

HOOD COUNTY & SOMERVELL COUNTY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Access North Texas is to improve public transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. These populations can have difficulty finding public transportation options that connect them to doctor's appointments, work opportunities and education or job training. This plan identifies where these transportation connections do not exist or could be improved within Hood County and Somervell County. This chapter will give an overview of the planning process, the research conducted and collected, the public outreach meeting, the transportation poll used to collect personal input on public transit needs, and the prioritized strategies for Hood County and Somervell County.

PROCESS

This plan is required by federal guidance to be updated every four years. The plan must be developed and approved through a process that included participation by seniors; individuals with disabilities; representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation; human services providers and other members of the public. The plan is updated to address current public transportation needs of the residents of Hood County and Somervell County. Through the process and methods described, prioritized strategies were developed so that future public transportation projects can be implemented when federal and state funding becomes available. Two different types of research were conducted during this plan update: data-based and people-based.

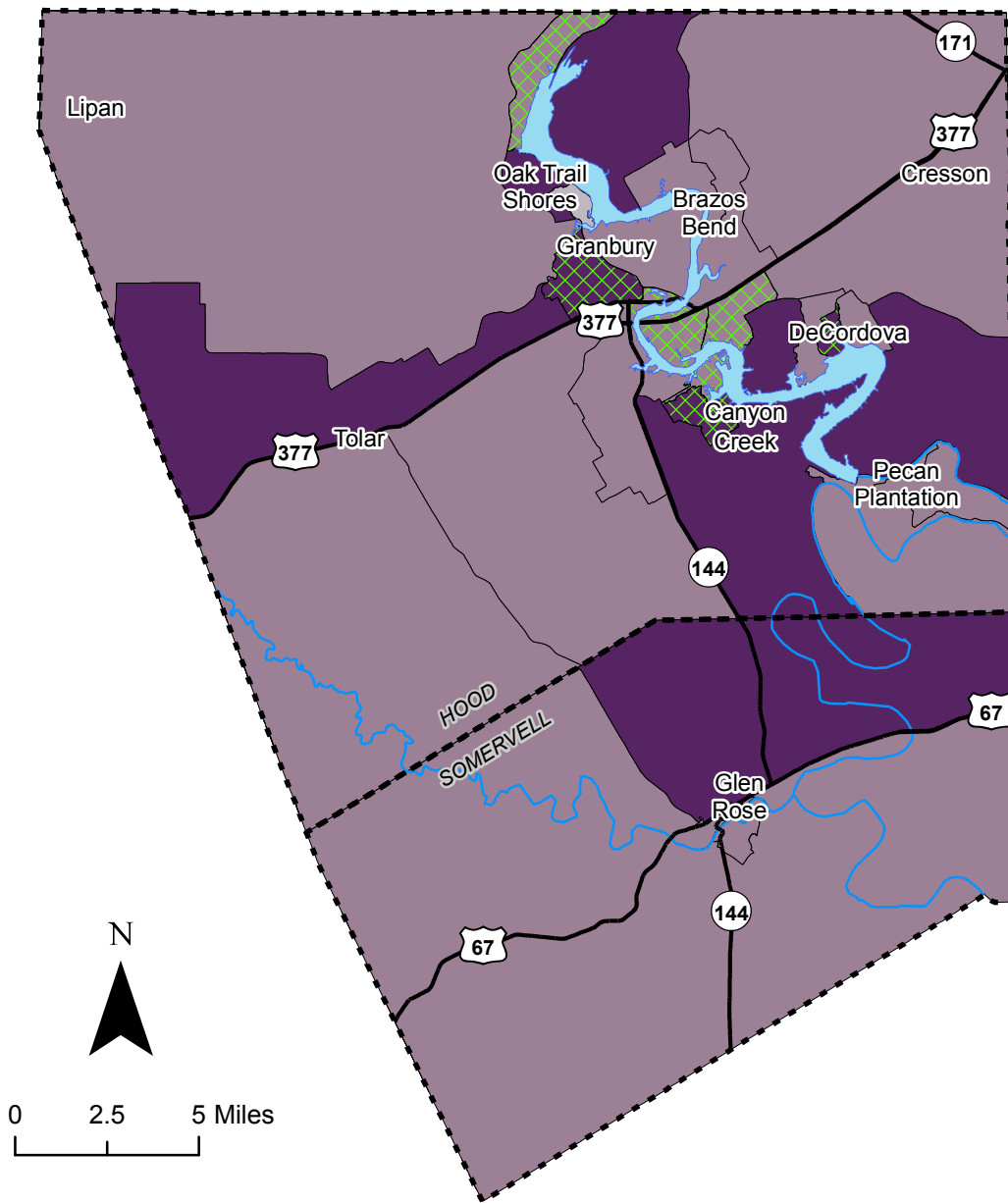
Data-based research included obtaining, reviewing, and analyzing Census data; using Census data to develop a mapping tool to identify locations where transit-dependent individuals may live; and identifying existing public transportation providers. The people-based research included reaching out to communities, organizations, and individuals to obtain feedback about the existing public transportation system and how it could be improved. Feedback was obtained through a public outreach meeting and a transportation poll. Through an interactive process, stakeholders prioritized concerns about transit access.

RESEARCH






The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)

The TAIT was developed to identify locations with certain demographic factors that may indicate a greater need for public transportation. The populations of individuals over age 65, residents below the poverty line, and persons with disabilities were each compared to the regional percentage of the population in that demographic. A map was created based on areas that were above the regional percentage in zero, one, two, or all three of the demographic categories. The more categories that an area is deemed above the regional percentage, the more likely it is that area is to need transit. Zero car households was provided as a supplemental layer to identify households above the regional percentage that do not have a working vehicle available. The tool is useful in identifying groups of people who could benefit from transit services, but is not intended to be the deciding factor in decisions regarding public transportation.

Hood and Somervell Counties Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)



Variables: Age 65 and Over, Below Poverty, and Persons with Disabilities

-  All Variables At or Below Regional Percentage
-  One Variable Above Regional Percentage
-  Two Variables Above Regional Percentage
-  All Variables Above Regional Percentage
-  Zero Car Households Above Regional Percentage

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) is a preliminary screening tool to identify areas that may need additional analysis when considering transportation-disadvantaged groups in a plan, project, or program. The TAIT displays Census block groups above the regional percentage for three variables: Age 65 and Over, Below Poverty, and Persons with Disabilities.

Source: 2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



In Hood County, there are census block groups where the populations of individuals age 65 and over, below the poverty line, and with disabilities are all above the regional percentage. Census block groups with all three variables above the regional percentage are in and northeast of Oak Trail Shores, north of US 377 in Granbury, in and east of Canyon Creek, and in DeCordova. All census block groups with two variables greater than the regional percentage in Hood County are higher than regional percentage in persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities. The lone block group in Oak Trail Shores with one variable higher than regional percentage is persons with disabilities. There are no census block groups with all three variables at or below the regional percentage. Zero car households above the regional percentage are mainly in central Hood County along the US 377 corridor in Granbury, Canyon Creek, and DeCordova areas. There is also a census block north of Oak Trail Shores that is higher than the regional percentage for zero car households.

Somervell County's lone census block with all three variables above the regional percentage is north of US 67 near Glen Rose. The other two census block groups in the county are above the regional percentage in persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities. There no block groups with zero or one variable above the regional percentage, and no block groups above the regional percentage for zero car households.

Additional Demographic and Commuter Information

Hood County and Somervell County continue to experience a steady amount of growth. According to the American Community Survey's 2015 5-year estimates, since the 2010 Census, Hood County's population has increased by 3.9% while Somervell County's population has increased by 1.4%. In comparison, the 16-county region has grown 6.3% in that same time period. Public transportation needs will change as the population grows. Within Hood County

and Somervell County, 3.7% and 7.4% of residents, respectively, speak English less than very well. Efforts to promote existing or new transit services should include strategies to reach this population.

According to U.S. Census employer information data as of 2014, Hood County is home to around 15,000 jobs, with a little over 6,000 employees living in the county. Approximately 9,000 workers commute into the county, while 15,000 commute out of the county for work. 38% of workers in Hood County live within 10 miles of their jobs, while the majority of employees commuting into the county are from the east and northeast. Hood County is somewhat diversified in their economy and around 1 in 5 jobs in Hood County are in the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction industry. Approximately 4 in 10 workers in the county have either some college experience or a degree.

Somervell County is home to around 4,000 jobs, with only 1,000 workers living within the county. Around 3,000 workers commute into the county for work, while approximately 2,500 commute out of the county. Only 1,300 workers live within 10 miles of their jobs in Somervell County, with the majority of commuters into the county entering from the north and northeast. The economy is not overly diverse, as around 30% of the jobs are in either the utilities or construction industries. The workforce is fairly well educated in Somervell County, with around 50% of workers in the county having some college experience or a degree.

Transportation Resources

The Transit System provides public transportation in Hood County and Somervell County, which serves the general public including older adults and individuals with disabilities. The Fort Worth Transportation Authority (FWTA) also operates commuter vanpools in both counties. Four vanpools originate in Hood County, while five vanpools have a destination of Somervell County.

See Appendix B4, Private Carriers for a list of private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These private providers are an additional transportation option that individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective), or organizations can contract with to provide specific service for clients.

Because of the smaller geography and smaller populations of Hood County and Somervell County, creative solutions to transportation challenges will likely require the participation of a variety of community partners, including some that may not have been involved in transportation in the past.

OUTREACH MEETING

The public meeting for Hood County and Somervell County was held as a joint public meeting with Erath County, on February 15, 2017 at the Hood County Library in Granbury. 148 invitations were mailed and emailed to interested parties throughout the counties. Meeting announcements and information were also posted online, and invitees were encouraged to share the invitation with partner organizations and clients to help promote the meetings. In all, 31 community members from Erath County, Hood County, and Somervell County were present at the meeting to provide feedback on transit priorities for each county.

Following a general welcome and presentation about public transit within the county, staff led an interactive keypad polling session to instigate discussion of transportation issues with attendees. Based on discussion question answers, community members prioritized current issues in the county and re-prioritized strategies from the 2013 Access North Texas Plan.

Comments and discussion during the outreach meeting identified that out-of-county medical trips (to both Tarrant County and Dallas County) and return trips home are difficult to schedule due to distance and availability. Regarding medical trips, attendees also noted that trips to the Veterans Affairs Hospitals are a high need for their clients. Additional capacity and funding is needed to accommodate the existing

demand for public transportation. Attendees also noted that even trips within the county can be cost prohibitive for riders with limited incomes. The Transit System, the public transportation provider in Hood County and Somervell County, noted that recruiting and retaining drivers has been a challenge due to the time needed to train and onboard a new driver. Lastly, better information about available transit services and the populations they serve is necessary. The Transit System identified that many residents don't understand that their transportation service is available to the general public, not just older adults and individuals with disabilities.

TRANSPORTATION POLL

A transportation poll was also available to residents and stakeholders, online and in paper, and available in English and Spanish. The poll collected first-hand data about public transportation in the region from riders and organizations that work with transit-dependent populations. Individual poll data revealed personal experiences with transportation. Polls completed by organizations on behalf of their clients explained issues seen by advocates of the people served by each organization. Both forms of the poll provide personal views of the public transportation system.

There were no responses to the transportation poll from residents of Hood County or Somervell County.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The strategies below identify ways to address the most important public transportation needs stakeholders thought should be implemented over the next few years. These strategies build upon the progress that has taken place since the 2013 Access North Texas plan and should be referenced when state and federal funds for public transportation become available.

Hood County and Somervell County Prioritized Strategies

Strategy 1 Improve access to Veterans Affairs facilities in Dallas and Fort Worth

Strategy 2 Explore partnerships to increase the affordability of fares for those most in need

Strategy 3 Add capacity to existing transit service to accommodate:

1. Local and regional medical appointments
2. Local job opportunities and training
3. General purpose trips (groceries, recreation, dining)
4. Weekend trips
5. Emergent transportation needs

Strategy 4 Establish consistent and effective driver recruitment and retention programs for public transportation services to address difficulties in retaining drivers in Hood County and Somervell County

Strategy 5 Work with 2-1-1 at least twice a year to ensure public transportation resources are up-to-date

Strategy 6 Conduct targeted marketing to local agencies about available transportation services and resources

Strategy 7 Explore partnerships with local employers, cities, and other agencies to fund additional transit services

Strategy 8 Conduct travel training to teach riders how to use public transportation

Regional Strategies for Coordinated Public Transportation

Much like the county strategies, the regional strategies may also be applicable to Hood and Somervell County.

Regional Strategy 1 In areas with no public transit service, assess community needs and implement transit

Regional Strategy 2 Continue and expand projects that have a no-wrong-door approach to accessing transit or information about available transit

Regional Strategy 3 Create partnerships to simplify regional trips and reduce the number of transfers between providers

Regional Strategy 4 Explore partnerships to increase the affordability of fares for those most in need

Regional Strategy 5 Work towards uniform, regional fares to simplify and reduce the cost of regional trips for riders

Regional Strategy 6 Advocate to integrate funding sources to maximize efficiency and increase available affordable public transportation

Regional Strategy 7 Identify, evaluate, and implement where appropriate non-traditional ways to deliver public transportation service, including partnerships among public transit agencies, private transportation providers, and transportation network companies

Regional Strategy 8 Identify, recruit, educate, and support influential champions for public transportation (elected officials, community leaders, or business leaders) to promote and support public transit through leadership or policy initiatives and to advocate for increasing investment in public transit

Implementing the Plan

Transportation providers and local stakeholders will collaborate to determine next steps, form needed partnerships, identify and pursue funding, and ultimately implement selected strategies. Organizations that want to implement a strategy listed in this plan will need to develop strong partnerships with transportation providers, stakeholder agencies, communities, and counties. NCTCOG staff is available to help organizations identify potential partners and coordination opportunities. Organizations should also identify potential funding sources, which can be a mix of private and public funds, including funds from local, state, and federal sources. Local funds from public and private sources are important to demonstrate a community or organizational commitment to implementing specific strategies. Local funds are especially important to leverage state and federal dollars. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and NCTCOG have regular calls for projects to award federal funds that support projects and strategies listed in this plan.

Characteristics of a highly competitive project:

- Is multi-year. A three year request is recommended for projects providing transit service;
- Identifies an existing public transit provider or existing non-profit transportation provider when proposing to provide transit service;
- Targets individuals with lower incomes for requests of Urbanized Area Formula Program (Job Access/Reverse Commute projects) funds;
- Targets older adults and individuals with disabilities for requests of Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program funds; and
- Supports one or more strategies outlined in this plan.

If a project is funded through NCTCOG or TxDOT, staff will document the project funding in the Transportation Improvement Program, coordinate necessary approvals, develop contract agreements, and work with implementing agencies to manage the project and all compliance activities associated with federal or state funding.

APPENDIX

For more detailed information about Hood County and Somervell County, please see Appendix C-Hood and Somervell, available online at www.accessnorthtexas.org. The Public Transportation Toolbox (see Appendix B-3) highlights transit services that can be implemented in the near term to meet specific needs within Hood County and Somervell County.

See Appendix B-4, Private Carriers for a list of private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These private providers are an additional transportation option that individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective), or organizations can contract with to provide specific service for clients.

See Appendix B-5, Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool, for additional information on how the tool was developed.

See Appendix B-6, Transportation Poll, for more information about the transportation poll.