

KFH GROUP, INC.

Ark-Tex Regional Public Transit Coordination Plan Update2013

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Ark-Tex council of Governments

ARK-TEX AREA REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSIT COORDINATION PLAN UPDATE 2013

On a regular basis, the Ark-Tex Region is updating the Coordination Plan to reflect changing needs and evolving activities and strategies. The Regional Coordination Plan Update calls for a review of needs, followed by a review of activities that have taken place in the past year. The final part of this effort is the Plan Update. The update addresses the variety of needs and proposes potential solutions. This will include identifying areas where funding can potentially be used.

REVIEW OF NEEDS

The Ark-Tex Area needs have remained similar to the needs as of two years ago and documented extensively in the 2011 Coordination Plan. However, national and regional trends are indicating that as the economy continues to slump the need and of course demand for public transportation will continue to grow.

Demand for service continues to increase. Requests for commuter service saw a significant increase and Ark-Tex TRAX will continue to place an emphasis on commuter needs. TRAX is now prepared to launch commuter/Greyhound connector services in three areas. Traditional thinking on who needs rural transit and where they need to go is no longer valid as TRAX is adapting to the changing economy and the new set of needs manifested.

Public and Stakeholder Outreach FY 2013

This section of the plan presents the results of the comprehensive outreach efforts as part of the coordinated planning process in the Ark-Tex region. This outreach includes surveys of the public and human service agencies, and 12 public meetings focusing on engaging older adults, persons with disabilities, individuals with low incomes, and the human service agencies that serve these cohorts. This review also discusses the 12 public meetings conducted as part of the coordinated planning process with an emphasis on service, planning, and coordination recommendations.

ARK-TEX PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SURVEY

Prior to development of any recommendations transit strategies, public transit riders, human service agencies, and their clients were surveyed regarding their need for improvements to existing transportation services.

Methodology and Outcomes

As part of the public transit and human service coordinated planning process, the project team created a survey tool that was implemented online and administered at public meetings and by human service agencies. Northeast Texas Opportunities, Opportunities Inc. and the Randy Sam's Outreach Shelter all submitted survey responses on behalf of their clients.

The primary purpose of the survey tool was to identify public transit service gaps in the Ark-Tex region, particularly for persons displaying characteristics indicative of transit dependency. Surveys were completed by human service agency staff, human service agency clients, public transit riders, and members of the general public who do not regularly ride public transit. The survey results were tabulated by the project team.

- 24% of respondents were over the age of 65 or cared for a person over the age of 65.
- 44% of the respondents have a disability.
- 40% of the respondents are in households that are considered low income.
- 40% of the respondents are unemployed
- 40% of the respondents indicated that there was a place in the region that they could not get to.

All of the respondents that indicated there were places in the region that they could not get to where regular T-Line customers that were unaware of TRAX services that connect Texarkana with surrounding communities. Of the 40% that indicated unmet destinations, all but one wanted service to New Boston, TX, just west of Texarkana. TRAX is currently developing a route between DeKalb and Texarkana that will make regular stops in New Boston.

The majority of survey respondents have no problem getting to destinations throughout the region and those that use public transit services were pleased with the service they receive.

The primary need that was revealed through the survey collection was for greater dissemination of information about TRAX rural and intercity services. The survey respondents that expressed barriers to reaching locations throughout the region, stated that “there are no other transportation services for the trip,” as their primary reason that the trip cannot be made. The fact is, public transportation services do exist that can meet their need, but they are unaware of their existence. There is potential for TRAX to increase ridership and further meet the needs of transit riders in the region through increased marketing efforts.

In response to these findings, TRAX will be developing a marketing and outreach plan for Year 2013. The survey process is still open and will be incorporated into the June public meetings and subsequent reports on the outreach process.

ARK-TEX PUBLIC TRANSIT MEETINGS

The purpose of the public transit public meetings is to constructively engage stakeholders in the region to help further determine transit needs, possible gaps in service, and potential solutions to bridge those gaps. The target audience for these stakeholder meetings is older adults, low income households, people with disabilities, and agencies that serve these cohorts.

In 2013 there were a total of 12 meetings covering all 9 counties in the region. There were meetings in the cities of De Kalb, Redwater, Linden, Cooper, Mt. Vernon, Cumby, Como, Reno, Paris, Omaha, Clarksville and Mount Pleasant.

NEEDS, GAPS, AND SOLUTIONS

This section outlines the main issues and topics that were discussed by human service agencies, human service clients, and public transit users in the stakeholder meetings to date.

Coordination

Morris County

Transit customers on the periphery of the TRAX service area have stated the need for inter-jurisdictional trips mostly for medical appointments. Trip needs to Tyler in the southern portion of the TRAX service area were specifically pointed out. TRAX will explore coordination possibilities with East Texas Council of Governments to help meet these trip needs.

Increased Service and Service Hours

Texarkana

The need for service from Texarkana to rural areas to the west of the city in Bowie County was identified. There is also the desire for increased service hours in the evenings and on the weekends in Texarkana.

Mount Pleasant

Fixed-route service only runs until the early afternoon. Fixed-route service does not accommodate commuters, people needing access to employment or visitors. Opportunities to schedule transit services later in the evening (6:00 p.m. or later) should be explored.

Fixed-Route Service

Texarkana

Feasibility for increased service hours in the evenings and on the weekends should be examined. Opportunities exist to coordinate with Texas A&M University to serve the new campus outside of the current fixed-route system. T-Line should explore capital funding opportunities to update their bus fleet. Many buses are in poor to fair condition and can be a jarring ride for passengers with disabilities or who are elderly, particularly when sitting in the rear of the bus. New buses could alleviate these concerns.

Mount Pleasant

The current fixed-route system in Mount Pleasant is underutilized due to insufficient service hours. Service is also insufficient in geographic coverage as many major destinations in Mount Pleasant are underserved and only accessible using demand-response service.

Paris

There are currently no fixed-route services in Paris though there is the density, population, and demand for a small fixed-route system. This is a current strategy in the Regional Coordination Plan.

Marketing and Outreach

Marketing and the dissemination of transit information needs to be increased

region-wide. There is ample opportunity to develop written information, either on brochures or on the web, of fare structures for TRAX services. Many participants at the public meetings were excited to learn about many TRAX public transportation programs that serve low income workers and persons with disabilities. Increased marketing efforts should be developed so that these populations can learn about these services outside of coordination meetings.

TRAX has a successful travel training program and the Randy Sam's Shelter in Texarkana and Advocacy Incorporated in Paris expressed interest in coordinating travel training for their clients.

The Randy Sam's shelter has also engaged in greater coordination with TRAX and T-Line as the Director of this human service agency sits on the regional Public Transportation Coordination Board. They have offered to host a public meeting in the future.

Facilities and Vehicles

Texarkana

There is no evidence that the previous contractor for T-Line service did routine preventive maintenance. It is clear that before ATCOG took over operations, the bus fleet was allowed to deteriorate faster than is normal. This coupled with the large increase in ridership since the ATCOG implemented new service designs has resulted in many of the T-Line buses degrading, even though most are 2008 models and should be running better. Maintenance to get the buses into an acceptable condition has been expensive and there have been continued maintenance issues, above and beyond what is normal. T-Line passengers have complained about the rough rides in the buses. T-Line is in need of securing capital funding for new busses.

Mount Pleasant

TRAX currently uses paratransit scheduling software in Bowie, Cass, Red River, and Lamar Counties and is planning to expand the use of the software throughout the remaining counties in the region once the Mount Pleasant facility is brought up to date. This will also entail the use of Automatic Vehicle Location in the entire region and should increase productivity.

Accessibility

Accessibility is an issue throughout the Ark-Tex region. There are a limited number of accessible sidewalks and or bus stops. This has become a particular problem in Paris, where traffic issues resulting from persons using wheelchairs have to use a

traffic lane to reach their destination. Opportunities to coordinate with the Texas Department of Transportation and local governments to increase accessibility and pedestrian safety should be explored. The typical regional accessibility problems are:

- No sidewalks
- Wheelchair users using traffic lanes
- Lack of wheelchair ramps and curb cuts
- Lack of safe pedestrian street crossing and lighting
- Obstructed sidewalks (telephone poles, fire hydrants, trash cans, etc.)

TARKANA BUS STOP INVENTORY

The consultant team led a detailed bus stop inventory process. Every bus stop in Texarkana was mapped using GPS coordinates. In Texarkana, TX a full bus stop assessment survey was completed at every stop. The assessment covered several data points including:

- Location
- Position in relation to the nearest intersection (Near side, far side or mid-block)
- Heading (North, south, east or west)
- Routes serving the stop
- Signage
- Amenities
- Accessibility
- Accessible pathways to human service agencies

This inventory and survey will help prioritize bus stop capital improvements, leverage funding for those improvements and held the service provider in making service changes and improvements.

TEXARKANA ORIGIN AND DESTINATION STUDY

As part of the ongoing effort by the Ark-Tex Council of Governments and the T Line to enhance the quality of transit customer's travel experiences, expand the availability of services to those who are unserved and increase the cost effectiveness of service delivery, a detailed passenger count survey for T Line services was completed. The passenger counts were conducted on Friday, February 22 and Saturday, February 23, 2013 for the entire span of service. KFH Group utilized a local Texas staffing agency in the recruitment of surveyors to assist with conducting the passenger counts. A total of 11 surveyors were hired to ride all the buses and provide logistical support. Prior to

the actual passenger counts, passenger count booklets were put together for each bus/run in service. Thus each passenger count booklet represented a vehicle run assignment for that particular day, and included a list of bus stop locations which were provided by T Line. Appendix A provides a sample page from one of the passenger count booklets.

A training session for the passenger count surveyors was conducted on Thursday, February 21, 2011 at the T Line maintenance facility at 818 Elm St. On the days of the passenger count effort, the surveyors logged the boarding, alightings, departing load, and the time of departure at each scheduled time point.

The technical report is organized into the following five sections:

- Section 1 - Introduction
- Section 2 - Total Daily Boardings and Alightings
- Section 3 - Average Peak and Off-Peak Loads
- Section 4 - On-Time Performance
- Section 5 - Route Analysis

Each section is then organized by route. Section 5 is comprised of an analysis of each individual route, including a basic description of the route, identification of the most effective stops, identification of significant ridership gaps and an overall assessment of the route. Stop activity is analyzed by looking at which stops have significant boardings and alightings or no boardings and alightings. This analysis helps identify geographic areas of high and low use on a particular route. Productivity analysis assesses the effectiveness of each route. The purpose is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each route and determine how the current fixed route system structure may be improved.

COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION: ARK-TEX REGION PLAN UPDATE

The Study Committee worked closely with the consultants and the public to develop a Plan that will meet a variety of transportation needs for all residents of the nine-county Ark-Tex Area. The Plan addresses a wide variety of organizational, coordination, and service activities. In addition, the Plan addresses the needs associated with the JARC and New Freedom initiatives, as well as funding for the FTA Section 5310 program. The update reflects those needs, but also reflects the changing environment for transit.

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES - 2013

The first part of this section of the Plan Update reviews the assumptions made through this planning process. The second part of this section reviews the progress in the organizational coordination issues that should be employed, followed by rural service activities and then urban activities.

Service Assumptions

1. **Latent Demand** - TRAX continues to expand its JARC and New Freedom programs, passengers are starting to utilize the services available. The latent demand that was predicted in the 2006 - 2011 Plan is beginning to manifest itself at this time.
2. **Funding Issues** - Funding, both local and state/federal is always a constraint to service expansion. New services cannot be implemented without a significant commitment of local funds. These funds will be secured from local governments, private businesses, and human service agencies that coordinate services. TRAX continues to excel in its use of local funding for effective service.
3. **Mobility Management** - Short-range planning and management activities and projects for improving coordination among public transit and other transportation providers. TRAX will continue to serve as the mobility manager and combine/coordinate with a variety of entities.
4. **Coordination Efforts** - TRAX is a highly coordinated system with myriad contracts and agreements as described in the original plan.
5. **Coordination Must Make Business Sense** - It is important to note that coordination must be a mutually beneficial agreement. That is, coordination

must make business sense.

6. **Fixed-Route and Flex-Route and Other Scheduled Service** – Productivity is a key to success. TxDOT funding is dependent to a large degree on the numbers of trips provided. The best way to provide the largest number of trips is to utilize the array of fixed-route and hybrid services that tend to group trips according to a schedule.
7. **Use of Technology** – While coordination does not require technology to be successful, the use of technology can be of significant help in the process if used properly. There are areas where technology can assist in the overall mission of providing more service. TRAX will be investing heavily in new technologies.
8. **Preventive Maintenance** – TRAX will continue to use Section 5310 funds to assist in preventive maintenance. These funds will ensure that the vehicles can be operated in the most cost effective manner.

Overarching Issue

The funding mechanisms that for the past 5 – 6 years have helped TRAX initiate new services and perform Mobility Management functions have been changed to the point that funding may be in peril as it sets up a competitive atmosphere between mobility management functions and transit operations. Therefore future planning efforts will redouble our need to generate a diverse set of funding entities.

Organizational/Coordination Tasks

The transportation programs in the service area are well coordinated between the Ark-Tex Rural Transit (TRAX) and most of the human service transportation programs. The exception to this is Medicaid Transportation, far and away the largest human service transportation program in a decision made at the state level. However, while the Study Committee believes that these activities should be coordinated, that decision is currently out of the hands of the local participants.

The majority of the coordination effort over the course of the plan will focus on activities that the region can control:

- Continuing to seek small scale coordination efforts
- Development of a Mobility Manager
- Further coordinate TRAX services and reduce contractor/Council of Governments (COG) duplication of effort
- Implement coordination opportunities with intercity bus services

Coordination Task No. 1 - Continue Coordination Efforts

The key participants in the Ark-Tex area should continue to work together in a formalized setting allowing all participants and other interested parties to participate. **TRAX continues to excel in this area, recently adding a new partner in Greyhound Bus Lines.**

Coordination Task No. 1.1 - Human Service Coordination Opportunities

In this task, TRAX is work closely with the AAA and workforce board to target elderly populations in need of paratransit services throughout the rural service area. These efforts are intended to improve mobility for elderly and persons with disabilities that cannot ride the fixed-route or fixed schedule bus. **TRAX continues to do an excellent job in coordinating services.**

Coordination Task No. 2 - Regional Mobility Manager - Ongoing

TRAX, working with each of the providers, funding agencies, and other interested stakeholders, will become the Regional Mobility Manager, coordinating a variety of public and private transportation service as well as acting as the regional rideshare manager for the nine counties. **TRAX has been fulfilling that role on an unofficial basis for many years is locally based and well respected in the communities it serves.**

SERVICE AND OPERATING TASKS

In order to effect a change - an improvement in what the customer sees, ultimately there must be service improvements. The Study Committee stated that three of the primary goals of the plan should be to:

- Enhance the Quality of the Customer's Travel Experience
- Expand the Availability of Services to Those Who are Un-served
- Increase the Cost-Effectiveness and Efficiency of Service Delivery

Operational Task No. 1 - Implement Fixed-Route and Flex-Route Service

The original coordination plan calls for a variety of scheduled service throughout selected parts of the region. TRAX has recently received finding to initiate the planning efforts to start service in Paris. **TRAX has continued to implement flexible route service in support of JARC and New Freedom programs.**

Operational Task No. 2 – Dial-a-Ride Service in Towns

The larger towns of Atlanta, Clarkesville, and New Boston are candidates for dial-a-ride service. This immediate response type of service is designed to attract more users through its convenience. Many persons with disabilities will find it very convenient to use for routine needs. Each community could sustain one full-time vehicle. **These activities have not been implemented at this time, due to lack of local funding support.**

Operational Task No. 3 – Develop and Implement a Marketing Plan

The major new outcome of the 12 meetings indicated that there was a need for enhanced marketing as many survey respondents did not know there was an option to the private auto. TRAX mobility manager will develop this grass roots tool. Management will implement.

Capital Needs

AS TRAX expands its role in the community, it is in need of additional and in some cases larger buses for its service. **TRAX has been aggressively increasing its fleet and is purchasing some bigger vehicles for increased flexibility, through the use of JARC, New Freedom funds and now stimulus funding.**

TRAX: NEW ACTIVITIES

TRAX has been aggressively seeking funding and has been very successful in bringing in more funds to the region. Following are the new activities planned by TRAX. TRAX is seeking funding for these services through JARC, New Freedom, Elderly and Disabled and the new Stimulus funding programs. These activities include:

Essential to the future is to be prepared for the next fuel price spike. In the summer of 2008 as the price of fuel increased, many rural transit systems including TRAX received many requests for commuter service from businesses and individuals. As prices abated the demand reduced, but was not eliminated. Most economists agree that the price of gasoline will continue to rise and at times dramatically over the next 5 – 10 years. TRAX wants to be prepared for the future by building this network of commuter services to:

- Provide more services to more people
- Capture a new market for TRAX
- Reduce pollution and greenhouse gases

- Reduce our nations consumption of gasoline

To those ends, the Ark-Tex area is prepared to implement the following projects:

1. **Job Access - Greyhound Connector Service - Three Routes** - TRAX is in the final stages of implementing three Greyhound Connector/commuter routes - two of which will go to Texarkana and one to Mt. Pleasant. TRAX will also become a ticketing agent for Greyhound in Paris, Mt. Pleasant and Texarkana. Greyhound is providing in-kind match.
2. **Paris Fixed Route Service** - TRAX will be implementing planning activities that will generate a fixed route system in Paris. The planning activities will incorporate local stakeholders in a major way.

These services are gaining in importance - the need to get people to jobs and to create jobs at this time is vital to our nation's economy. The Ark-Tex Coordination committee is dedicated to moving people and getting them to health care, jobs, and just about any other reason people need to travel. These projects are all supported by local funding, ensuring a local stake in success.

T LINE: NEW ACTIVITIES

Based on the data assessment of the Bus Stop Inventory and the Boarding and Alighting Study T Line will be updating and adjusting their fixed routes to increase productivity and meet new demand.