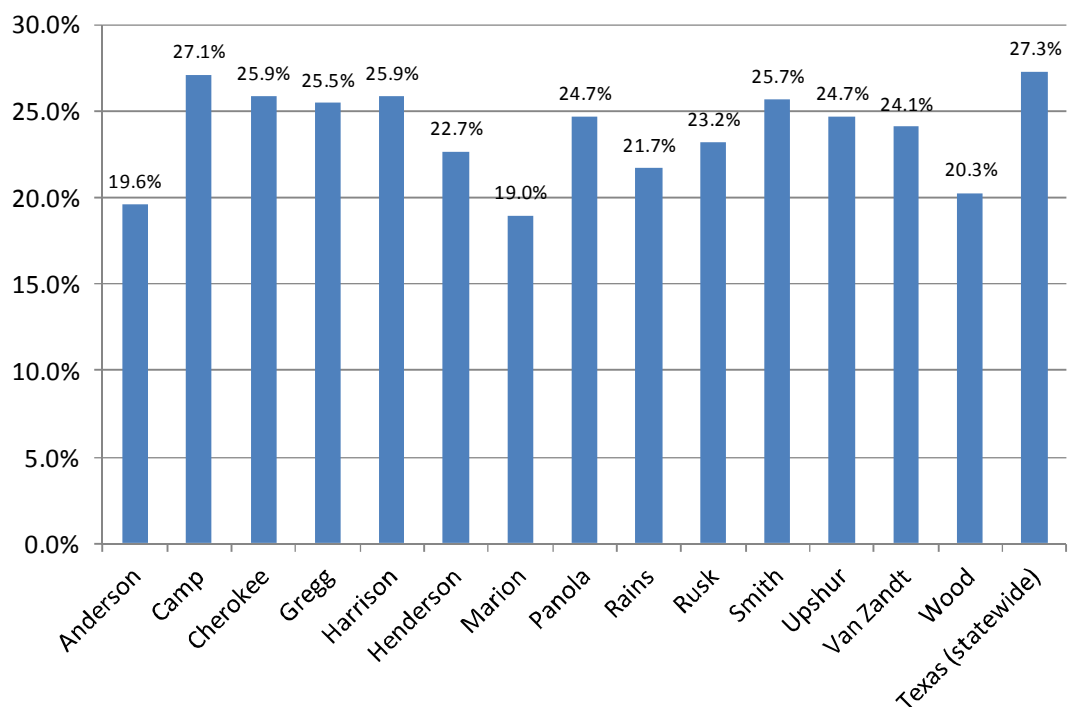
### East Texas Demographics

Ride-dependent populations can be defined as being made up of individuals who, for one reason or another, do not have the ability to transport themselves and therefore rely on other persons or organizations (i.e., public transportation) for basic mobility needs. Industry research defines ride-dependent groups as youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, low-income individuals, and those with no access to a personal vehicle. The following is an analysis of current ride-dependent populations in East Texas.

#### Youth

Youth (defined as persons under the age of 18) comprise nearly a quarter of East Texas residents, though the youth population of all counties falls below the statewide average of 27.3 percent. Camp County has the highest youth population (27.1 percent), followed by Cherokee and Harrison counties (25.9 percent each), Smith County (25.7 percent), and Gregg County (25.5 percent). It is unsurprising that Smith, Gregg, and Harrison counties have higher youth populations, as these counties are home to several of the region's larger cities (including Kilgore, Longview, Marshall, and Tyler). Marion and Anderson counties have the lowest youth populations (19.0 and 19.6 percent, respectively).

Exhibit1.1 Percentage of Youth Population by County (2010)

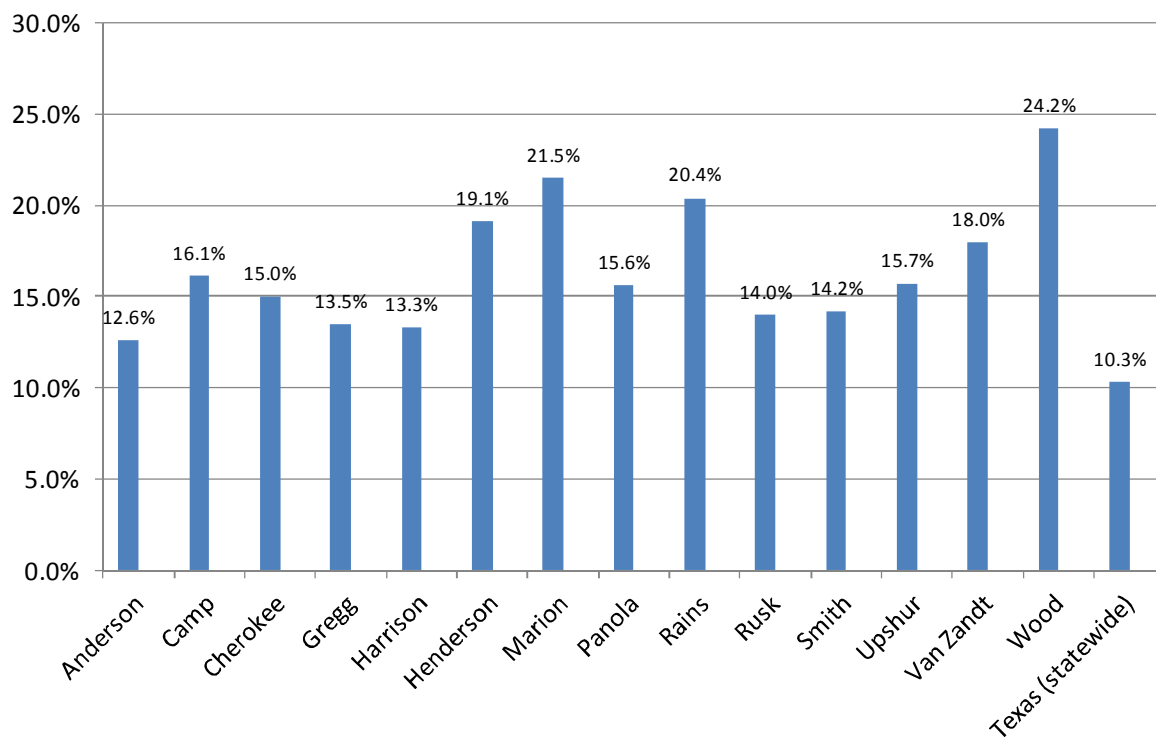


### Seniors

The leading edge of the Baby Boomer generation recently turned 65. More than 125,000 of the region's residents are 65 or older. This population's need for accessible transit will only grow as it ages.

East Texas communities are aggressively positioning themselves as a prime retirement destinations. For example, the Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce launched a "10 Reasons to Retire in Tyler" campaign. In fact, between 2000 and 2010, 9 of the 14 counties in this region experienced an uptick of senior residents. For example, Rains' senior population saw the largest increase as it spiked to 20.4 percent, a 4.3 percent jump since the last census and almost twice the state average of 10.3 percent. Anderson, Henderson, and Marion also saw noticeable gains. Camp, Cherokee, Panola, Rusk, Smith, and Wood counties all experienced modest declines in senior population. Despite these changes, every county in the East Texas region exceeds the state average for senior population.

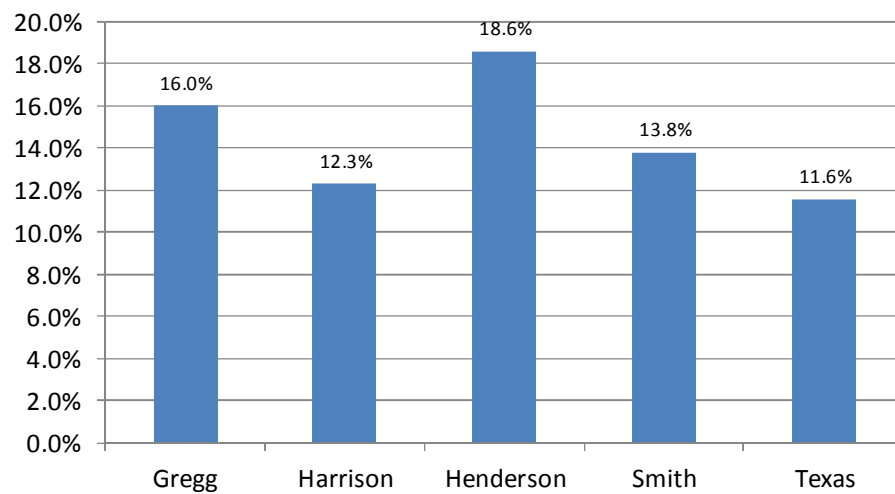
Exhibit 1.2 Percentage of Senior Population by County (2010)



### Persons with Disabilities

For estimates of this region's disabled population, we'll turn to the 2010 American Community Survey, which has the most recent data available on this demographic. However, only estimates for four of the 14 counties (Gregg, Harrison, Henderson, and Smith) were available at the time of this report. Still, these numbers give good insight into this region's higher-than-state-average concentration of disabled persons.

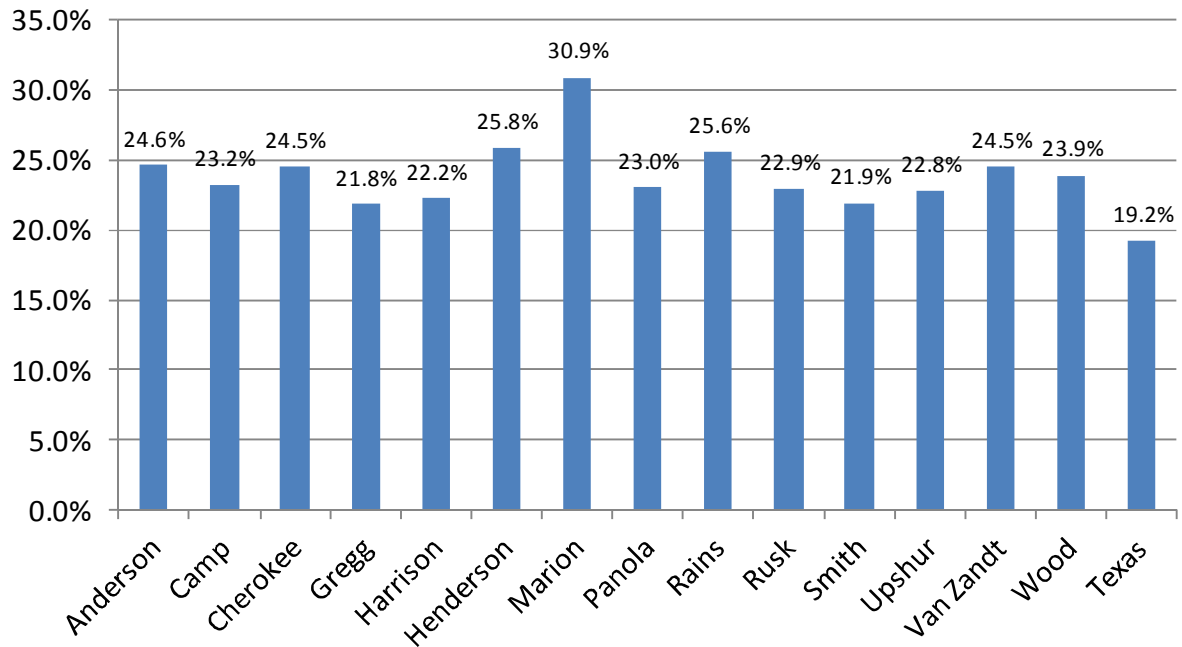
Exhibit 1.3 Percentage of Disabled Population by County (2010)



In 2010, about 19 percent of residents in Henderson County claim to be disabled. This is more than seven percent higher than the state average of 11.6 percent. Gregg County's disabled population is nearly 17 percent, followed by Smith and Harrison counties, 13.8 percent and 12.3 percent respectively.

In contrasting these figures with data from the 2000 census, we can see there are distinct differences. This is due in part to changes made in the questions asked to determine disability status between 2000 and 2010. However, in looking at the region as a whole in 2000, one thing is apparent – every county contained a population of persons with disabilities at least 2.6 percent higher than the state average. In fact, Marion County exceeded the state average by a whopping 11.7 percentage points.

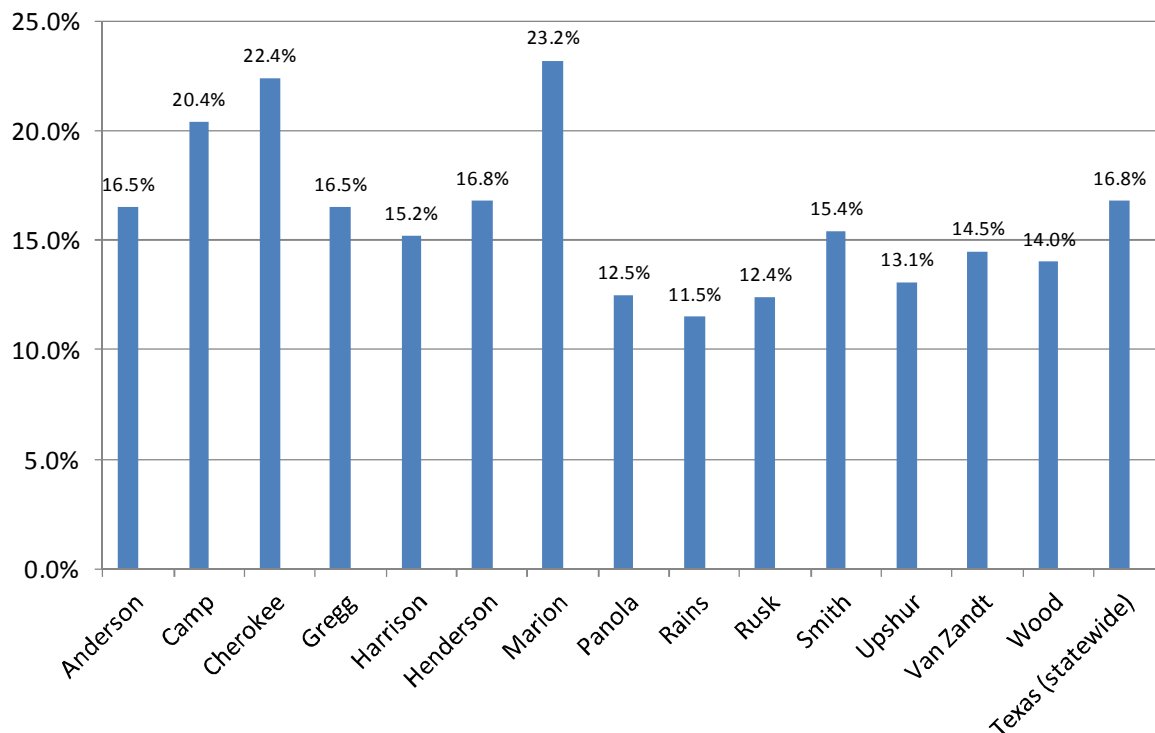
Exhibit 1.4 Percentage of Disabled Population by County (2000)



### Low-Income

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, four counties in East Texas are at or above the state's average percentage share of persons living in poverty. Cherokee County's population of individuals living below the federal poverty level jumped 5.6 percent since 2000. Anderson and Henderson counties also experienced noticeable increases (4.4 and 2.0 percent, respectively). Rains County (at 11.5 percent) had the lowest percentage of persons living in poverty.

Exhibit 1.5 Percentage of Individuals Living in Poverty (2010)



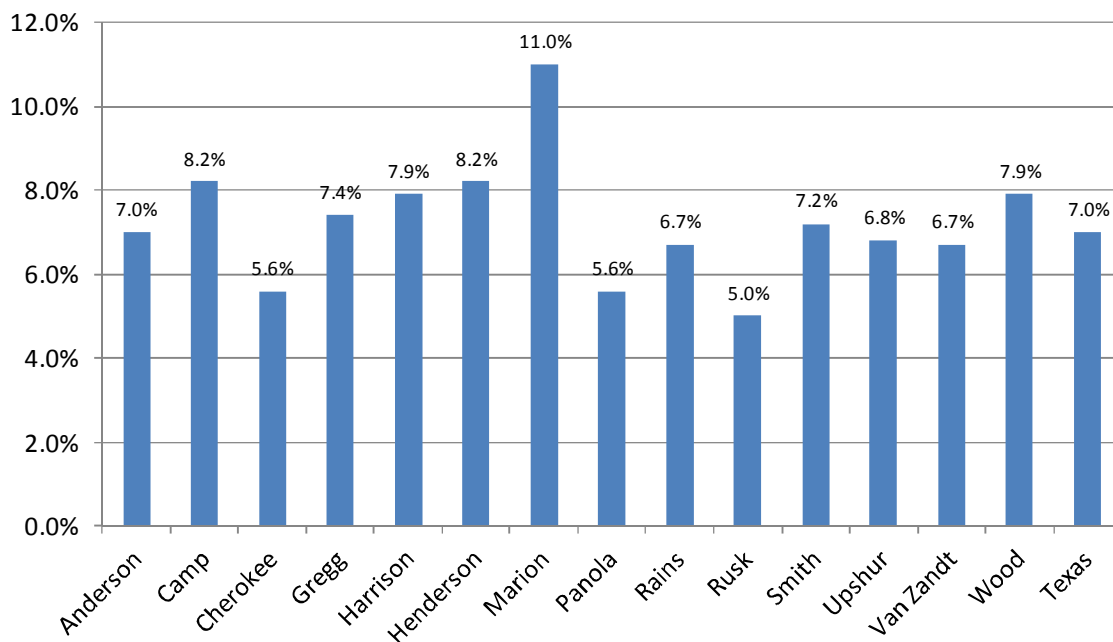
Low-income citizens are more likely to use public transit than higher-wage earners – albeit slightly more likely. According to the American Community Survey for 2006-2010, only 9.6 percent of low-income individuals take public transit to work. That's marginally higher than the population as a whole, 7.9 percent.



### Employment

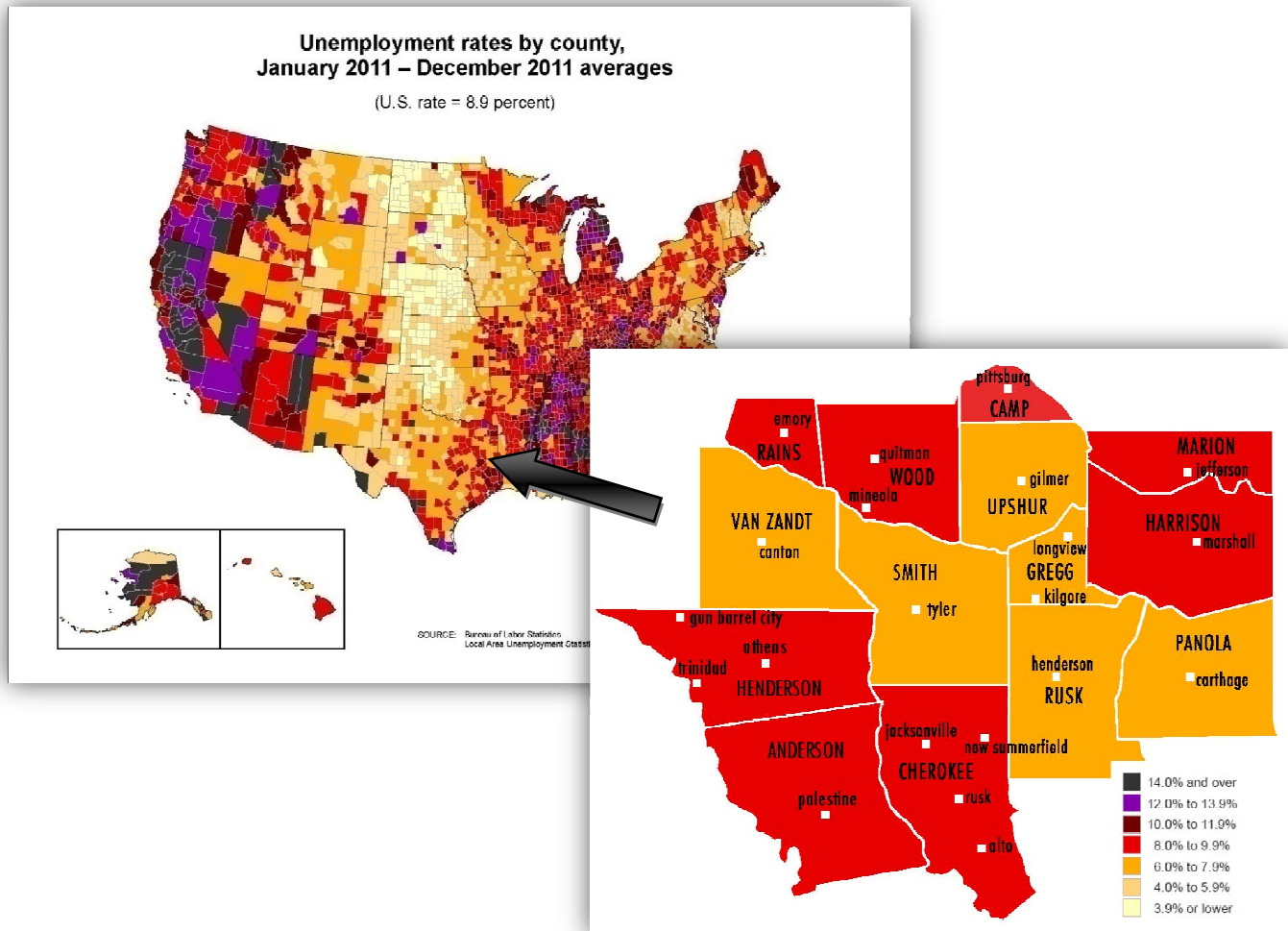
Unemployment figures by county were calculated by the 2006-2010 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates). Marion County saw the highest unemployment (11.0 percent), while Rusk County experienced the lowest (5.0 percent). Eight counties were equal to or above the statewide average of 7.0 percent, though only five counties were equal to or above the nationwide average of 7.9 percent.

Exhibit 1.6 Unemployment Rates by County (2010)



As demonstrated in this map based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data for Calendar Year 2011, East Texas counties experienced average unemployment rates between 6.0 and 9.9 percent. This straddles the nationwide unemployment average of 8.9 percent for the same period.

Exhibit 1.7 East Texas Unemployment (CY 2011)

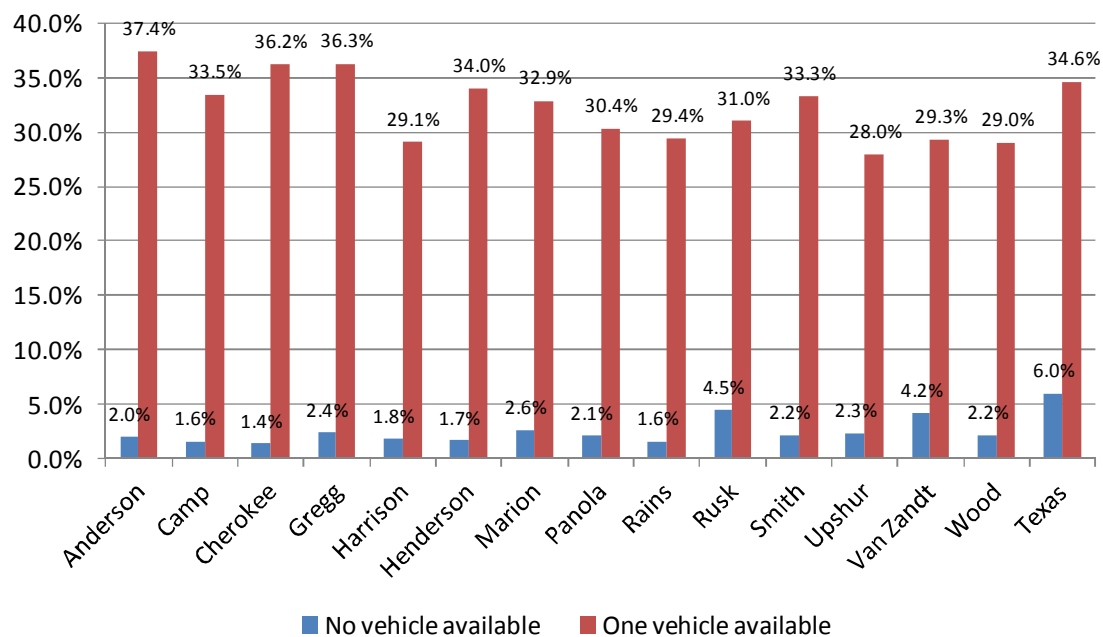


While in some counties unemployment was lower than the national average, it is complicated by the rural nature of the region. In an urban area, it is much easier to access employment and necessary resources without a personal vehicle. This is more difficult in rural areas, especially those where transportation options are not well known.

### No Vehicle Available

As with many areas throughout the country, personal vehicles remain the primary transportation option for the majority of residents. According to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimate), relatively modest numbers of households in East Texas reported having no vehicle available. However, possession of a vehicle does not speak to that vehicle's condition or reliability. A household with one unreliable vehicle can become ride-dependent if that vehicle breaks down or becomes inoperable. In other cases, work or school schedule changes can have a significant impact when multiple driving-age residents in a single household rely on one vehicle. Therefore, households reporting just one vehicle should also be taken into consideration when assessing ride-dependence.

Exhibit 1.8 Vehicles per Household (2010)



### Conclusions

In reviewing the demographic data regarding traditionally ride-dependent populations, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the 14-county East Texas region.

- The region has a lower-than-average youth population.
- The region has a significantly higher-than-average senior population.
- The region has a higher-than-average population of persons with disabilities.
- There is a significantly higher-than-average population of persons living in poverty in Camp, Cherokee, and Marion counties, though this population is average to lower-than-average in other counties.
- The region exhibits generally average levels of unemployment, except for Marion County, which is significantly higher than average.
- The region has lower-than-average incidences of households with no vehicle. Most counties are also lower than average in regard to households with one vehicle available.

However, these conclusions do not paint the whole picture. To better understand ride-dependency in East Texas, it is important to understand what mobility options serve the region and how they are perceived by the community.

### Transportation in East Texas

East Texas is served by a variety of public, private and nonprofit transportation providers. Two of the largest urbanized areas, Longview and Tyler, have fixed-route systems, while GoBus provides demand-response and deviated fixed-route service to the rural areas in the region. Other transportation services include Greyhound, Amtrak, regional airports, private taxis and shuttles, as well as a number of other medical/social service transportation providers.

#### Longview Transit

Longview Transit provides traditional fixed-route service within the city of Longview via six routes operating between 6:15 a.m. and 7:15 p.m. on weekdays and 7:15 a.m. and 7:15 p.m. on Saturday. Fixed-route service is supplemented by an eligibility-based ADA complementary paratransit service that operates

between 6:15 a.m. and 7:15 p.m. on weekdays and 7:15 a.m. and 7:15 p.m. on Saturday. The paratransit service area is defined as an area within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of the fixed-route service, or up to another  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile to the nearest landmark. Operation of Longview Transit is currently contracted to McDonald Transit Associates.



#### Tyler Transit

City-operated Tyler Transit provides traditional fixed-route service within the city of Tyler via four routes operating between 6:00 a.m. and 8:15 p.m. on weekdays and 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. Fixed-route service is supplemented by the eligibility-based ADA complementary ParaTransit service that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The ParaTransit service area is defined as within the city limits of Tyler. Operation of the Tyler ParaTransit service is currently contracted to NDMJ, Ltd.



### GoBus

The East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG), serving as the East Texas Rural Transit District, operates the GoBus demand-response service within each county of the fourteen-county region. Service within each county generally operates Monday through Friday between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., though some counties only have local service on certain weekdays. There is no weekend service. Scheduled trips from outlying counties to the cities of Longview, Marshall, Mt. Pleasant, and Tyler operate on designated days, usually arriving in the destination city by 10:00 a.m. and departing around 2:00 p.m. 24-hour advance notice is required for trip reservations and reservations can be made up to 2 weeks in advance.



GoBus also provides deviated fixed-route service in the city of Marshall. The Marshall service has three routes, each of which can "flex" up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile off its designated route upon request.

### NDMJ, Ltd.

In addition to operating the City of Tyler's ParaTransit service, NDMJ, Ltd. provides special purpose supplemental transportation which serves Smith County (outside of Tyler city limits). It supplements regular GoBus and Tyler ParaTransit services and operates on evenings, holidays, and weekends, utilizing a three-year grant through JARC/New Freedom.

### Amtrak

Amtrak stops within East Texas include Texarkana, Arkansas/Texas, Marshall, Longview, and Mineola. All of East Texas is served by Amtrak's "Texas Eagle" route, which connects Chicago and Los Angeles via St. Louis, Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, El Paso, Tucson, and Phoenix. Amtrak provides daily service between Chicago and San Antonio with tri-weekly connections between San Antonio and Los Angeles. The Longview rail passenger station is a junction for Amtrak's dedicated Thruway Motorcoach services which connect all "Texas Eagle" trains to Shreveport or Nacogdoches, Houston, and Galveston (Lone Star Coaches). Amtrak's Shreveport Thruway is a truly intermodal connection as it operates to/from the rail station in Longview and Shreveport's Regional Airport in Louisiana.

### Greyhound/Kerrville Bus Company

Greyhound and Kerrville Bus Company serve the cities of Carthage, Henderson, Jacksonville, Kilgore, Longview, Marshall, and Tyler. Service is also provided to Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, as well as smaller cities along key transportation corridors.

### Other Providers

The Tyler Pounds Regional Airport (TYR) in Tyler and the East Texas Regional Airport (GGG) in Longview offer scheduled commercial air service. Presently, TYR has American Eagle serving Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) with four daily roundtrips and Continental Express serving Houston's Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) with five daily roundtrips. GGG has American Eagle serving DFW with two daily roundtrips. A wide array of domestic and international connections are available via either DFW or IAH.

Taxis serve as an efficient transportation solution. Taxis in East Texas also frequently provide door-to-door service in those instances where public transit might not adequately fulfill specific mobility needs, such as medical trips. Currently, taxi service is well-dispersed throughout the region with London Cab in Longview, Tyler Taxi in Tyler, Camp County Taxi in Pittsburg, and Marshall Cab in Marshall, to name a few.

### East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan

While transportation options are numerous, the lack of coordination between these providers in prior years meant mobility gaps, duplication of service, and unmet transit needs. Further compounding the problem is the largely rural nature of the East Texas region, large senior and low-income populations, and a number of residents without access to personal vehicles.

Fortunately, efforts are being taken to address these issues. House Bill 3588 – passed by the Texas Legislature in 2003 – mandates a transportation coordination plan for each region in the state. The original East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan was subsequently developed by the East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan Steering Committee (now dubbed EasTexConnects) in 2006. The Plan was updated in 2011.

If there is one takeaway from the surveys and community workshops conducted during the updating process it is this: The public's knowledge of available transportation services is limited at best. In 2010 and 2011, EasTexConnects sponsored 11 community meetings throughout East Texas, each drawing anywhere from 10 to 60 attendees. Overwhelmingly, people expressed a demand for basic education and promotion of transit services. Many living outside of Tyler and Longview were entirely unaware of transit options available to them.

Additionally, the Plan identified a need for a one-stop information source and resulted in the development of a Regional Mobility Guide covering all transportation providers (public, private, and nonprofit) in the region.

These are good starting points, but there is still plenty of fertile marketing ground to till. In this marketing plan, we outline ways to effectively share with priority populations – such as seniors, people with disabilities and low-income individuals– about the benefits of public transportation and its ease of use.

Should this plan be executed as recommended, the results will be a better-informed customer base and an increase in overall ridership. Operators should provide EasTexConnects with monthly ridership reports by which to measure the effectiveness of marketing efforts.



### Current Marketing and Outreach Efforts

Tyler, Longview, and GoBus conduct their own promotion and outreach. There are three primary components common to the marketing and outreach efforts of all providers: branding, printed collateral, and an online presence.

- **Branding.** A consistent, recognizable brand is necessary to increase awareness of a transit service. The brand can be completely unique (i.e., GoBus) or incorporate elements of a parent organization (i.e., Tyler Transit).
- **Printed collateral.** Effective marketing collateral is critical to not only raising awareness of available transportation services, but also to providing people with sufficient information for them to use the desired services with as little effort as possible.
- **Online.** An online presence is increasingly important in this day and age. Other online features include social media and materials designed for the smaller screens of mobile devices.

Below is an outline of the current marketing efforts for GoBus, Longview Transit, and Tyler Transit.

#### GoBus



In 2011, ETCOG successfully launched its GoBus brand (slogan: Get on the Go), replacing the prior Rural Transit District service name. GoBus wisely took advantage of its most visible means of communication when it gave its inconspicuous fleet a cosmetic makeover. Its previously plain vehicles now sport a can't-miss-it green and purple color scheme.

GoBus subsequently completed the design and distribution of 14 county-specific brochures, with information specific to the services provided within each individual county and sporting the GoBus colors and vehicle image. An initial print run was distributed throughout the East Texas region (within respective county). A round of community workshops following distribution of the brochures resulted in considerable positive public comment and requests for additional stock.



The GoBus page is located on the East Texas Council of Governments' website ([www.etcog.org/234/Transportation.htm](http://www.etcog.org/234/Transportation.htm)). The link can be found under "Transportation" in the *Our Services* tab on the home page. There are also seven links that can be accessed by mousing over "Transportation" in the drop-down menu: County Schedules; History, Mission & Vision; Committee; Contacts; Coordination Plan; Resources; and Corridor Council. While GoBus information is fairly easy to find from its parent website, we recommend ETCOG secure an easy-to-remember URL such as [www.easttexasgobus.org](http://www.easttexasgobus.org).



The GoBus website contains schedules for all intra- and inter-county services, though not downloadable versions of its brochure.



## Longview Transit

Current marketing materials for Longview Transit include a brochure containing fixed-route maps, timetables, and service information. The City's "Your Guide to Ride Complementary Paratransit Service" booklet

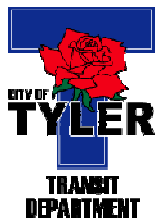


provides detailed information on how to use Longview Transit's paratransit service.

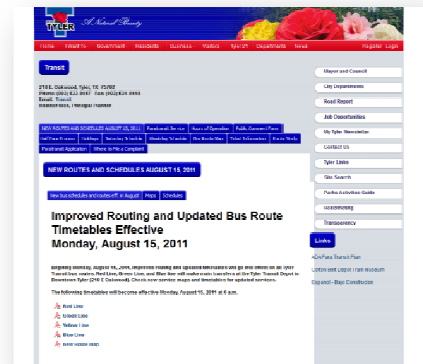


Longview Transit hosts its own website at [www.longviewtransit.com](http://www.longviewtransit.com). Route-specific information in a downloadable PDF format is available on the site. Each route brochure features a directional map as well as schedule with stops and times. A system map is also available online, but cannot be downloaded.

## Tyler Transit



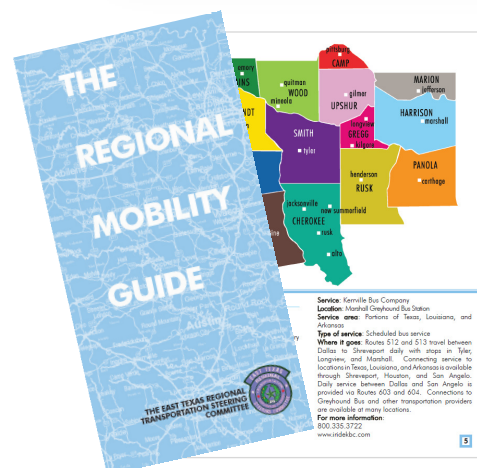
Tyler Transit currently has a transit guide and schedule brochure with an effective date of August 2011. The brochure includes a schedule for each route, as well as information regarding passes and fares, hours of operation, and other information/tips on how to ride. Although the brochure does not include a system map, a map of the system can be found on Tyler Transit's website.



Tyler Transit has a page located on the City of Tyler's website. It can be accessed directly at [www.tylerbus.org](http://www.tylerbus.org).

## Regional Mobility Guide

Given the East Texas region includes fourteen counties, during recent outreach efforts there were many public requests for a one-stop information resource covering all transportation providers (public, private, or non-profit) within the region. To support this request, EasTexConnects developed its regional mobility guide. The guide features information by county for all transportation services including local, rural and intercity bus services; rail; taxis/limousines; airports; and special services. The information contained therein is generic in nature (type of service, service area, contact information, etc.), which helps extend the shelf life of the piece and makes frequent updates unnecessary.



## 2. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

### Introduction

As mentioned earlier, public transit is not “top of mind” in East Texas. Again and again, survey respondents and participants at community meetings stated they were unfamiliar with, or entirely unaware of, local transit services.

A well-executed communications plan can go a long way toward raising awareness. According to the Public Relations Society of America, a strategic PR effort “engages and informs key audiences, builds important relationships and brings vital information back to an organization for analysis and action. It has real, measurable impact on the achievement of strategic organizational goals.” EasTexConnects’ goals are as follows: People first, barrier-free; multi-modal interconnectivity across the region; and aggressive outreach and education to a broad base. To achieve these goals, we have set objectives in the areas of public relations, advertising, customer experience, and promotion and outreach. Within each of these objectives we have made recommendations for the success of the marketing plan.

### Media Relations

Before firing off media releases and bending the ears of local newspaper editors, it is important to know what the message is and how to best deliver it.

Simply put, EasTexConnects is helping coordinate and streamline various transportation services throughout East Texas to improve connectivity region-wide. The aim is to better serve ride-dependent populations (such as seniors and persons with disabilities) and improve overall customer service. The effort will help ensure all have easy access to healthcare and social services.

There it is. That’s the message. Each item that goes out to the media should ultimately focus on this goal.

### Recommendations:

1. Compile a database of news outlets throughout the region. Include contact information for editors, news directors and reporters.
2. Broadcast one media release a month. Because coordinating transportation region-wide is such a massive undertaking, keeping audiences apprised of developments is a must. Announce services changes, upcoming events, partnerships between transportation providers, success stories and other newsworthy happenings. Has GoBus, Tyler Transit or Longview Transit experienced a spike in ridership? If so, share it!

The Regional Transportation Coordination Plan has already garnered media attention. The Longview *News-Journal* covered a community workshop where “Interconnectivity Day” (dubbed “Basic Training” in 2012) was the hot topic. Keep the *News-Journal* clued in on progress and invite the paper to cover future regional connectivity events.

3. Tailor content to appeal to target audiences. For example the Rains County *Leader* might not be interested in a story that happened in Wood County, unless there is a local angle to emphasize.
4. Keep a close eye on what is being said about East Texas' transportation coordination efforts. Compile all media mentions/appearances.
5. Continue to make media releases available on etcog.org and post on participating operators' websites as well.

**Evaluation:** Track and compile media mentions to identify those that received specific information related to campaigns. Relate back to ridership to track effectiveness of each media release.

**Cost:** \$2,500 to build media database, write and distribute 12 media releases, and track efforts.

### **E-blasts**

In conjunction with monthly media releases, consider initiating an e-mail campaign to deliver news and updates (essentially an e-newsletter) to stakeholders, service operators, schools, churches, senior centers, and assisted living facilities. (Given the demographics of the region, an e-blast campaign to businesses, local organizations, and governmental agencies is likely to be more successful than one targeted to individual users, though this option exists as well.) Content should reflect the latest happenings in EasTexConnects' quest to coordinate transportation.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop an initial e-blast distribution list utilizing current contacts. All marketing materials and public transportation websites (ETCOG/GoBus, Longview Transit, and Tyler Transit) should encourage visitors to sign up to receive the free e-newsletter.
2. Write and distribute monthly e-blasts to local residents, businesses, government agencies, etc.
3. The e-mail template should reflect EasTexConnects' brand/identity.

**Evaluation:** Utilize analytics provided by the e-blast distribution platform (such as MailChimp) to measure recipients, click-throughs, bounce rates. Periodically survey readers to find out which topics or issues they would like to learn more about.

**Cost:** \$2,400 to build template and write and distribute 12 e-blasts.

**Brochure distribution**

As mentioned earlier, EasTexConnects developed a Regional Mobility Guide, which is a one-stop information source covering all transportation providers (public, private, and nonprofit) in the region. It is vital this information be accessible at senior centers, libraries, social services offices, airports, and train and bus stations throughout the region. The Guide should also be stocked by the primary public transportation providers in the region (GoBus, Longview Transit, NDMJ, and Tyler Transit), either onboard vehicles (preferred) or available upon request.

*Recommendations:*

1. EasTexConnects should compile a database of all locations at which to display marketing collateral (including relevant contact information). Some key areas to display transit brochures, the Regional Mobility Guide, and other information include airports, rail/transit stations, senior centers, etc.
2. Distribution locations should be contacted, at a minimum, once a quarter to determine if restocking is needed.
3. Encourage distribution locations to request more materials before their stock is depleted. A postage-paid brochure request postcard that allows the distributor to check which items they need should be provided to each distribution location.

*Evaluation:* Monitor stock of brochures via quarterly phone calls to distribution locations. Track quantities to determine which locations use the most brochures. Compare these observations to ridership figures, and focus distribution efforts in areas where growth is desired.

*Cost:* \$640 to develop distributor database and contact distributors quarterly. \$350 to create and print postage-paid brochure request cards. (Note: amounts do not include shipping of brochures or postage-paid BRMs.)

**Website development**

Websites should be easy to navigate and frequently updated. Currently, Longview Transit, Tyler Transit and GoBus each have an online presence. Each transit operator's site/page has links to its route schedules and fare information. However, the level of information and ease-of-use of the websites differ.

*Recommendations:*

1. Create an easy-to-remember URL for GoBus, such as [www.easttexasgobus.org](http://www.easttexasgobus.org). The location of the webpage itself would not change; the new URL would simply redirect to the existing site.
2. Provide downloadable .pdfs of the GoBus county-specific brochures on the GoBus website. The information is presented in a printer-friendly format, but does not feature the GoBus branding. Anything the customer takes away from contact with the transportation provider should bear the appropriate brand.

*Evaluation:* Regularly assess websites to ensure they are easy to use and all information is accessible and up-to-date. Track number of website visitors and relate those to specific marketing efforts. Utilize simple online surveys to get customer feedback.

*Cost:* \$15 annually for domain registration. ETCOG should be able to handle the other recommendation in-house through its current IT department or provider.

### 3. ADVERTISING

*“There should be better advertising for GoBus service.”*

*“The GoBus program is wonderful, but no one knows about it.”*

These sentiments were expressed during a community workshop in Palestine. Increased advertising was a recommendation in the 2006 Regional Transportation Coordination Plan, and while GoBus specifically has addressed this with new brochures and a fleet of eye-catching vehicles, more can be done.

However, the scope of this marketing plan is to highlight transportation services region-wide, not to zero in on one provider. So an appropriate advertising approach would be a cross-promotional effort between rural GoBus services and urban transit providers. GoBus and Longview Transit/Tyler Transit could arrange advertising buy-ins to promote “town to city” services.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Tyler and Longview transit services should be encouraged to tap into rural markets through community weekly newspapers. In many rural communities, the weekly paper is the sole source of news outside of local gathering spots (i.e., barbershops and restaurants). Rural audiences could be enticed by the prospect of enjoying “big city” amenities without having to drive.
2. This message could also effectively be told through radio. Place simple, effective advertisements on country music stations to reach this rural demographic. Advertisements should communicate connectivity between GoBus and urban transit services.
3. Direct mailers are an opportunity to place information into the hands of thousands of potential riders. Mailing lists targeting low-income households, multi-family dwellings, and specific geographic locations can maximize the value of direct mail.
4. GoBus vehicles traveling to Longview and Tyler should provide stock route information and schedules for the transit services operating in these cities.
5. Posters and flyers at churches and senior centers would also be an advertising advantage.
6. Longview Transit and Tyler Transit should be encouraged to highlight regional connectivity in their individual marketing efforts. Potential activities include electronic communications to existing customers, bus stop posters, and car cards onboard transit vehicles.
7. Amtrak, Greyhound, Kerrville Bus Lines, and both regional airports should be approached regarding the placement of local and regional transit information on their

websites. Someone taking Amtrak into Longview, for example, would ideally be able to see their transit options when looking at features of their destination station. While connecting transit is not a current feature on the station profiles on Amtrak's website, this is a possibility that should be explored.

*Evaluation:* Document advertising outreach and follow-up with circulation figures to determine scope of reach. Analyze effectiveness and plan future ads around successful ones. Utilize simple surveys at the beginning and end of advertising campaigns to determine if awareness has been raised.

*Cost:* \$24,000 to \$36,000 annually. Depending on the size and scope of advertising EasTexConnects chooses to pursue, this amount would cover costs of design, copywriting, media placement and coordinating. As mentioned earlier, EasTexConnects could partner with transit agencies to share cross-promotion costs.

## 4. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

### Introduction

The 2011 Regional Transportation Coordination Plan recommends establishing a “one-stop-shop” information source. This call center would take all transportation-related inquiries and match riders with services relevant to their needs.

While details of this project will be discussed in a series of forthcoming technical memorandums, it’s not too early to begin thinking about ways to market this new service.

The initial launch of the helpline will no doubt attract media attention, but ongoing advertising and promoting will be critical to sustaining awareness.

### Branding

Branding is vital to a program’s success. An effective brand can elicit recognition and a call to action. EasTexConnects should consider following the lead of Tulare County, California, regarding its proposed One-Stop Regional Transportation Call Center. The Tulare County customer service call center, The Green Line (877-40GO-GREEN), has an easy-to-remember name and number (slogan: Your Bus Info Help Line). The service provides information about transit services in Tulare and Kings counties, including both local (city) services and regional (county-wide) services.





Exhibit 4.1 Tulare County (CA) One-Stop Call Center (The Green Line) Website

*Recommendation:*

1. Create a unique brand and image for the One-Stop Regional Transportation Call Center. The brand should not reflect any one service or program's look or color scheme, but should be a stand-alone brand. An easy-to-remember name and phone number will enhance awareness throughout the region.

*Evaluation:* Survey before launch and 6 months to one year after launch to quantify the impact the brand has on awareness region-wide. These surveys can be done informally at existing outreach events, but the follow-up survey should mirror the original baseline survey in regard to locations surveyed.

*Cost:* \$1,000 to design brand.

### Marketing

Once the call center is established, all marketing materials and partner websites should be updated with call center information. The call center phone number should be incorporated into every point of contact public transit agencies have with the public.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Undertake extensive outreach to local social service organizations, senior programs, veteran's programs, schools, governments, and employment assistance organizations to promote the new call center. Utilize direct mail (such as an oversized postcard) to communicate the change.
2. Issue one or more media releases in the weeks leading up to the launch of the call center. Utilize the media database developed as part of the recommendations in Chapter 2.
3. Consider including car cards on buses and coordinating with all regional transit agencies to ensure their brochures, maps and route schedules include the helpline number.

*Evaluation:* Customer service representatives can be used to assess impact. Across a specified period (i.e., two weeks twice a year), CSRs can ask callers where they heard about the Call Center. They can also track the home county of callers to determine where the message is being received.

*Cost:* \$3,000 to \$4,000 for outreach campaign, including design and distribution of direct-mail postcards and car cards.

### Customer Service

Even before the One-Stop Regional Transportation Call Center is launched, it is important to offer a standard level of customer service from all public transportation providers. In order to promote true connectivity, it is important that one service does not stand out as significantly worse than the others based on customer experience. A few simple tactics can help alleviate any such perceptions.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Log all calls that come into the call center (whether the regional call center or individual operator call centers). This will help the provider track how many complaints are being received versus calls for information.
2. All complaints should be addressed in a timely manner. We recommend operators adopt similar complaint resolution procedure so that complaints can be addressed to the customer's satisfaction.
3. Logging requests for information can help determine if there is a location or medium that should be included in future brochure distributions or outreach efforts. For example, if a large number of calls are coming from a particular community, the more locations in that community may need to be added to the brochure distribution list

*Evaluation:* Lists and records should be kept and reviewed quarterly to identify trends or common issues that should be addressed to provide improvements to customer service and the overall customer experience.

*Cost:* This should be incorporated into the job description of each call center employee and should be factored into the overall cost of the call center's operating budget. No additional cost is anticipated.

## 5. PROMOTION AND OUTREACH

### Introduction

The challenge here is that this marketing and outreach plan is not promoting a single transportation entity. It includes promotion of all regional transportation services and how travelers can transition seamlessly between them.

Each service has its own unique identity and operators should be assured their brands will not be compromised in the process of implementing a region-wide marketing plan. The aim here is to make all transportation information easily accessible through promotions, events, collateral and the proposed One-Stop Regional Transportation Call Center.

Outlined below are marketing strategies that can be implemented within six months, 12 months, and 18 months.

### Interconnectivity Day

Interconnectivity Day was originally conceived as an opportunity for East Texas residents who utilized two or more transportation services on the designated day would receive free rides and/or participate in local festivities. However, given the needs expressed during the early planning stages, EasTexConnects elected to focus on a key group of participants for the inaugural event.

The first Interconnectivity Day event, dubbed “Basic Training” and scheduled for May 10, 2012, will focus on training veterans how to use public transportation to access the VA hospital in Dallas. The recent opening of the Texas State Veterans Home in Tyler was a significant factor in this decision. During the first EasTexConnects day, up to 25 selected veterans will use volunteer drivers or local transportation (as available) to access Amtrak stations in Longview, Mineola, and Marshall. They will travel via Amtrak to Union Station in Dallas, where they will transfer to DART for the remainder of their trip to the VA Hospital. Upon successfully reaching their destination, they will have the opportunity to explore other attractions they can reach using DART, including Dallas’ historic West End.

While several of the recommendations below are intended to support the first Interconnectivity Day event, they should also be applied to future events as well.

### Recommendations:

1. Engage the media to cover the “Basic Training” trip the first year. Pre-event promotion is not necessarily warranted, since the target group is very specialized. In future years, media outlets can be used for promotion prior to the event as well as coverage of the event itself.
2. Develop event-specific collateral. The first year, this is expected to include a “Basic Training” brochure for the Disabled American Veterans conference at the end of March as well as a commemorative pass to be distributed to all participants. In future years, this could include wristbands, punch cards, commemorative transfers, or other pieces to help track multi-operator connections.

3. Write up each event for submission to industry publications. Raising awareness among other transit operators can elevate the prestige of the event and potentially uncover neighboring/connecting agencies that would like to participate (i.e., Greyhound, DART, The T, Trinity Railway Express, or SporTran). Having Amtrak as a partner significantly expands the options for connectivity outside of East Texas.

*Evaluation:* Document distribution of brochures or any advertisements to make sure the target audience was fully reached and what aspects of the event was the most successful. Utilize these figures in future Interconnectivity Days and events.

*Cost:* \$2,000 to \$3,000 for basic collateral development and production, media engagement, and article writing for industry trades for a modest event. More elaborate events would result in additional costs for coordination, promotional items/collateral, and marketing/advertising.

### Transportation fairs

What better way to get the word out about regional transportation than by taking the information directly to the community? Transportation fairs can be as simple as setting up informational booths representing an array of public and private transportation providers in a central location. Or it could be more elaborate to include demonstrations on how public buses accommodate people with disabilities.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Start small by hosting 4 transportation fairs a year, each in a different community. Separate booths for GoBus, Tyler Transit, Longview Transit, NDMJ, Greyhound/Kerrville Bus Company, Amtrak, local taxi companies, regional airports, and even TxDOT will bring comprehensive transportation information into a single location while putting a human face on it. Locating the fair at a mall or in a key community activity center will increase the number of people reached, even those that do not stop to pick up information or ask questions.
2. Once the One-Stop Regional Transportation Call Center is established, resist the urge to consolidate all the information into a single booth. Seeing the wide variety of options available is part of the effectiveness of the transportation fair.
3. Include all regional transportation providers, even if they do not serve that particular community. One goal of the transportation fair is to raise awareness of mobility options throughout the region so that residents know what their options are when they are away from their home community as well.

*Evaluation:* Track distribution of materials to see how many people are reached. Make sure call center keeps records to see if inquiries increase in relation to the fairs.

*Cost:* \$2,500 per event, or \$10,000 annually. Cost includes promoting and coordinating event.

### Senior and disabled outreach

Given East Texas' increasing senior population and the mobility restrictions inherent to aging, it is vital to target the senior population regarding public transportation options. Likewise, persons with disabilities often face many of the same mobility challenges (i.e., lack of access or ability to operate a personal vehicle). Therefore, getting transportation information to these specific populations is a prime focus of this marketing plan.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Develop a "mobility ambassador" program. Volunteer mobility ambassadors in each county (preferably local active seniors) would make presentations to senior centers and assisted living facilities. The ambassador would provide information about what transportation services are available and how to use them, answer questions, and distribute informational materials. (Though assisted living facilities typically provide transportation for their residents, it is often limited to health-related travel.)
2. Coordinate with senior and housing centers to distribute informational materials on mobility options for seniors who can't drive or prefer not to.
3. Consider development of a brochure focusing on mobility options specifically for seniors who have recently lost the ability to drive themselves. Many seniors see this turning point in their lives as a serious impediment to their independence. A marketing piece focusing on how to get around without a car – especially one that addresses the perception of being a burden by having to rely on others – could be distributed at senior centers, social service agencies, local driver's license offices, and medical facilities.
4. Provide flyers and posters to senior centers and churches throughout the region. Churches may be willing to include inserts in bulletins or include an item in their congregational newsletter. Like an in-flight magazine, this would be an effective way to reach a captive audience.
5. To reach the disabled community, provide rehabilitation facilities with materials and coordinate with the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services to ensure materials are being distributed to clients. Materials should reflect public transit's ease-of-use and accessibility.
6. Organize a mobility fair or demonstration to show how public transit vehicles accommodate people with disabilities. This could be held in conjunction with a transportation fair or other outreach activity.

*Evaluation:* Track distribution rates of each piece and location(s) it was distributed to track the reach of messaging. Track ridership by senior populations to keep track of trends that increase or decrease ridership.

*Cost:* \$4,000 to \$6,000. This would cover developing database of churches, senior centers, and rehab facilities; contacting organizations; and developing and distributing materials.

### **Workplace outreach**

According to the East Texas Regional Transit Transfer Study, 52 percent of East Texans reside in rural communities. This suggests many people commute to worksites located in more urban areas, or job centers, such as Tyler and Longview. In many cases, a regional vanpool program, as recommended in the 2011 Regional Transportation Coordination Plan Update, would be a cost-effective approach to bridging the gap between rural communities and urban job centers. Absent the implementation of this program, it is important to reach out to employers with comprehensive regional transportation information.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Coordinate with major employers (those who employ 500 or more, as identified in the 2011 Regional Transportation Coordination Plan) to display brochures representing relevant public transit services and the Regional Mobility Guide.
2. Encourage employers to designate an official “Employee Transportation Coordinator” (or ETC) at their worksites. This person would serve as the point person for transportation-related information for current employees as well as new and potential hires.

*Evaluation:* Track distribution amounts and locations as well as the number of ETCs to determine scope of potential ridership. Maintain a relationship with ETCs to evaluate workplace needs and program effectiveness.

*Cost:* \$2,000 to \$2,500 to contact employers, distribute brochures, develop and distribute ETC materials, and make follow up phone calls.

### **Outreach to low-income residents**

Low-income residents are at high risk of being ride-dependent. Those who are unemployed may feel they cannot get a job without access to reliable transportation, yet they cannot get reliable transportation without first getting a job. Other low-income residents may have a personal vehicle, but cannot afford to insure, maintain, or fuel it. Therefore it is extremely important to get information about regional transportation options out into the community.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. To reach jobseekers, partner with Workforce Solutions East Texas to ensure all transportation information is available at satellite offices throughout the region and at its Mobile Workforce Center. Informational materials could be tailored to this demographic highlighting public transit as a money-saving solution. Provide Regional Mobility Guides and other service information to ensure those persons most at risk for being ride-dependent have access to the information they need to procure employment.

2. Encourage employment counselors to work with jobseekers and transportation call centers to find transportation solutions.
3. Target each county's low-income residents with a county-specific direct mailer communicating public transit's affordability and providing information directly relevant to that county. For example, a mailer to low-income residents of Henderson County would highlight GoBus service within Henderson County, service to Tyler, and basic information about Tyler Transit. The piece could also include a list of popular destinations in Tyler.

*Evaluation:* Track placement of advertisements and distribution of brochures and mailers to determine "hot" locations and where the next distribution and placement should be for the most effective return. Track ridership of low-income residents through surveys or outreach to keep track of trends that increase or decrease ridership.

*Cost:* \$2,500 to \$3,500 to develop and distribute materials and/or direct mail to workforce center locations and to contact workforce centers to ensure materials are displayed.



6. Timeline

	Estimated Cost	2012				2013							
		September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August
Public Communications													
Media database	\$300												
Monthly media release	\$1,200	Ongoing											
Monitor media mentions	\$750	Ongoing											
Post media releases on websites	\$250	Ongoing											
Add eblast signup to websites	\$250												
Monthly eblast	\$2,150	Ongoing											
Brochure distribution database	\$200												
Quarterly distribution assessment	\$440												
Materials request postcard	\$350												
GoBus URL	\$15												
GoBus brochures on website	\$0												
Advertising													
Community newspaper adverts	\$10,000 - \$15,000												
Radio buys	\$6,000 - \$8,000												
Direct mail	\$3,000 - \$6,000												
Stock GoBus info on city services	\$2,000	Ongoing											
Posters and flyers for churches/seniors	\$2,000	Ongoing											
Transit info via Amtrak/KBL/airports	\$1,000	Ongoing											
Customer Experience													
One-stop call center brand	\$1,000												
Promotion of call center brand	\$2,000 - \$3,000	Ongoing											
Call center brand media releases	\$500												
Call center brand onboard notices	\$500												
Log call type	N/A	Ongoing											
Address complaints	N/A	Ongoing											
Log requests for information	N/A	Ongoing											
Promotion & Outreach													
Engage media re: EasTexConnects	\$500												
Develop event-specific collateral	\$1,000 - \$2,000												
Write up event for industry publications	\$500												
Transportation fairs	\$10,000												
Volunteer Mobility Ambassador program	\$1,000	Ongoing											
Distribute materials to senior centers	\$750 - \$1,000	Ongoing											
Senior-specific mobility brochure	\$1,500 - \$2,000												
Distribute materials to rehab centers	\$750 - \$1,000	Ongoing											
Senior mobility fair	\$1,000												
Employer outreach	\$2,000 - \$2,500	Ongoing											
Workforce Solutions outreach	\$1,000	Ongoing											
Low-income direct mailer	\$1,500 - \$2,500												

Annual budget (12-month plan)

Tier One = \$30,000 budget  
Tier Two = \$40,000 budget  
Tier Three = \$50,000 budget  
If additional funds are available

