

Executive Summary

Updated
Regional Public Transportation
Coordination Plan 2011
for the
Coastal Bend Region

Transportation Inventory &
Needs and Gaps Assessment

September 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2006, the Coastal Bend Council of Governments (CBCOG) produced the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan for the Coastal Bend in accordance with state and federal regulations. The initial plan was a short-range plan, appropriate to provide guidance for regional coordination for approximately four to five years. An update of the plan is necessary in order to continue to be relevant and provide new goals for the future of regional public transportation coordination in the Coastal Bend. Using funds from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Public Transportation Division, CBCOG contracted with Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) to prepare the transportation inventory and the public transportation needs and gap assessment as the first two activities for the updated plan. This report represents the initial chapters for the Updated Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan 2011.

BACKGROUND

Located in southern Texas, the Coastal Bend region consists of 12 counties: Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio, and San Patricio.



Coastal Bend Region

The objective of 2006 Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan for the Coastal Bend was to improve public transportation services for choice riders and transit dependent persons in the Coastal Bend. The emphasis of the plan was to provide better transportation for individuals

traveling for employment, day care, training, non-emergency medical and other destinations as needed. One main theme in the 2006 plan was inter-county coordination that requires regional thinking and planning.

The regional lead agency for the Coastal Bend 2005-2010 was CBCOG. The lead agency and a regional group of stakeholders established the Transportation Coordination Network (TCN) in 2008 to guide the implementation of recommendations from the 2006 plan. The TCN includes representatives from local transit agencies, health and human services agencies, agencies that provide employment services such as Workforce Solutions, the CBCOG, and the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Leaders of the TCN work to create a forum for coordination between all stakeholders in the area. In April 2010, the TCN announced a new director who also serves as the Inter-County Mobility Director. This director assists the region to improve coordination of transportation services.

APPROACH

The process to develop the Updated Regional Plan 2011 will take approximately one year due to the comprehensive nature of the effort. The timeline calls for the updated plan to be complete by August 2011. The objectives for the summer 2010 were to identify additional stakeholders and to document transportation needs and service gaps.

TCN held meetings to discuss the regional plan update on June 21, July 26, and August 16, 2010. Approximately 85 individuals attended regional meetings in Robstown, Refugio, and Falfurrias to provide comments regarding transportation needs and opportunities in the region.

In July, TTI posted the online 2010 Coastal Bend Public Transportation Needs Assessment Survey (the survey). The survey was an opportunity for all stakeholders to provide information and participate in the identification of transportation needs and current gaps in transportation services in the region. More than 120 respondents representing health and human service agencies, agencies that provide employment services, regional transportation planning organizations, agencies that provide services for clients who need transportation, and advocates for those who use or need public transportation answered the survey and provided information regarding transportation challenges in the region.

The full report provides an inventory of current transportation providers, describes the transportation planning process, documents existing demographic characteristics, and identifies public transportation needs and gaps in the region. . Throughout the report, the use of the term disability refers to all types of physical and mental disabilities (cross-disability).

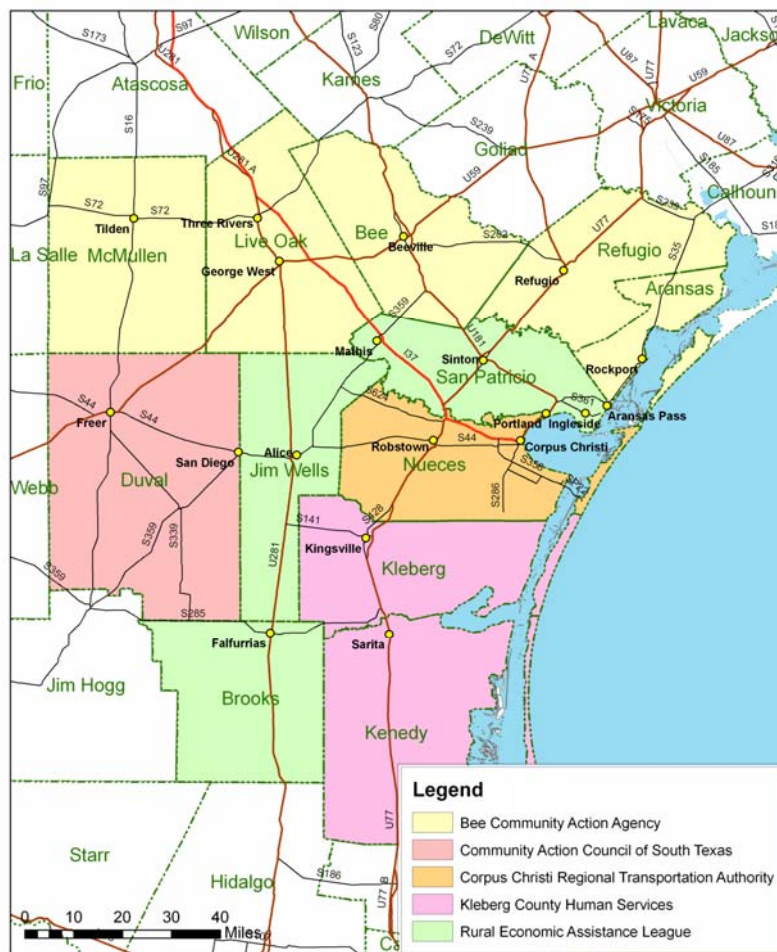
INVENTORY OF TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES IN THE REGION

The different types of transportation resources in the Coastal Bend region include the following:

- public transportation providers,
- intercity/international bus carriers,
- medical transportation,
- client-based providers, and
- private-for-hire providers.

Public Transportation Providers

The Coastal Bend region contains five public transportation providers consisting of one regional transportation authority and four rural transit districts. Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) is the regional transportation authority and serves the Corpus Christi urbanized area and all of Nueces County. The four rural transit districts within the Coastal Bend region are Bee Community Action Agency (BCAA), Rural Economic Assistance League (REAL), Kleberg County Human Services, and Community Action Council of South Texas (CACST) in Rio Grande City serves Duval County. Every county in the Coastal Bend is part of the regional transportation authority or a rural transit district.



Public Transportation Provider Service Areas of the Coastal Bend Region

Intercity/International Bus Carriers

Greyhound is the one American intercity bus carrier serving the region. Greyhound owns other intercity operators such as Valley Transit. Greyhound has 16 stations in the region, in all counties except Kenedy and McMullen. Greyhound has three routes through the region, connecting San Antonio and Houston with towns in the Coastal Bend and McAllen, Harlingen, and Brownsville. One route includes a trip each direction each day to Laredo.

International intercity transportation providers also play an important role in connecting the region with Mexico. Most of the Greyhound station personnel in the region report no international carriers making stops, although some report as many as 10 international bus trips per day. The only corridor with regular international carrier traffic is U.S. Highway 77, with Refugio and Robstown reporting between four and 10 international carriers stopping each day. The international carriers identified by the Greyhound station personnel as making stops in the region are El Expreso Bus Company, Grupo Senda, and Omnibus de Mexico.

Medical Transportation Program (MTP)

MTP is under the oversight of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. MTP provides non-emergency medical transportation to eligible customers. MTP is for categorically eligible Medicaid recipients that have no other means of transportation to access a Medicaid-covered service. The MTP provider for the Coastal Bend region is a private company, LeFleur Transportation. In addition to providing service to the Coastal Bend region, LeFleur provides transportation service to seven other counties in the South Texas (18 counties total). Within the Coastal Bend region, LeFleur directly operates approximately 25 vehicles. LeFleur also has a subcontractor, Southwest Transportation. LeFleur does not subcontract to public transportation providers in the Coastal Bend region.

Client-Based Providers

The Coastal Bend region contains several agencies that provide client-based transportation resources. The types of resources consist of the following:

- fund transportation or facilitate access to transportation resources for clients;
- deliver transportation services to clients directly using agency vehicles and drivers;
- purchase transportation for clients by contracting with a transportation provider; and
- pay for client public transportation fare or reimburse for personal transportation to services.

Private-for-Hire Providers

The region has 30 private-for-hire transportation providers such as taxicab, limousine, and charter bus companies. Private-for-hire transportation provides transportation to individuals needing an exclusive trip to a destination within or outside the region. The typical trip by private-for-hire is a higher cost than the same trip by public transportation (if available).

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The Coastal Bend region covers 11,507 square miles, and has an estimated 2009 population of 559,067 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Nueces County has a population of 323,046, more populous than the other 11 counties combined. Kenedy and McMullen Counties have populations of 369 and 810, respectively, and constitute two of the six least populated counties in the state.

County	Population		Absolute Change	Percent Change
	2000	2009		
Aransas	22,497	24,826	2,329	10.4%
Bee	32,359	32,487	128	0.4%
Brooks	7,976	7,377	-599	-7.5%
Duval	13,120	12,010	-1,110	-8.5%
Jim Wells	39,326	41,001	1,675	4.3%
Kenedy	414	369	-45	-10.9%
Kleberg	31,549	30,647	-902	-2.9%
Live Oak	12,309	11,046	-1,263	-10.3%
McMullen	851	810	-41	-4.8%
Nueces	313,645	323,046	9,401	3.0%
Refugio	7,828	7,225	-603	-7.7%
San Patricio	67,138	68,223	1,085	1.6%
Total	549,012	559,067	10,055	1.8%
Texas	20,851,820	24,782,302	3,930,482	18.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; U.S. Census Estimates, 2009

Coastal Bend Population by County

The largest city in the region, Corpus Christi has a 2009-estimated population of 287,438 and is the eighth largest city in the state. Kingsville, in Kleberg County, is the second largest city in the region, with a population 24,591. Other cities in the region with populations greater than 10,000 include Alice in Jim Wells County, Portland in San Patricio County, Beeville in Bee County, and Robstown in Nueces County. All principal cities in Aransas and Jim Wells Counties gained population during the last decade. The cities in Nueces and San Patricio Counties saw mixed growth, with approximately one-half gaining population. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates a loss in population for all cities in the remaining eight counties, with George West and Three Rivers in Live Oak each experiencing at least a 12 percent decline in population.

When examining demographics, the Coastal Bend region ranks significantly above the state average in the percentage of the elderly population, the percentage of people with a disability, the percentage of individuals living below the poverty rate, and the percentage of occupied housing units with no vehicle available. The characteristics of the region for each of these variables indicate a high need for public transportation. The need is highest in the south and western portions of the region, particularly in Brooks, Duval, and Kenedy Counties. These counties require increased levels of public transportation, in order to serve the higher percentages

of the transit dependent segments of the population. Brooks County ranks first in the state in teen birth rate and is among the top five counties for children in poverty.

Analyzing health demographics reveals similar trends for the region. Jim Wells, Duval, and Aransas Counties are all in the bottom quarter of counties in the state in terms of overall health rankings. Counties with lower health rankings tend to need public transportation, especially for medical trips.

The regional population will become more obese over the next 20 years. The obese population is expected to increase through 2030, at the same time that overall population is projected to decrease. A larger obese percentage of the population also indicates an increased need for public transportation due to the increase of diabetes and other illnesses connected to obesity. More residents will have a need for public transportation to serve medical trips, while at the same time the decline in overall population will lead to a lack of public resources to support them.

Examining the spatial distribution of colonias provides a clear perspective on the need for public transportation. The colonias in the region are scattered throughout the southwestern and central portions of the region, especially in Jim Wells, San Patricio, and Nueces Counties. Most colonias are located in or near the mid-sized cities in the region, including Alice, Falfurrias, Sinton, Beeville, San Diego, Aransas Pass, and Freer. The counties and cities with significant numbers of colonias represent a need for public transportation due to the high percentage of migratory workers living below the poverty level and with no means of transportation.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In order to reach out to all stakeholders and collect data from each one, TTI posted the online 2010 Coastal Bend Public Transportation Needs Assessment Survey in July. The TCN Inter-County Mobility Director invited stakeholders by mail, phone, the TCN newsletter, and the TCN website to log into the survey and complete the questions. The survey asked stakeholders to provide information about existing needs and gaps in transportation service in the region and to identify others who can contribute to the discussion. TTI followed up to contact all referrals.

For the purposes of this report, survey responses were collected through a survey cut-off date of August 24, 2010. As of that date, 123 respondents initiated a survey response online. More than one person from some agencies responded to the survey. The respondents to the survey represented 82 unique agencies/offices. If an agency has more than one office in the region, each of the offices is treated as an independent respondent.

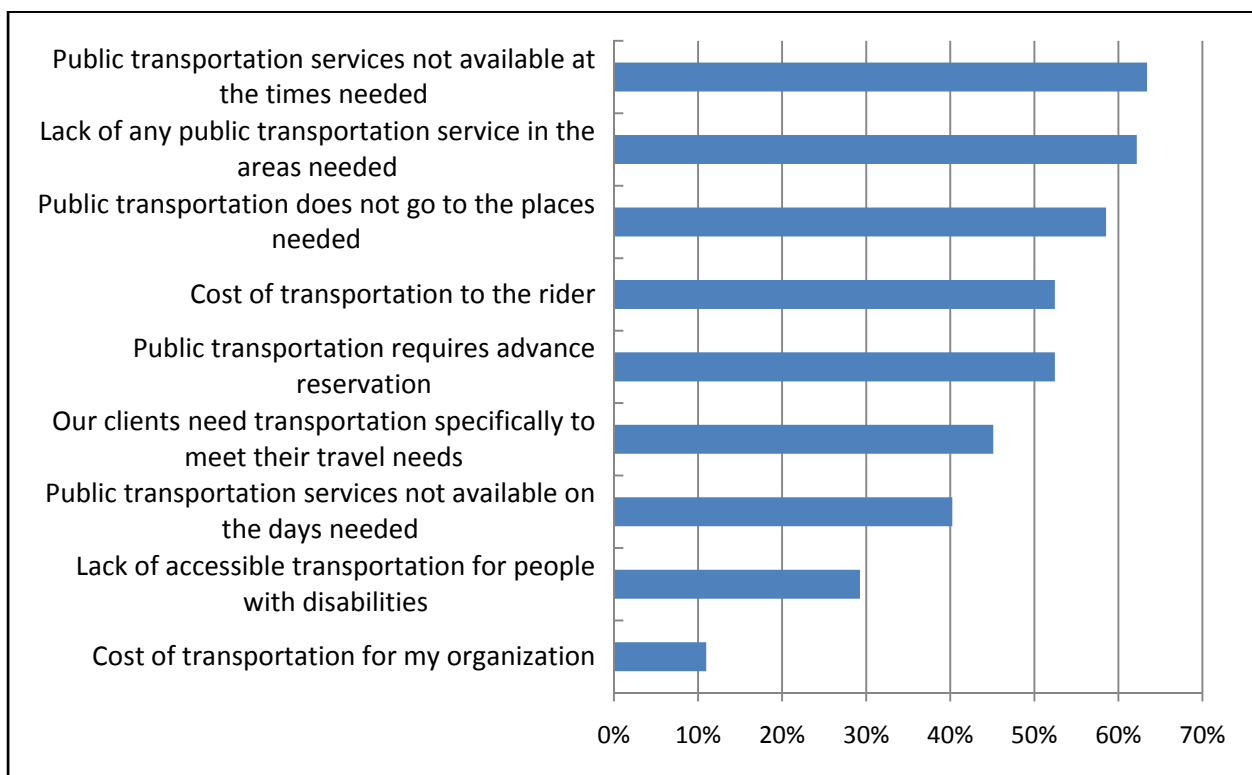
The agencies that responded to the public transportation needs assessment represent the following stakeholder categories:

- public transportation authorities and rural transit districts;
- agencies that fund public transportation;
- client transportation providers including Section 5310 recipients;
- health and human service agencies that fund or purchase transportation for clients;
- agencies that provide employment services;
- regional transportation planning organizations;
- agencies that provide services for clients who need transportation;

- advocates for those who use or need public transportation;
- representatives of higher education institutions;
- faith-based transportation providers; and
- sponsors of volunteer driver programs.

In addition to respondents to the public needs assessment survey, participants in the three stakeholders meetings in Robstown, Refugio, and Falfurrias included users of public transportation and human service transportation services and representatives of the business community.

The public transportation needs and gaps identified through the survey and the three stakeholders meetings are illustrated below and described in the following section.



What are the most common transportation related issues that you or your clients or constituents face?

1. Transportation services are not available when needed.
 - need daily service including weekends
 - need longer span of service in rural areas
 - need 24 hour service for shift workers
 - need more fixed route frequency
2. Transportation is not provided in all areas.
 - areas have no transportation [although a transit district exists to serve every rural county and RTA serves all of Nueces County]
 - need more transportation in rural areas

- must travel to metro areas to get transportation
 - need to extend bus routes outside Corpus Christi
 - need local transportation in Kingsville, Alice and Beeville
 - no private providers in some rural areas
 - need public transportation for colonias
3. Services need to focus on specific customer needs.
 - people with cross-disabilities lack accessible modes of transportation, such as accessible taxis
 - need consumer education programs/travel training for people with cross-disabilities and elderly
 - need public transportation for colonias
 - need to improve maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure
 - need to improve scheduling of demand response service for return trips
 - elderly need shelters for waiting
 - low income people need transportation at a cost reasonable to the ability to pay
 - students at TAMU-Corpus Christi need transportation year round
 - veterans need transportation to VA hospitals and clinics
 4. Advance reservation requirements for demand response transportation are difficult.
 - many users find it difficult to make advance reservations
 - many users do not/cannot remember to make appointments
 - advance reservations means no spontaneity for trips
 - wait times are too long
 - inconvenient because the requirements mean planning travel well in advance
 5. Public transportation services do not cross jurisdictional boundaries.
 - lack of public transportation services across county lines
 - need for rural transit interface with RTA services
 6. Counties lack regional transportation connections.
 - lack of rural connectivity to RTA
 - need transportation to Laredo from some areas
 - need transportation to Veteran's Hospital in San Antonio
 - Duval County is part of Coastal Bend region but at the same time part of another rural transit district
 7. Transportation services and health services are not coordinated.
 - medical services and public transportation need to coordinate schedules
 - riders must reserve appointments for transportation to get to medical appointments
 - need to share resources among transportation providers
 8. Communication about public transportation services needs to improve.
 - need to resolve general public lack of awareness of rural transit services
 - need one point of information for all services
 - need information in various formats
 - low income people do not have telephone or internet access
 - overcome boundaries between cultural backgrounds
 - find solutions to restrictions on information sharing between agencies
 9. Demand response public transportation can be inconvenient for the return trip.
 - need coordination of pick-up times to ensure people with cross-disabilities can use the service

- improve efficiency for coordination of pick up/delivery
 - improve communication with clients to let them know when they will be picked up after appointment
10. Existing resources can be used more effectively.
- need to access additional funding for public transportation
 - need to tie funding to results for coordination and innovation
11. Rural transit districts have problems recruiting and retaining drivers
- gap between competitive pay scale and current wages
 - need to find drivers with proper certification and endorsements
12. Medical Transportation Program policies do not always meet client needs.
- only patient and one escort can use the service
 - siblings cannot ride along with an eligible child
 - wait times for return trips are often too long

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

The suggested improvements for transportation in the Coastal Bend are summarized below.

- Improve coordination between agencies:
 - expand opportunities to travel across county lines;
 - provide coordinated points of access;
 - increase efficiency for pick-up/delivery of clients;
 - coordinate maintenance for wheelchair lifts (and other maintenance needs) between rural providers and RTA;
 - provide connections at outlying RTA park-and-rides located in Robstown, Gregory and Calallen (within Nueces County); and
 - use routing and scheduling software to full potential – Shah Transportation Manager software system to coordinate across service areas.
- Expand transportation provided in the Coastal Bend area:
 - identify sources of additional funding for expanded hours and days of service;
 - set up more flexible routes in higher density areas;
 - evaluate the feasibility of local transit in small cities; and
 - increase frequency on RTA routes to create a regional network.
- Connect rural transit providers with RTA:
 - investigate the feasibility of RTA expanding services to additional areas if the communities fund the cost of providing the service; and
 - increase timed transfer connections to RTA, for example at park-and-rides or transit stations.
- Improve customer service:
 - recognize the needs of the disabled and medically ill to accommodate personal needs;
 - help consumers to be stronger advocates for service, ask for mobility options;
 - provide transit-use training;
 - improve coordination of scheduling for clients by health and human service providers and transportation providers;
 - provide more shelters at fixed route stops for transfers between transportation providers;
 - provide more reduced fare opportunities to match income;

- investigate ways to provide public transportation to colonias;
- assist veterans with coordination of transportation to San Antonio VA hospital and Corpus Christi VA clinic.
- Improve communication:
 - provide more information to transit users – via variety of media. Prepare pamphlets to distribute to low income areas where internet and phones are not readily available;
 - improve communications regarding reservation system for demand response;
 - improve public information about the services provided by rural agencies;
 - resolve the perception that rural transit agencies do not cross jurisdictional boundaries;
 - develop a single point of public information for all transit information;
 - increase funding for more communications and marketing;
 - share transportation information at local events; and
 - establish a network of enrolled “volunteers” to provide transit training.
- Raise the bar for coordination by public transportation agencies:
 - encourage cost-sharing;
 - encourage sub-contracting/interlocal agreements;
 - work to address consumer needs;
 - improve oversight by funding agencies to monitor for coordination;
 - include incentives and tie continued funding to accomplishments; and
 - compete to increase existing funding of public transportation.
- Discuss MTP polices with HHSC.
- Look for innovative solutions to problems:
 - for example, CBCIL secured Section 5317 Job Access Reverse Commute funds to implement a small pilot program that will offer transportation providers subsidies for meeting customer needs for people with cross-disabilities in Nueces and San Patricio Counties.
- Improve maintenance for accessible vehicles;
 - train existing mechanics to repair wheelchairs lifts in-house; and
 - coordinate with experienced personnel at RTA.

NEXT STEPS

The Updated Regional Plan 2011 is necessary for the plan to continue to be a valid resource. The update process will take approximately one year due to the comprehensive nature of the effort. The timeline for the updated plan to be complete by August 2011 is as follows:

- Fall 2010:
 - establish vision, mission, goals and objectives
 - identify measures of performance
 - identify improvements and prioritize an action plan
 - prepare funding application for TxDOT Coordinated Call for Projects
- Spring 2011:
 - streamline parallel planning program
 - leverage resources for sustainability beyond 2011
- Summer 2011:
 - complete Updated Regional Plan 2011.