



South East Texas Regional Planning Commission

Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
MARCH 2022

Adopted by the South East Texas Regional Public
Transportation Steering Committee on April 21, 2022



Executive Summary

At the request of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and with guidance and input from human services agencies, public transit operators, and other interested parties in each county within its jurisdiction, the South East Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC) facilitates the planning process and prepared the 2022 South East Texas Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan for the southeast Texas region, specifically Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, and Orange Counties.

Adopted in 2003, Chapter 461 of the Texas Transportation Code requires the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) be responsible for identifying duplication of and gaps in the provision of public transportation services, inefficiencies in service provision, and equipment that is being underused by public transportation providers. In addition, federal surface transportation legislation was enacted in 2005 with a very similar requirement. The federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) requires locally-developed coordinated public transportation-human services plans for federally-funded transportation providers. TxDOT fulfills both obligations by requiring each TxDOT Planning Region to prepare and submit a Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan every five years beginning with the preparation of each TxDOT Planning District's initial plan in 2006. This represents the third update of the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan (Plan) for Planning Region 15.

The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC) serves as the lead agency for the Regional Public Transportation Coordinated Plan. SETRPC's Regional Public Transportation Coordination Steering Committee (RPTCSC) functioned as the Plan advisory board.

The Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan consists of three core components: Transportation Resources Inventory, Needs Assessment, and Gap Analysis. These Plan components are supplemented by additional materials required by TxDOT which examine Planning Region 15's goals, assess its ability to implement recommendations, and set forth performance measures by which progress can be measured. The prior Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan was approved by the RPTCSC in March 2017. The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission served as the lead agency for the prior Plan update as well.

The methodology used in the development of the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan Update sought to include as much input from the community as possible, with a special focus on transportation needs and gaps encountered by historically ride-dependent populations including seniors, persons with disabilities, low-income residents, and youth. To that end, the outreach activities included both individuals and stakeholders, which often serve as advocates for specific populations. Development of the stakeholder list began with the Project Steering Committee (PSC) membership, and was subsequently expanded to include other community organizations serving the target populations. All stakeholders were invited to participate in a stakeholder survey, public workshops, and periodic PSC meetings.

Outreach and engagement tactics were shaped in large part by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in outdoor pop-up events in lieu of traditional indoor workshops, as well as, PSC meetings and public workshops offering virtual attendance options. Other outreach activities included a bilingual webpage, bilingual community survey, bilingual community pop-up events, and a bilingual direct mailer (postcard) sent to approximately 23,000 randomly-selected households throughout the four-county Plan area. The consultant also worked with community stakeholders to encourage participation in the community survey. Periodic status updates were provided to the Project Steering Committee at its regularly scheduled meetings. The updated Plan is scheduled to be adopted by the PSC in March 2022.

Transportation Resources Inventory

The Transportation Resources Inventory is far from simply a listing of providers. It is useful not only to regional planning bodies but to stakeholders and end-users as well. To that end, the Inventory includes considerable relevant information about transportation providers within the four-county region, including service area, who is eligible to use the service, and other relevant information. The Inventory also includes a summary matrix identifying which services are available within each individual county. Included within the Inventory are organizations that provide transportation services for their clientele, even if they do not directly operate a transportation service.

Social service transportation tends to be focused chiefly within the more populated portions of the Plan area. These services may offer transportation only within a certain community (versus the county as a whole).

Methodology

The methodology employed to develop the Transportation Resources Inventory was two-fold. First, a stakeholder survey was distributed via both first-class mail and email to 94 organizations throughout the Plan area. The stakeholder survey sought to collect information about populations served, (non-transportation) services provided, and transportation services provided. The stakeholder survey also requested respondents to identify existing transportation needs with respect to the populations each serves. This information was used in developing the Plan's Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis.

The second strategy employed to collect transportation provider information involved internet research. Using both methods resulted in development of a more robust and representative provider inventory.

Observations, Findings, and Conclusions

The majority of the stakeholders responding to the survey do not directly operate or provide transportation services. They most frequently provide clients with transportation guides and/or schedules, and refer clients to transit provider guides or websites. A few make telephone calls on behalf of clients or use Texas 211 to provide additional information. The most common transportation need which stakeholders reported having difficulty obtaining is medical trips, followed by access to veteran services, essential shopping, and weekday trips.

Some of the responding stakeholder organizations cited a lack of funding to meet current transportation/mobility needs, followed by insufficient staffing to support transportation coordination activities. Some cited the absence of public transit service within their respective community, while others shared their perception of inadequate public transit services.

The survey asked stakeholders to comment on the following:

- Client/members' primary barriers to accessing transportation;
- Enhancements that are most needed to improve coordination of public transit and human service transportation; and
- Other issues, concerns, or information they believe are relevant to the issue.

Barriers to accessing transportation

- Availability/frequency of bus transportation to and from campus. (Lamar University)
- Clients in low-paying jobs or unemployed are unable to access transportation services. Some lack driver licenses or are unable to get them. (Workforce Solutions – Orange)
- Cost, accessibility, lack of availability. (RISE)
- Internet or phone access, as most of the clients are seniors and need help accessing those things in order to contact us. (Orange Community Action Association)
- Lack of financial resources. (Workforce Solutions SETX)
- Lack of knowledge and education of what options are out there. Difficulties getting to/from our building. (The Arc of Greater Beaumont)
- Lack of routes, needing transportation to mid-county, number of transfers required to get where they need to go. (Goodwill Industries of SETX)
- Limited routes, limited schedule. (Beaumont Housing Authority)
- Minimal to no transportation services. (Jasper County)
- Mobility limitations, funding, late evening service hours, some employment opportunities are not close to transportation. (Port Arthur Transit)
- Needing more advanced help than driver (i.e., caregiver or provider). Some clients either cannot afford or are not able to get the help they need for daily functions and often want drivers to perform these duties. (Orange County Transportation)
- No vehicle in household – no family or friends to assist – time of transit vehicle does not coincide with time of appointment. Nothing available to assist beyond volunteer help. (SETRPC Community Services Division)
- Patients on dialysis generally receive treatment for four hours, three times a week. Transportation times are very limited. Patients can only be placed on certain shifts to accommodate transportation. This greatly limits patients. Patients who treat on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday must be placed on 2nd shift (very limited space). Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday patients also must be placed on 2nd shift to accommodate transportation hours. Since transportation does not operate on Saturdays, patients must make other arrangements. However, many do not have another option and tend to miss treatment. (Renal Center of Orange – DaVita)
- Patients say it's impossible to schedule a same-day reservation. Not enough bus stops. Holidays cause them to miss treatment since transportation does not operate on those days. (Fresenius Kidney Care Dialysis)
- The transportation company through Medicaid switched in June and there have been issues. Drivers are late, drivers having children or other people in the car making patients uncomfortable. Not an issue with City, but good to note. (DaVita Golden Triangle Dialysis)
- We currently provide transportation so the clients we have only express a need to get to Houston for medical appointments. Most other trips we can help them with. (Nutrition and Services for Seniors)

Most-desired enhancements

- A detailed plan regarding existing transportation resources and efforts to improve support to the citizens. (Jasper County)
- ADA-compliant public access and bus stops. (RISE)
- Better software in order to help run and schedule the routes for a more sufficient outcome in order to generate more rides. (Orange Community Action Association)
- Service to Houston area – VA, MD Anderson, etc. (Nutrition and Services for Seniors)
- Consistent funding sources. Consistent and regular conversations between providers. (Port Arthur Transit)
- Easier access to the scheduling of rides on current special transit system. (RISE)
- Extended hours of operation to include early morning and evening times. (Renal Center of Orange – DaVita)
- Get away from traditional bus service and move to more “on demand” personal service. (Beaumont Housing Authority)
- Increasing the number of wheelchair accessible/special transit buses and services from city-to-city within the county. (RISE)
- Information to populations that can benefit from transportation options that exist. (The Arc of Greater Beaumont)
- Linking BMT to Port Arthur. (Goodwill Industries of SETX)
- Need to extend hours. If patients are not a part of Medicaid, they do not have access to affordable transportation. (Fresenius Kidney Care Dialysis)
- Patients that don’t have access to unlimited transportation rides (through Medicaid) have difficulty accessing transportation if their treatment goes over the scheduled time. Better coordination with public transit and the organization would be beneficial. (DaVita Golden Triangle Dialysis)
- Perhaps expanded hours that are advertised. Safer bus stops. (Workforce Solutions SETX)
- Some way to have more immediate resources to lead individuals to transportation service, especially for elderly and individuals with disabilities. (SETRPC Community Services Division)
- Some way for transportation to become more available between counties, especially for those in Triangle who have medical resources in the Houston area. (SETRPC Community Services Division)
- Upgrade intersection signal preemption for emergency vehicle traffic. (Orange Fire Department)

Other issues, concerns, or information

- Airport and taxi services are standard partnerships. Lack of taxi services is a common complaint. (Jack Brooks Regional Airport)
- Lack of funding to upgrade 18-year-old traffic signal pre-emption system. Infrared emitter technology in pre-emption is being replaced with a GPS cloud-based system that is a subscription service that no longer requires the entity to own the equipment and maintain it. (Orange Fire Department)
- Lack of wheelchair-accessible transportation for veterans needing services inter-/intra-county where they live. (RISE)

Findings

Based on the input from community stakeholders responding to the survey, the consultant identified the following general findings:

1. There are geographic areas within the four-county study area not currently served by public transit.
2. There is a desire by area residents for extended transit service hours to provide access to employment and healthcare.
3. There is a need for inter-county (and inter-community) transit service.
4. Transportation is needed for access to medical facilities in the Houston area.
5. A patient's ability to undergo dialysis treatments on weekends and holidays is impacted by limited transportation options. Further, transportation may not be available should a patient's treatment run beyond the scheduled time.
6. Cost remains a barrier to obtaining transportation for many historically transportation-disadvantaged persons.

Conclusions

While several transportation providers operate service within the Plan area, there are still significant gaps between the service provided and the needs of individuals or populations within the four-county Plan area. These will be discussed in greater detail through the Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis sections of the Coordinated Plan.

Needs Assessment

A detailed summary of the methodology for preparing the Needs Assessment includes discussion of the stakeholder survey, community survey, and community pop-up events. Observations included in the Needs Assessment help shape the scope of the transportation needs identified throughout the four-county area.

Methodology

Presented below is an analysis of current demand specific to public transportation services as well as population forecasts for the South East Texas region; specifically, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, and Orange Counties.

The demand forecast reflects a multi-prong approach. First, overall population growth trends based chiefly on data and estimates from the federal decennial census as well as the American Community Survey. Second, demographic analysis specific to historically ride-dependent populations including seniors, persons with disabilities, low-income individuals, zero and/or one-vehicle households, job seekers, veterans, and youth. Third, input received directly from persons residing and/or employed within the Plan area as well as community stakeholder organizations. Engagement of community stakeholders is particularly important as these organizations often function as advocates or spokespersons for demographic cohorts who often are unwilling or unable to participate in traditional public engagement activities.

In preparing the Needs Assessment, the consultants also considered land-use and development patterns as it pertains to the provision of public transportation service, inventoried the human services organizations throughout the Plan area (details of which are presented in the Transportation Resources Inventory), and compiled an objective assessment of current public transportation offerings via-a-vis actual as well as latent and future demand.

Community Engagement Activities

Community Engagement - Survey

One of the more important public engagement activities undertaken in support of the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan of the South East Texas Regional Planning Commission was the community survey.

The community survey had several objectives including 1) assess awareness as well as recent use of public transit, 2) identify potential motivators as well as barriers (perceived as well as actual) regarding current and future use of public transit, 3) collect basic demographic data specific to survey participants, 4) codify recent travel behavior and mobility needs, and 5) identify opportunities for potential public transit service enhancements.

Survey fielding occurred from early September through mid-October 2021. Data collection was done online as well as at the eight community pop-up events held throughout the Plan area. The survey was available in Spanish as well as English.

The online survey was promoted via social media messaging, a direct mailer (four-color postcard) to approximately 23,000 randomly-selected households throughout the four-county Plan area (i.e., Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, and Orange counties), and via the bilingual webpage. Key stakeholders (such as Workforce Solutions) also assisted by promoting or distributing the survey to their clients. At the conclusion of the agreed upon survey fielding period nearly 100 valid responses were received.

Updating the 2022 Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan occurred during a period when the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic were still being felt in many of the communities of southeast Texas. As such, the consultant believes the number of individuals who might otherwise had participated in the project's various public engagement activities was reduced.

Based on the survey data, the following "profile" of the survey participant was compiled:

- "Typical" mode of travel: *drive alone* (73 percent).
- Access to personal vehicle: *all the time* (78 percent).
- Familiar with public transit (32 percent).
- Has not ridden public transit within the prior 12 months (93 percent).
- Employed full-time (32 percent) or is retired (28 percent).
- Absence or insufficient public transportation service is a barrier: for work (19 percent), for access to healthcare (22 percent), for school/training (13 percent), and for shopping/personal errands (22 percent).
- Typically travels *within home county* (44 percent), *within home county as well as neighboring counties* (47 percent).
- Preferred method of receiving information about public transit services: *Transit provider website* (20 percent), *telephone* (12 percent).
- Greatest motivator for potential future use of public transit: *Later evening service* (28 percent), *service linking Beaumont to Port Arthur* (27 percent), *more frequent service* (23 percent), and *improved access to transit service information* (23 percent).
- Speaks Spanish at home (5 percent).
- Annual household income under \$50,000 (47 percent).

Community Engagement - Pop-up events

From September 28-30, 2021, the consultant team hosted eight community pop-up events in support of the 2022 Regional Public Transportation Coordinated Plan project. The pop-up events were held at publicly accessible locations in Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, and Orange counties. Details regarding event times and locations were developed through consultations with RPC staff. Presented below is a brief summary of each of the eight events.

Market Basket Food/Beaumont

Approximately 40 residents. Engaged at least 15. Comments received:

- Need a connection from Beaumont to Port Arthur.
- Vehicles are unsafe (BMT); equipment is in poor condition.
- New operations contractor is not liked (First Transit). Drivers are underpaid.
- Not enough public transit service for persons with disabilities.
- Store manager was very appreciative to receive BMT service info given she has become the unofficial Uber for her employees.

La Vaquita Meat Market/Port Arthur

Majority of the attendees spoke Spanish. Approximately 70 residents. Engaged at least five. Comments received:

- Need transportation to Houston.
- All transit service materials need to be available in Spanish. Port Arthur Transit and SETT brochures, specifically.

Market Basket/Bridge City

Approximately 40 residents. Engaged at least 10. Karen Stevens/Orange Community Action Association stopped by. Her comments:

- Seeking money for marketing/advertising her program.
- Has been able to regain nearly all ridership since pre-COVID (750 rides/month before COVID; currently 650 rides/months).
- Operates three vehicles. Has one vehicle that is unreliable.

Danny's Super Foods/West Orange

Approximately 10 residents. Engaged four. (Note: This location was flooded out half-way through due to heavy rains. Danny offered to have us back out the next day. Unfortunately, other pop-up events were already booked. This is an opportunity for future outreach.) Dispatcher from Orange Community Action Association stopped by. Comments specific to the current South East Texas Transit service:

- Need service from Orange to Port Neches.
- Need service from Orange to Lake Charles, LA. Many medical services available Lake Charles. Currently service does not cross state lines.
- Current service doesn't run late enough (4 pm). There are many night-shift workers that start at 6 pm that need transportation.
- Need weekend service.
- Pricing at one dollar seems fair.
- Need more vehicles for the fleet. Currently only have 2 functioning.
- First week of the month is very busy (trip denials are higher).
- Majority of current riders is seniors. They have limited access (or don't use) the internet. Therefore, need funding to support traditional marketing/advertising /outreach.

Brookshire Brothers/Kirbyville

Approximately 20 residents. Engaged five. Tough location. Manager required set-up far away from store entrance. Additionally, given there is currently no public transportation in Jasper County, there was no “carrot” to initiate public transportation conversation with passers-by.

Brookshire Brothers/Jasper

Approximately 10 residents. Engaged three. Manager required set-up away from store entrance. Comments included:

- Folks commented the outreach was a “waste of time” unless public transportation will be extended into Jasper County
- Request for transportation between Jasper and Hardin or Orange Counties to access healthcare services.

Brookshire Brothers/Lumberton

Approximately 20 residents. Engaged six. Location was offset from the store entrance. Public comments:

- Would like to have service along Highway 96. To the mall or various services for seniors.
- Residents of Lumberton do not qualify for South East Texas Transit. So there really isn’t any public transit in town.

Brookshire Brothers/Sour Lake

Approximately 10 residents. Engaged three. Our location was offset from the store entrance. Public comments:

- Given Sour Lake’s westerly location in Hardin County would like service to Liberty.

Overall, attendees appreciated receiving the information. Many weren’t previously aware that some form of public transportation is available. Event staff left SETT materials with every store manager (except in Jasper County) and explained how public transportation could help with existing employees as well as recruitment of future employees. This was well-received.

Stakeholder Engagement – Survey

Completed surveys were received from the following organizations:

- Beaumont Housing Authority
- Beaumont Transit*
- Catholic Charities of Southeast Texas
- City of Bevil Oaks
- City of Orange
- City of West Orange
- Da Vita Golden Triangle Dialysis

- Fresenius Kidney Care Dialysis Center
- Goodwill Industries of Southeast Texas
- Jack Brooks Regional Airport
- Jasper County
- Jasper Emergency Service District #1
- Lamar University
- Nutrition and Services for Seniors*
- Orange Community Action Association*
- Orange County Transportation*
- Orange Fire Department
- Port Arthur Housing Authority
- Port Arthur Transit*
- Port of Beaumont
- Renal Center of Orange (Da Vita)
- RISE (Resource, Information, Support and Empowerment)
- Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club Beaumont*
- South East Texas Regional Planning Commission, Community Services Division
- Spindletop Center*
- The Arc of Greater Beaumont
- United Way of Orange County
- Workforce Solutions – Orange
- Workforce Solutions Southeast Texas

**Directly operates transportation service.*

Transportation Overlaps and Gaps in Service

In reviewing the existing public transit services provided in the Plan area, very few overlaps were identified. Any overlaps that are present are necessary to provide connectivity between systems. Transportation gaps are a much greater issue in South East Texas. Through the public engagement process, stakeholder engagement, discussions with SETRPC staff, and consultant observations, the following significant service gaps have been identified:

- There is no service connecting Beaumont and Port Arthur, though each city has its own fixed-route transit program.
- There is no public transportation available in Jasper County. (Given Jasper County is a new addition to the SETRPC, it has not historically been included in South East Texas Transit's service offerings.)
- Intercommunity transportation is another significant gap. In addition to no service between Beaumont and Port Arthur, it can be difficult to travel from outlying communities into Beaumont, or between communities such as Orange and Port Neches, for example. There is also a lack of service east to Lake Charles or west to Houston.
- Service to the Houston area for medical trips (especially to the VA Medical Center) is also a transportation gap.

- Residents on the far western edge of the Plan area would also like to see opportunities to travel to Liberty, as it is more accessible to them than Beaumont.

Findings and Conclusions

Despite the historic reliance of Texans on their personal vehicles, there is a demonstrated need for transportation options beyond the personal vehicle. There are significant concentrations of historically transportation-disadvantaged populations throughout the study area. More than 20 percent of residents live below 125 percent of the poverty level. Nearly 25 percent are under 18 years of age, while more than 16 percent are age 65 and older. Nearly 16 percent indicated having a disability which impacts their mobility. While none of these demographic characteristics automatically makes an individual ride dependent, all of them represent characteristics that are more likely to be mobility-disadvantaged. In addition, nearly six percent of households have no access to a personal vehicle, while nearly 32 percent have access to only a single vehicle.

In response to needs identified through the outreach process, the consultant identified the following list of more specific transportation needs:

- Some level of service between Beaumont and Port Arthur.
- More service for seniors and persons with disabilities.
- Some level of service to Houston area (especially for medical trips).
- Service information for all public transit providers in Spanish.
- Service from Orange to Port Neches and other locations.
- Service from Orange to Lake Charles, Louisiana (to access healthcare services).
- Later service to accommodate night shift workers or those who start/end work after 4 p.m.
- Traditional marketing materials (brochures, etc.) for people who do not use the internet.
- Some level of service in Jasper County and between Jasper and Hardin/Orange counties.
- Some level of service in Lumberton and along Highway 96.
- More frequent service to and from Lamar University campus.
- Evening, Saturday, and holiday service to help facilitate regular dialysis treatments.
- Same-day reservations and easier scheduling of rides.
- More inter-county service.
- More wheelchair-accessible transportation options.

Gap Analysis

Methodology

The methodology for the Gap Analysis is very similar to that of the Needs Assessment, inclusive of community and stakeholder input as well as South East Texas Regional Planning Commission staff and the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Steering Committee along with consultant observations.

The scope and programs of the transportation services operating within the four counties of the Plan area were compared and contrasted with the mobility needs, challenges, and priorities identified via the various public engagement and observation activities.

Observations, findings, and conclusions

Observations and findings are segregated by population as well as individual county so as to present a more complete picture of the barriers and challenges facing each demographic cohort. In several instances, the same barrier or challenge was reported by more than one demographic cohort, and therefore is included within each category to which it applies.

Disabled transportation

- Nearly 16 percent of Plan area residents possess some form of disability. While many persons with disabilities are able to drive or have someone available to assist with their mobility, there are many that do not. Having access to public transportation, even if it is limited, can help persons with disabilities remain otherwise independent.
- There is a perception within the community that there is not enough public transportation service for persons with disabilities.

Inter-county transportation

- There are many individuals residing within the Plan area who need to travel between the four counties to access employment. Even within the four counties of the Plan area, there is little intercounty transportation available, especially for a regular work commute.
- Residents in western Hardin County (Sour Lake) have requested service to Liberty in neighboring Liberty County.
- Inter-county transportation is especially important for healthcare. While there are medical facilities throughout the Plan area, specialized services are often only available at larger facilities outside the four-county area.
- The Houston area is home to many medical facilities offering specialized services, including the Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center, MD Anderson Cancer Center, and Texas Children's Hospital.

There are no public transportation opportunities for Plan area residents seeking medical care in the Houston area.

- Some residents of the Plan area also seek medical services in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Despite its proximity to the eastern portion of the Plan area, there are no transit services that cross into Louisiana.

Low-income individuals

- Approximately 20 percent of persons living within the Plan area have a household income below 125 percent of the federal poverty level. Lower income levels are often tied to vehicle ownership. In many cases, the household may share one vehicle, or vehicles are not well-maintained and more likely to become inoperable. Public transportation can be a lifeline for members of the household who do not have access to a vehicle, or as a back-up plan should a household's single vehicle become inoperable.
- More than 40 percent of the households in Jasper and Jefferson counties reported having either zero or one vehicle in the household. While not all single-vehicle households are low-income (for example, an individual living alone would likely be a single-vehicle household), all are at risk of needing transportation assistance of some sort should that single vehicle become inoperable. In Jasper County, where there is no public transportation, this can be a significant problem.
- Even where transit is available, often the service times do not coincide with medical appointments times or work hours, or do not serve a rider's home and/or work location.

Rural transportation

- While South East Texas Transit (SETT) provides service in rural Hardin, Jefferson, and Orange counties, there currently is no public transit service operating in Jasper County. Therefore, recommend conducting a Transit Needs Study designed to 1) objectively quantify potential transit demand, 2) identify potential service delivery options, and 3) assess the (financial) feasibility of introducing service.
- Residents of Jasper County would like transportation to Hardin, Jefferson, and Orange Counties to access healthcare.
- Rural transportation utilizes a demand-response model, which can be highly impacted by an imbalance between requests for service and service capacity. This leaves rural residents' mobility susceptible to reduced availability due to driver shortages or increased demand.
- It is difficult to schedule a same-day trip using the existing demand-response service.

Senior transportation

- Each of the counties within the Plan area has a higher concentration of seniors (age 65 and older) than Texas at-large. While many individuals over 65 remain independent and continue driving, there are also many that do not drive due to health issues, inability to maintain a vehicle, or declining abilities (such as reaction time). Having access to public transportation, even if it is limited, can help non-driving seniors remain otherwise independent. This is especially notable in Jasper County, which has the highest concentration of seniors (19.4 percent) but no public transportation.
- Many senior riders do not use the internet to access public transit information. As such, there is a need for traditional (non-digital) marketing and informational materials.

Urban transportation

- While Beaumont and Port Arthur each operate their own public transit services, there is no service connecting the two communities.
- Transit service in the mid-Jefferson County area (with service to both Port Arthur and Beaumont) is available only to seniors and persons with disabilities. Most residents of Nederland, Port Neches, and Groves have no access to public transportation.
- Recent Transportation Plan work sponsored by the SETRPC has revealed growing demand for additional inter-community transit service. Therefore, recommend conducting an Inter-Community Connectivity Study to 1) objectively quantify potential transit demand between a selection of potential “city-pairs”, 2) determine the most cost-effective means of providing community connections, and 3) assess the (financial) feasibility of potential inter-community service.
- Current transit service in the city of Orange does not run late enough for workers who start or end their shift after 4 p.m. It also does not start early enough for patients to have access to some dialysis services.
- While service in Port Arthur runs until 7:15 p.m., there is some demand for later evening service hours.
- Even within Beaumont and Port Arthur, there can be difficulties accessing key locations, such as The ARC of Greater Beaumont or key employment centers. Several stakeholders indicated a need for more (and more accessible) bus stops.
- Limited public transportation service hours and lack of weekend or holiday service impacts access to dialysis and can cause some patients to miss treatment.

Veteran transportation

- The VA Clinic in Beaumont is associated with the Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston. While the VA formerly provided van transportation to Houston, that program was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic and did not offer wheelchair-accessible transportation.
- For veterans living on the north side of the Plan area (especially Jasper County), using the VA outpatient clinic in Lufkin (in neighboring Angelina County) is more convenient than traveling to Beaumont. However, there is no transportation available.
- Transportation opportunities for veterans need to be wheelchair-accessible.

Youth/student transportation

- Many school-age youth in Texas at-large rely on school district-provided school bus transportation, and those in the Plan area are likely to be no exception. However, school district transportation is generally limited to areas two miles or more from campus and tied to morning and afternoon bell times. Lack of access to public transportation can limit a student’s participation in before- and after-school activities (such as tutoring, sports, music rehearsals, or student organizations) if the student does not drive and parents are not available for transportation.
- With the exception of Lamar State College (with campuses in Orange and Port Arthur), all higher education facilities are located in Beaumont. Lack of transportation from outside Beaumont can make access to campus difficult for those living outside of the Beaumont Municipal Transit service area. For example, service to Lamar University is provided by BMT Route 7 every 30 to 45 minutes

on weekdays and Saturdays. Route 7 runs between downtown Beaumont and the campus, so a transfer is required for riders coming from any other part of town.

Planning for Comprehensive Services

The 2022 Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan includes the following recommendations designed to address mobility needs and service gaps identified within the four-county Plan region.

Priority: Short-term

- Recommendation 1: Implement scheduled service linking Beaumont and Port Arthur on a trial basis.
- Recommendation 2: Design/distribute easy-to-understand public transportation service informational materials.
- Recommendation 3: Enhance the SETRPC transit webpage.
- Recommendation 7: Increase promotion of reduced/subsidized transit fares among historically transportation-disadvantaged populations.
- Recommendation 8: Conduct Inter-Community Connectivity Study.

Priority: Mid-term

- Recommendation 4: Implement an ongoing travel training program.
- Recommendation 5: Improve connectivity between sidewalks/pedestrian network and bus stops.
- Recommendation 6: Improve/enhance bus stops (e.g., customer amenities, signage, information displays).
- Recommendation 9: Conduct feasibility/cost-benefit analysis of providing some level of public transit service in Jasper County.
- Recommendation 10: Assess viability of establishing scheduled service between adjoining communities and counties outlying communities and Beaumont.
- Recommendation 11: Investigate the feasibility of establishing a partnership with local Transportation Network Companies (TNC) to address mobility needs outside traditional transit service hours/days.
- Recommendation 12: Evaluate the practicality of joint recruitment and training of drivers.
- Recommendation 13: Increase capital (vehicle) funding for non-profit organizations.

Priority: Long-term

- Recommendation 14: Implement “one-stop” transportation information call center.