

**Access North Texas
Denton County Meetings**

**Wednesday, April 19, 2017
City of Lewisville Municipal Annex Building
Lewisville, Texas**

**Wednesday, April 26, 2017
DCTA's Downtown Denton Transit Center
Denton, Texas**

In April, two outreach meetings were held in Denton County. The comments and concerns from each meeting were combined into one summary in order to illustrate all of the transit needs within Denton County.

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1. Meeting Summary

a. Welcome

Kelli Schlicher from the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) welcomed and thanked everyone for attending each meeting.

b. Introduction to Access North Texas

Ms. Schlicher provided a [short presentation](#) and covered the following material at each meeting:

- An overview of NCTCOG
- What Access North Texas is and is not
- The general timeline of the plan update
- A summary of the 2013 plan

c. Interactive Questions and Discussion

The attendees answered several interactive questions and participated in open conversation about the public transportation needs and challenges in Denton County. The polling questions and discussion are summarized below.

With the agency you work for, what is the highest day-to-day transportation need?

Medical, other, and work trips were identified as the highest day-to-day transportation need. Top trip destinations for medical appointments include the Veterans Administration clinics in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Bonham. A veteran's representative noted that connections to the Bonham clinic is particularly difficult and are typically accommodated by taxis. Residents of The Colony need access to doctors and specialists in Dallas

County and Tarrant County. For one rider, the biggest issue is drivers disallowing service dogs on DCTA's buses. Also, MHMR clients have been unable to board DCTA's buses when trying to access services at MHMR. Denton Community Clinic can be difficult for clients to access (off of DCTA's Route 1) due to the walking distance from the bus stop, particularly when clients are using crutches or a wheelchair. A representative from Denton Public Health noted that the cancellation of DCTA's Route 3 would affect WIC clients' access to services.

Other transit service needs included access to Alzheimer's education and support, counseling sessions, education (including local ISDs, University of North Texas (UNT), and Texas Women's University), and daily transportation needs beyond getting to the senior center. A couple of participants noted family crisis center and human trafficking victims need safe transportation to medical and counseling appointments. For UNT students, even with DCTA's current high-frequency routes (up to 5 minute headways), there isn't enough capacity to meet the demand. There are also funding issues keeping some cities from benefiting from transit service.

Students taking evening classes have trouble finding transportation for their return trip. It is difficult for Denton ISD (in Collin County, too) students to find transportation to evening literacy classes. Also, Denton ISD employees and secondary education students could benefit from transit. Currently, DCTA's routes don't run in the locations needed (around the 380 corridor) or during morning or evening commutes. Residents of Fair Oaks Denton have trouble accessing services outside of Denton and DCTA's service area.

Regarding public transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, low-income individuals, etc., what is your primary area of concern?

Improving awareness of available services and increasing coordination between agencies were identified as the primary areas of concern. At Fair Oaks Denton, while many of the residents are over the age of 65, they did not know about DCTA's Access transit service for qualified older adults and individuals with disabilities. Additionally, an advocate mentioned that individuals requesting an application for Access services had to use a specific term ("Access application"). It can be difficult for a potential rider to know this specific term if they're not familiar with DCTA's services and are asking for a "disability application." Another participant mentioned that it is difficult to get kids from McMath Middle School to local services (like a library) after school. Like the Access application, there's a special term ("courtesy bus") that was needed to get her son from school to a local library.

The United Way of Denton is working to increase knowledge of services available in rural areas of Denton County as well as identifying the potential collaboration opportunities to increase services provided in these areas. Part of increasing awareness includes providing information in different languages and through other outlets than social media. Areas outside of Lewisville need cities to buy in to provide transportation for individuals who do not drive. Presentations by transportation agencies to city councils could help increase awareness and develop relationships to increase city buy-in. Span staff mentioned that there should be a rider focus to help provide a seamless transition between transit providers for regional trips.

Additional information about how to access Span and DCTA's services would be helpful. A Lewisville Chamber of Commerce representative noted that a business expo ("Discover Local") is an opportunity to raise awareness about transit. Participants also indicated that an implementation plan focused on getting targeted groups of employees to work.

An attendee who works with victims noted her primary area of concern was a combination of all the options. Rural Denton County residents don't have access to services in cities and there are city residents without safe access to existing services. If we can increase awareness, increase coordination and access a funding source, we can enhance the user's experience with a higher sense of security. Denton County Friends of the Family's main office is located between Corinth and Denton and they have trouble getting clients to services. As a result, they're expanding their offices and services to help reach their clients with limited transit options.

Cooke County and Grayson County have limited transportation connections to Denton County and other urban counties. These connections are necessary for residents to access services and medical appointments. For example, a Child Protective Services (CPS) client living in Cooke County is required to take certain classes that are only in Denton County. If they can't get to this out-of-county class, they're unable to meet CPS' requirements.

What funding approach will have the biggest impact on improving access to transit?

Integrating funding sources, getting additional local investment, and getting additional federal investment were seen as having the biggest impact on improving access to transit. A participant mentioned that integrating funding sources was similar to businesses interlining services. Transit agencies could "interline" their trips and balance the funds at the end of the month in order to improve the user's experience. An attendee noted that there are agencies that coordinate and each receive federal funds. These federal funds could be used to offset the cost of the trip for the rider. This is a way to spend the existing funding better while improving coordination. A participant mentioned that there's an education and investment opportunity for businesses to help improve local transit.

Increasing the user's choice gives the rider multiple options that could meet their unique individual needs. Uber and Lyft are one way to address the first mile/last mile of a trip between a transit station and the rider's end destination. Currently, DCTA has a pilot project with Uber in Highland Village to offer trips at a discounted fare. If the goal is to reduce the number of transfers between transit providers for regional trips. Adding Uber or Lyft to make first mile/last mile connections to stations could add another transfer for regional trips.

A participant expressed that some local governments are maxed out on their current contribution to transit. The Colony focuses on providing transportation for older adults to and from the senior center. Some senior center members who live in Carrollton now have trouble getting to the facility because the city no longer pays for these out-of-county trips. Currently, senior center volunteers are picking up these members and transporting them to the center.

An attendee noted that only so many highways and roads can be built. There needs to be a change in culture. Federal and State agencies are in the best position lead that effort and determine how to move people in general rather than single occupancy vehicles.

What method could improve the awareness of available services?

Targeted marketing, a public marketing campaign, and a centralized location to receive information about transit were the best methods that could improve the awareness of available services. Many participants mentioned that all the strategies should be utilized. An attendee mentioned that a public marketing campaign may miss local agencies. So, targeted marketing (with market segmentation) would be the best approach. Additionally, a rider believed that targeted marketing would also be the best method because agencies already have an established, trusted relationship with their clients. Targeted marketing could also include giving presentations at city council meetings and senior centers, as well as leaving brochures at key locations.

An attendee thought expanding beyond targeted marketing with a public marketing campaign was the best method (i.e. innovation over traditional methods). While it's important to get the information out to the end user, it is equally important to communicate the importance of transit to the general public so that there is buy-in from families, employers, etc. and greater support for individuals using transit. A veterans' representative mentioned that public marketing would help inform veterans what options and benefits they have access to. The representative believe that face-to-face interaction at meetings and veteran benefits fairs could be the best methods to increase awareness.

A DCTA representative asked how they could better advertise route modifications and cancellations. The group suggested electronic constructions signs, MHMR billboards, and Our Daily Bread billboards. Also, a centralized location could be a cost-effective way to disseminate this information. This could be a website with a list of resources or a brick and mortar location for people to visit.

Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) received funding through the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) and is developing a website called My Ride North Texas. This is a website that will help individuals identify their transit options based on their current location, destination, trip purpose and accessibility needs. Phase two of this project could include individuals booking trips through the website. A senior center representative mentioned that a link on their website to local transit resources would be very helpful. This would allow the senior center staff to share information (either online or in person) with their members.

2-1-1's resource directory may not have current information. One participant assists her clients when calling 2-1-1 because the automated menu can be confusing and talking to a live person is preferred. The United Way of Denton has a community resource directory (available in print or online) of local resources, including transportation. The United Way representative encouraged agencies to share the resource with their clients.

What about coordination between agencies is the biggest barrier for you?

Knowing where to start and identifying appropriate contacts were noted as the biggest barriers to coordination. One attendee mentioned that, more than anything, time is the biggest barrier. Another participant echoed the concern with time, particularly when they're the only one on the project. Also, for individuals who aren't native to the area, it is more difficult to identify the appropriate contact. Coordinating with all the appropriate agencies, ensuring consistency, and following-up in a timely manner can also be challenging. A county (or multi-county) coordinating committee could be a forum to discuss coordination between agencies. A participant noted that overcoming gaps in transit service may not be as simple as coordination. Federal rules and regulations were noted as a barrier to coordination.

Knowing where to start can be difficult for potential riders who may not know about Span or DCTA's services or that they have mobility managers to help connect individuals to their services. Additionally, these potential riders each access information differently (not all have internet access), even in the rural areas. It is important for the mobility managers to be out in the community sharing their agency's resources.

Agencies should coordinate to provide consistent trips to necessary services. For example, service could include a planned community shuttle from a residential community to a medical center. This type of agreement is less complicated between a transit agency and a city because they're both political subdivisions of the state. When a transit agency works with another agency, federal charter rules come into play, ultimately limiting flexibility. Regardless of the parties involved, agreements take time to develop in order to craft proper transit solutions. Sometimes while agencies work to develop these agreements, they can get stuck on jurisdictional and contract issues, losing sight of the end goal (transportation for the customer). Lastly, when developing these agreements, there needs to be a balance of customer needs with necessary regulations. For example, picking a drop-off location that is most convenient for the customer even if it's one street over in a neighboring jurisdiction.

A rider mentioned that there is difficulty scheduling within the 24-hour window with DCTA's Access service. DCTA employees clarified that rides can be scheduled 7 days in advance up to 5 pm the day before the requested day of the trip. An agency in rural Cooke County also has trouble with advanced scheduling with Texoma Area Paratransit System (TAPS). It was also noted that 2-1-1 referrals in Cooke County are often to agencies without appropriate service or capacity.

What is the best way to enhance the user's experience?

Better information on how to use transit and fewer transfers between providers for regional trips were expressed as the best ways to enhance the user's experience. DCTA's travel trainer noted that each of the options are a way to enhance the user's experience, depending on the individual's needs and how they learn. Different paths should be available to accommodate individual's unique learning styles (i.e. visual, aural, verbal, and kinesthetic). For example, older adults may be an audience needing one-on-one instruction. Another method that could be helpful for potential riders are short videos (30 second clips) of what it looks like to take transit (getting to the stop, boarding, paying

the fare, etc.). These could be available online and to agencies who could help show individuals how to take transit, no matter where they are in the learning curve. They could also be shown at local businesses, Veterans Administration clinics, restaurants, banks, and senior centers. In-person, one-on-one travel training is still important.

The Denton Veterans Affairs clinic has an advocate who helps show veterans how to use transit to access the Dallas and Fort Worth clinics.

Which technology advances are most likely to help improve transportation options for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income individuals in the next five years?

Attendees indicated that people wouldn't access these options because the target populations may have physical or learning disabilities that would require additional assistance in order to utilize the technology. Additionally, some individuals may not have the financial ability to purchase the necessary technology or to pay for the trip. There are platforms with transportation network companies (TNCs) for agencies to pay and schedule rides on behalf of their clients. However, there's still room for growth. Since TNCs use personal vehicles, they are not always accessible for individuals using mobility devices such as wheelchairs. A participant mentioned that this is a people-first issue. The needs of the individuals should be considered first and then matched with a transportation option. Another participant noted that technology can't be the only solution.

Conversely, other attendees believed that TNCs like Uber and Lyft would help improve transportation options over the next five years. A participant noted that more older adults and individuals with disabilities are using these transit options. An attendee mentioned that they provide an additional level of independence and minimize scheduling conflicts. Additionally, there's a layer of security because the technology enables people to share their real-time location while in transit (which is important when transporting human trafficking or domestic violence victims).

d. Priorities & Solutions

In closing, Ms. Schlicher asked participants to rank the priorities that were most important to them or indicate if new priorities have since arisen for Denton County.

Participants ranked priorities in the following order:

1. Provide additional service in unserved areas and to underserved locations.
2. Create partnerships between transit agencies, municipalities, and community organizations to increase the accessibility of bus stops and paths to transit.
3. Conduct additional planning activities to further quantify transportation needs of residents outside of the DCTA service area and define additional coordination opportunities for existing providers throughout the county.
4. Improve awareness of services by providing education and information, including travel training.
5. Establish or improve service to regional destinations, including employment centers, and medical services in Dallas, Tarrant, and Collin counties.
6. Establish and maintain a county coordinating committee to focus on ongoing transportation needs.

7. Enhance connections among existing services to improve access within the county.
8. Expand the availability and affordability of for-hire transportation (private transportation providers such as taxis) to increase options for travel.

e. Next Steps

A point-person committee for Denton County will soon be developed. The committee will discuss and further refine Denton County transportation needs and solutions. Agencies or individuals interested in participating should contact Ms. Schlicher.

The final plan is slated for fall 2017 and implementation will begin in early 2018. The final plan will include prioritized solutions that will improve the coordination and availability of public transportation for the 16-county region.

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 Sarah Chadderdon, AICP, Principal Transportation Planner, North Central Texas Council of Governments; (817) 695-9180, schadderdon@nctcog.org

2. Attendee List

Advocates: Tim Swenson, Anita, Leigh Duncan-Timm
 Abigail's Arms: Rosina Salsman, Bridgette Clemons
 Alzheimer's Association of Greater Dallas: Tara Longley
 Aubrey ISD: Dr. David Belding
 Christian Community Action: Daphne Adams
 City of The Colony: Diana Holland
 City of Denton: Councilmember Sara Bagheri
 City of Flower Mound: Matt Hotelling
 City of Frisco: Jordan Feldman
 City of Lake Dallas: Kevin Lasher
 CoServ: Tracee Elrod
 Denton County: Paul Bastaich
 Denton County Friends of the Family: Michelle Behl
 Denton County Indigent Health Care: Isabel Rodriguez
 Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA): Michelle Bloomer, Anna Mosqueta, Crystal Pustejovsky
 Denton County Housing Authority: Peggy Ritter, LeMaya Woods, Igna Chavez, Tangela Caldwell, Eula Rose, Lola Davis, Cynthia Richards
 Denton ISD: Barb Haflich, David Gerabagi, Courtney Martin
 Fairoaks of Denton, Inc.: Christina Trevino
 Good Samaritan Society: A. Peabody
 Lewisville Area Chamber: Ray Hernandez
 North Central Texas Council of Governments: Sarah Chadderdon, Kelli Schlicher, Donato Perez
 REACH of Denton: Murphy Hardinger
 Resurrect Life, Inc.: Kari Tamburin
 Serve Denton: Danita Summers

Span, Inc.: Deb Robertson, Roger Muckel
Special Abilities of North Texas: Jordan Drake
Texas Woman's University: Amy O'Keefe
United Way of Denton County: Rhett Richardson, Katie Foote
University of North Texas: Bob Brown, Rebecca Cagle, Dr. Geary Robinson