

CHAPTER 03



# DALLAS COUNTY



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Access North Texas is to document the public transportation needs for seniors, 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 Dallas County. This chapter will give an overview of existing services, research conducted and collected, the public outreach meetings, the transportation poll used to collect individualized input on public transit needs, and the prioritized strategies for Dallas County.

## EXISTING TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

Within Dallas County there are several transportation providers and services. The main transportation provider is Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), and they cover a total of thirteen member cities within the county. DART's services include light rail, local bus service, paratransit service, nearly 30 on-demand Go-Link Zones, and operations of the Dallas Streetcar. The McKinney Avenue Transit Authority (MATA) coordinates with DART to operate the M-Line Trolley in Uptown Dallas. Additionally, the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) is jointly owned and operated by DART and Trinity Metro and connects Dallas to Fort Worth and points in between.

STAR Transit operates three commuter routes in Mesquite, Balch Springs, and Hutchins. Each of these routes connect to DART's light rail system at either the Lawnview Station, Buckner Station, or the UNT Dallas Station. In partnership with the cities of Mesquite, Balch Springs, Seagoville, and DeSoto STAR Transit also provides curbside-to-curb transportation in those cities. In addition, STAR Transit operates a GoLink zone with DART and the Southern Dallas County Inland Port

Transportation Management Association to provide on-demand shared rides to areas outside of DART service area but within the Southern Dallas County Inland Port.

The City of Grand Prairie also introduced on-demand services using the Via Rideshare platform in April 2022. Residents can use the new service Monday through Saturday to travel within city limits and to select college campuses. Other specialized services in Grand Prairie include the Grand Connection, providing curbside-to-curb transportation to older adults and individuals with disabilities within city limits.

In addition to other transportation options and services, Trinity Metro and Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) operate a commuter vanpool program within the North Central Texas region. As of May 2022, Trinity Metro operated up to 39 vanpools with origins in Dallas County and up to 72 vanpools with destinations in Dallas County. Also, DCTA operated up to 23 vanpools with destinations in Dallas County. The number of vanpools may change month to month as the regional program expands shared commuter transportation opportunities.

Additional resources that provide or facilitate access to transportation include cities, major employers and numerous human service and social service agencies such as Community Council of Greater Dallas, AARP Ride@50+ Program, and Metrocare Services. My Ride North Texas is a project that connects residents to transportation providers and resources, based on their needs. Also, see Appendix B, Get-A-Ride-Guide, for a list of private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These private providers are an additional transportation option individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective), or organizations can contract to provide specific service for clients.

Even with the transportation providers listed above, transportation gaps still exist in Dallas County. In 2021, the North Central Texas Council of Governments released a transit planning study for the Southern Dallas County communities of Cedar Hill, DeSoto, Duncanville, Lancaster and the Southern Dallas Inland Port area. The study focused transit implementation in areas with limited access to transit services and phased recommendations over the next 20 years. There are also some barriers for riders looking to travel between cities with different providers, rural areas, and seamless connections into neighboring counties.

### DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

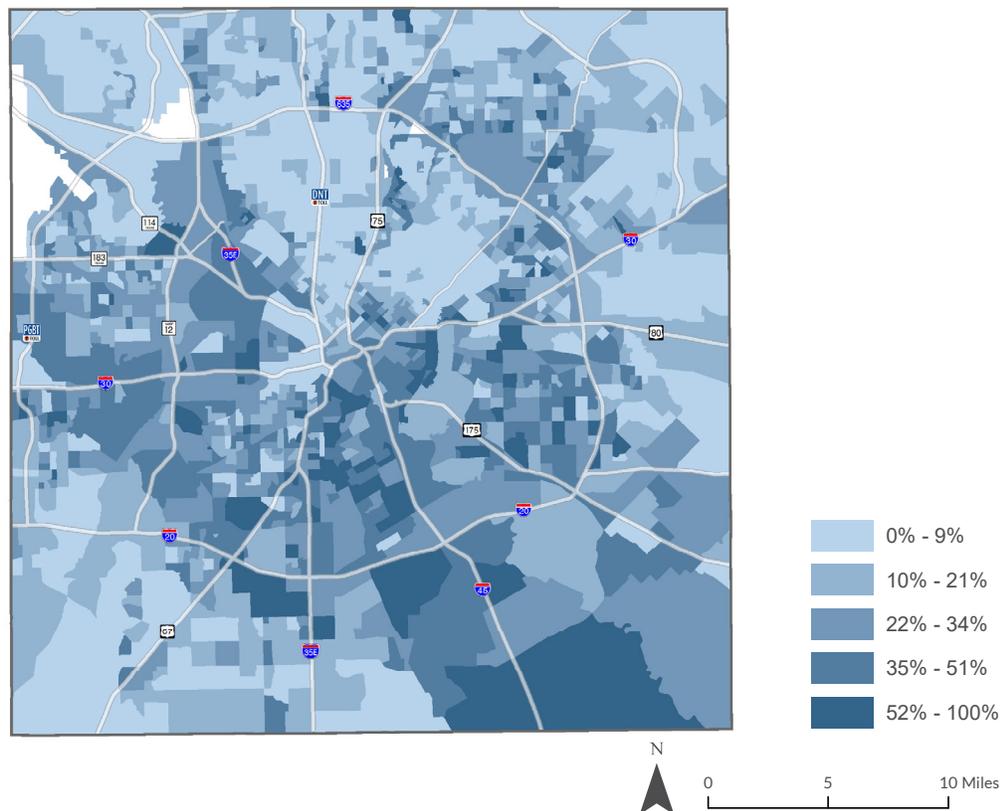
Demographic data in Dallas County was used to identify populations that may have a high potential need for public transportation. Dallas County continues to experience some growth, as more

people relocate into the region. According to the American Community Survey’s (ACS) 2019 5-year estimates, since 2015 Dallas County’s population has increased by 4.9%. In comparison, the 16-county region has grown 8% in that same period.

According to these same estimates, Dallas County’s total population is made up of nearly 2,600,000 individuals and 930,000 households. Of these individuals, 272,730 are 65 years of age or older, making up 10.5% of the population. Dallas County also includes 244,865 individuals with disabilities who make up 9.4% of the population, as well as 550,179 low-income individuals who make up 21.3% of the population.

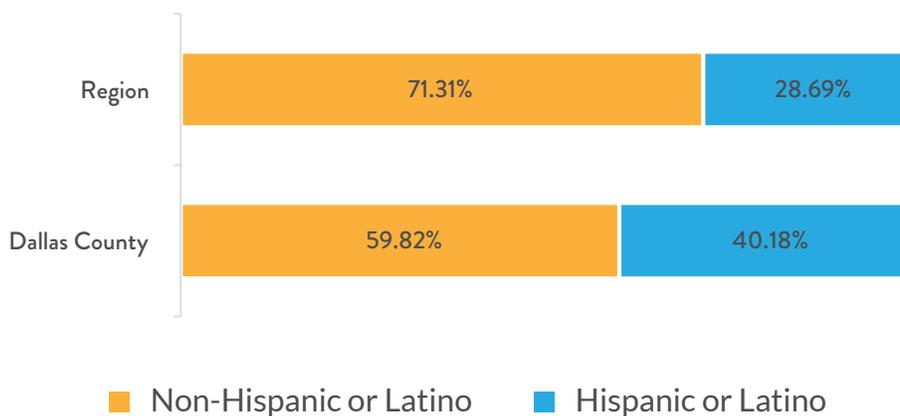
Dallas County’s racial composition is majority white at 61.2%, followed by 22.6% Black, 6.3% Asian, 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.05% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander,

## Dallas County Low-Income Individuals



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates  
Data aggregated to the Census block group level

## Dallas County Ethnicity Compared to Regional Ethnicity



6.8% identifying as another race, and 2.6% indicated two or more races. Dallas County also has a significant Hispanic or Latino population, comprising 40.2% of the population. Additionally, within Dallas County 493,308 individuals, which is 20.5% of residents speak English less than very well, indicating that information about available transit will be difficult for these individuals to access if it is provided only in English

Although the county has a low percentage of zero-car households at 6.8%, that percentage is still higher than the regional percentage of 1.6%. Also, while the number of homeless individuals is naturally difficult to estimate, the Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance (MDHA) 2021 Point in Time Homeless County notes a total of 4,105 sheltered and unsheltered individuals experienced homelessness in Dallas County from when the count occurred. According to MDHA's 2021 State of Homelessness Address, nearly 7,000 individuals experienced homelessness for the first time, needing a different approach and less intensive services as those who are disabled or have experienced homelessness for many years. Efforts to promote existing or new transit services should include strategies to reach each of these populations.

## PROCESS

### Outreach

Public outreach for Dallas County was conducted through a series of virtual public meetings, surveys, and public mapping data. Outreach efforts were advertised through email invitations, the Access North Texas website, NCTCOG's Local Motion publication, a press release, and social media. Invitees were encouraged to share the invitation with partner organizations and clients to help promote the meetings. Staff sent out 171 emails inviting Dallas stakeholders and contacts to participate in public outreach efforts. Three virtual public meetings in July 2021 saw 7 attendees including members of the public and representatives from county non-profits and transit providers. Additional conversations with staff from a local a community organization in Dallas County supplemented the larger meeting participation. The organization serves seniors and individuals with disabilities.

A transportation survey was also available to residents and stakeholders, online and in paper, and available in English and Spanish. This survey collected input on public transportation in the region. A similar survey was also available online for organizations and agencies that work with

# Dallas County Zero-Car Households



transit-dependent populations. In total, 685 responses were received for Dallas County. Of these 672 were received from Dallas County residents and 13 were received from agency/organization representatives. Finally, during the outreach period 3 transit comments from Dallas County were received through Map Your Experience, a virtual public mapping tool that allows respondents to anonymously share comments and concerns by location.

## Data Sources

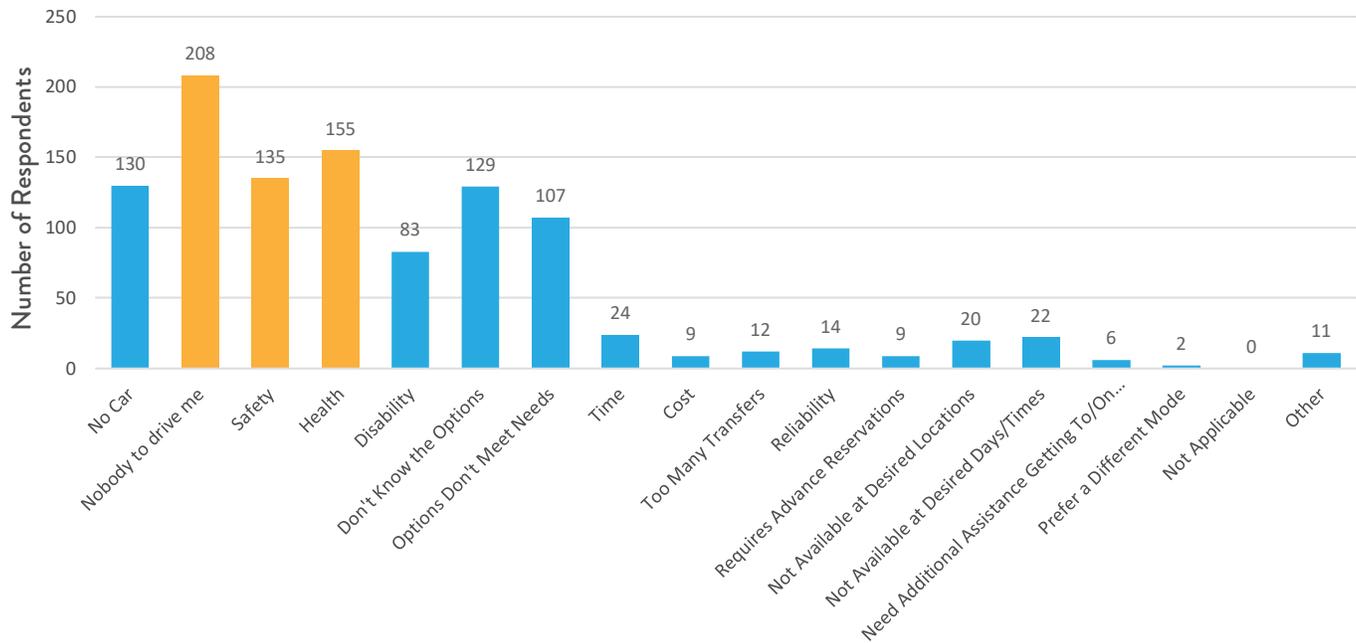
The planning process for Access North Texas involved NCTCOG staff, community stakeholders, transportation providers, and community members. Through virtual meetings, members from each county prioritized its main concerns about transit access in their area.

Discussion with Dallas County residents and stakeholders highlighted several key concerns for transit users. The primary concern of participants

was the awareness of available resources, followed by enhancing the user's experience and creating targeted implementation plans. Attendees noted that referral services, such as those provided by AARP, have served as an access point for transportation information and to connect riders to transportation options. As for enhancing user experience, agencies and non-profit organizations could benefit from greater efforts to educate the public on new services and existing resources. Although discussions occurred prior to major network changes within the DART service area, these concerns may continue to be relevant as users begin or return to use public transportation.

Another form of receiving data from Dallas County residents and stakeholders was a transportation survey; made available online and translated into English and Spanish. Due to COVID-19 limitations, paper copies were available upon request or through transportation partners. The survey helped NCTCOG staff to collect first-hand data

## Dallas County Reported Barriers to Mobility



about public transportation in the region from riders and organizations that work with transit-dependent populations.

Responses to the transportation surveys totaled 685 for Dallas County. Of these 672 were received from Dallas County residents and 13 were received from agency/organization representatives. The top 3 reported barriers were not having access to someone to drive them, safety, and health concerns. Compared to the previous plan, more respondents in Dallas County indicated that safety and health concerns were barriers for them in using public transportation. The survey was conducted while communities were in high alert due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so respondents were likely concerned with risks involved in travelling with others. Public education campaigns have been implemented by the various public transportation agencies and data shows that respondents desire access to multiple transportation modes.

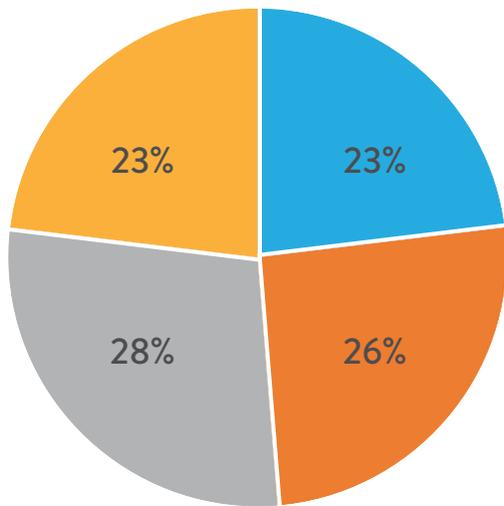
Similar to the meeting discussions, respondents also expressed not knowing about their transit

options and that current options don't meet their transportation needs. Additionally, the most desired transportation enhancement reported is greater service areas and times, along with greater frequency. Although responses are prior to the implementation of DART's redesigned network, discussions support greater service and the need to increase access to information on available transportation options.

The survey also found that users would also like to see fewer transfers for regional trips and better regional connectivity. Several respondents mentioned specific connections outside of current transit service areas or near entertainment centers outside of Dallas County. Crossing service area boundaries is named as a significant barrier to traveling across the county and across the region.

All information gained through outreach meetings and transportation survey was gathered to develop the prioritized strategies for Dallas County.

### Desired Transportation Modes in Dallas County



- Fixed-Route Bus
- Commuter Bus to Light Rail
- Light Rail
- Demand Response or On Demand

#### *TAIT Tool and Environmental Justice*

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) identifies communities who face transportation disadvantages and may have greater potential need for public transit. This tool is updated by the North Central Texas Council of Governments and is based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Based on information from TAIT, in Dallas County there are many census block groups where populations of individuals age 65 and over, below poverty, and with disabilities are above the regional percentages.

#### *Analysis*

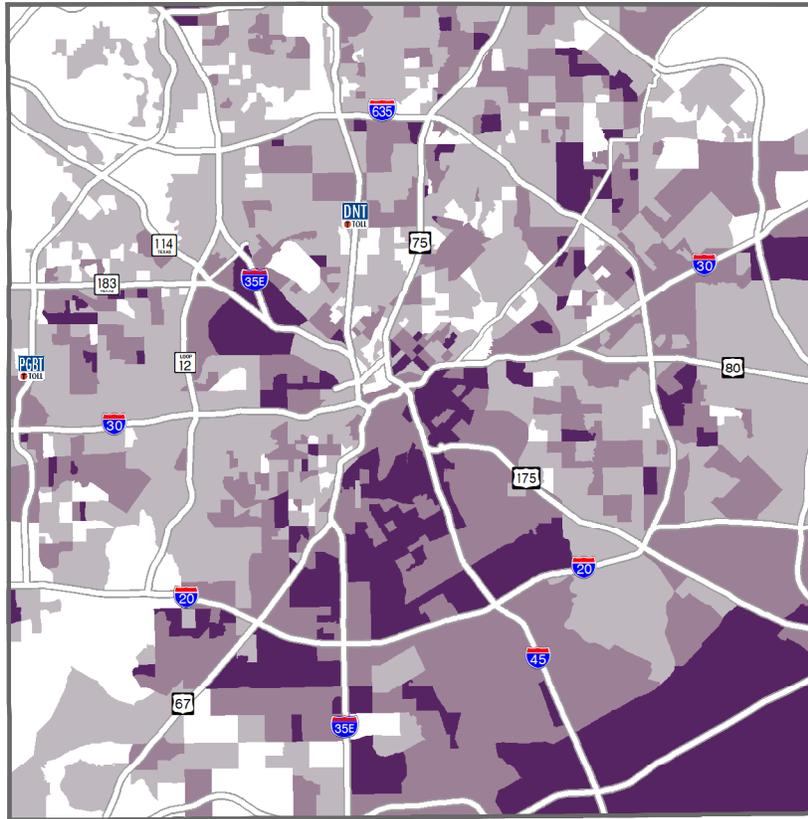
The highest conglomeration of census block groups within Dallas County where the three variables are all above the regional percentage is in the south and southeast portion of the county. This area includes the cities of Dallas, Mesquite, Balch Springs, Hutchins, Wilmer, Lancaster, DeSoto, and Duncanville. Areas where census block groups have three variables above the

regional average are mostly scattered south of I30 and east of Hwy 67. The rest of the area is covered with census block groups with one or two variables above the regional average. Along the US 67 corridor near Duncanville, DeSoto, and Cedar Hill the block groups with two variables above the regional percentage mostly contain individuals 65 and over and individuals with disabilities. Moving east, towards the Southern Inland Port area, the block groups with two variables above the regional percentage shift and are predominately individuals with disabilities and populations living below the poverty line.

In northeast Dallas County, there are also census block groups where the percentage of individuals 65 and over, populations below the poverty line, and those with disabilities are all above the regional percentages. Most of the census block groups with all three variables above the regional average are near downtown Dallas and the City of Garland. The Garland area also has census block groups with just one or two variables above the regional percentage. Most of these contain higher levels of persons below the poverty line and either individuals with disabilities or individuals aged 65 and over.

Other areas with all three variables above the regional percentage include the northeast portion of the county, along the I35 corridor and 183 in Irving. Many census block groups with two variables above the regional percentage in the northeastern portion of Dallas County are persons below the poverty line and individuals with disabilities. Areas where the percentage of individuals 65 or older is higher than the regional percentage are distributed across the northeastern portion with concentrations found around Love Field Airport and across the City of Irving.

# Dallas County Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)



## Legend

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

0 7 14 Miles



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) is a preliminary screening 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.

## *Development of Strategies*

The prioritized strategies were developed once information from outreach meetings, the transportation poll, and research data was compiled and analyzed for patterns and gaps of service. Observations and recommendations were coded into five (5) main categories to identify themes across the 16-county region and inform regional goals. Those goals provide a framework for the Access North Texas and individual strategies were identified for Dallas County to further those goals and provide a plan for transit providers and organizations in future implementation of services. Drafted goals and strategies were provided to the stakeholders for additional feedback and review prior to the finalization of the plan.

## *Findings*

In Dallas County 672 individuals completed the Access North Texas survey. Many of the respondents indicated they did not have a car or someone who could drive them. For those that depend on public transportation, they experience additional transportation barriers and may not be able to reach critical appointments. Nearly 450 responses indicate that in the past, they have had to miss work, medical, and meal trips or experienced delays due to lack of transportation options. The TAIT analysis tool identified the southern half of the county as having high concentrations of transit dependent populations and zero-car households. The accessibility of transit in these areas is important for connecting individuals to job opportunities and critical services.

The combination of all outreach efforts, including surveys and meetings, revealed that respondents want to see more information about available transportation options. Within Dallas County, riders have difficulty distinguishing between the different transportation services. For instance, in areas south of the City of Dallas there are several

cities that are not members of a transit authority and provide contracted services, which may have their own transportation programs with varying eligibility and hours. Additionally, for areas where there are no public transportation options, respondents are faced with private transportation options which typically have higher user costs.

Given the multiple modes and providers in the region and in Dallas County, residents also expressed wanting to see better connectivity across modes and providers. Many of the locations listed by respondents were entertainment and shopping centers where currently there is limited or no public transportation options available. Therefore, even if the rider has access to public transportation within Dallas County, they are often unable to reach destinations outside the county or find the trip too difficult to complete.

Outreach efforts also indicated a large need for transportation providers and partners to promote existing options and ensure that services are being provided in a safe manner. Specifically, riders indicated health risks such as COVID-19 as a barrier to using public transportation. The transportation agencies have conducted individual and coordinated campaigns to inform riders of measures they are taking to ensure trips are safe and continuing these efforts in future health emergencies can help riders feel more comfortable using public transportation. Additionally, riders are looking for services that feel safer since some generally perceive a lack of safety on public transportation. The impact of COVID-19 was greatly felt by riders and transit agencies alike since the shortage of drivers and security personnel has impacted the level of services being provided at a local level. As the region moves forward from the COVID-19 pandemic, transit agencies and partners should ensure the communication with the public continues to be a focus in order to build trust among current and potential riders.

It's also worth noting that DART, the largest transit provider in Dallas County, implemented their bus network redesign, [DARTzoom](#), in January 2022 after outreach for this plan was completed. Any associated improvements to the system that addressed connectivity and rider education are not captured in the feedback collected for this plan but will be evaluated in future updates.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The goals and strategies below identify ways to address the most important public transportation needs stakeholders identified as needing to be implemented over the next few years. The strategies build upon the progress and feedback that has been provided since the 2018 Access North Texas plan and should be referenced when state and federal funds for public transportation become available.

### *Implementing the Plan*

NCTCOG was awarded a 2021 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to enhance mobility within the Southern Dallas Inland Port. Currently, on-demand services are operated by STAR Transit in coordination with DART to areas outside of DART service area but within the Southern Dallas County Inland Port. The project will seek to expand hours and enhance services in order to connect individuals with reliable public transportation and a significant and growing job center. Services will be evaluated in the next Access North Texas update.

The [Southern Dallas Transit Study](#) was completed in July 2021 and it focuses on the communities of Cedar Hill, DeSoto, Duncanville, Lancaster, and the Southern Dallas Inland Port area. The study includes a needs assessment of the area and provides multi-phase service recommendations

for the area. The study recommends that in Phase 1 (1-5 Years) a foundation of transit services is built in the area by introducing micro transit zones in each city for local circulation and connecting those cities to regional transit nodes. Implementation of Phase I from this plan aligns with strategies developed under Access North Texas for Dallas County.

In January 2022, DART implemented their bus network redesign, [DARTzoom](#), to address transit challenges in the county. Through these changes, DART can offer more frequent routes, longer service hours, and has expanded their on-demand service areas. This along with their education campaign, begins to address various strategies listed for Dallas County. The impact of these efforts will be evaluated in future updates.

In early 2022, NCTCOG also began a transit study for [East Dallas, Kaufman, and Rockwall Counties](#). This study aims to develop a comprehensive public transportation plan for cities in Eastern Dallas County that are not members of Dallas Area Rapid Transit, as well as Kaufman and Rockwall counties. Once complete, recommendations from this study will be evaluated in future Access North Texas updates.

Agencies and organizations looking to develop transit projects aligned with these strategies may find support through NCTCOG's Transit Strategic Partnerships Program or the TxDOT Call for Projects. Competitive proposals will demonstrate innovative solutions, strategic value, sustainability, implementation capacity, and evidence of collaboration. Most importantly, the proposal's needs assessment will need to be supported directly by county specific strategies identified in this plan. The most competitive proposals will demonstrate how the proposed project or service will utilize one or more strategies to enhance transit accessibility for transit-dependent

## REGIONAL GOAL

## DALLAS COUNTY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

### Plan and Develop Transportation Options by Assessing Community Need and Challenges

- A) Invest in programs to assist with filling gaps in public transportation and facilitate service for work-related trips
- B) Invest in programs that facilitate transportation trips to medical and healthcare appointments
- C) Launch a mobility toolbox to educate on and promote public transportation options such as fixed route, demand-respond, on-demand services, etc.

### Implement Services by Enhancing Transportation Options and Expanding Where Service Gaps Exist

- A) Improve existing public transportation options to better fit the needs of riders and households with 1 or zero cars by increasing service frequency and availability
- B) Expand eligible trips for specialized public transportation services to include employment, social, religious, and well-being trips
- C) Establish additional assistance or more specialized public transportation options for customers who are not ADA paratransit eligible or physically capable of utilizing regular public transportation services
- D) Expand service hours to support needs of low-income individuals in the service industry and outside traditional 9am-5pm jobs

### Coordinate with Transportation Providers, Public Agencies, and Stakeholders to Increase Efficiencies

- A) Work with regional and local organizations to increase ease of travel across municipal and county boundaries
- B) Foster cooperation between public transit providers within counties to allow better connectivity and simplify regional trips

### Support Public Transportation Recovery and Growth

- A) Promote safe and healthy practices on public transportation services
- B) Partner with organizations to coordinate training and recruitment for future public transportation professionals and create pipelines with area schools
- C) Establish driver recruitment and retention programs for public transportation services to address difficulties in retaining drivers

REGIONAL GOAL	COUNTY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES
<p><b>Promote Access and Information about Available Transportation Options</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) Enhance communication and outreach programs to improve awareness of existing or new transportation options</li> <li>B) Conduct travel training to educate the public on available services and policies</li> <li>C) Partner with agencies, recreation centers, senior residencies, housing assisted living centers, and other organizations to publicize information</li> </ul>

populations. More information on the Transit Strategic Partnerships Program can be found at [www.nctcog.org/strategicpartnerships-transit](http://www.nctcog.org/strategicpartnerships-transit). More information on the TxDOT Call for Projects can be found at <https://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/division/public-transportation/local-assistance.html>

**REFERENCE TO THE APPENDIX**

For more detailed information about Dallas County, please see Appendices A-E, available online at [www.accessnorthtexas.org](http://www.accessnorthtexas.org).

See Appendix A, Summary & Status of 2018 to review previously adopted goals and strategies that were included in the 2018 Access North Texas plan.

See Appendix B, Get-A-Ride Guide, for a list of public and private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These providers are an additional transportation resource that individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective), or organizations can contract with to provide specific service for clients.

See Appendix C, Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool, for additional information on how the tool was developed and how to use it.

See Appendix D, Data & Analysis, for copies of the transportation surveys, statistics, and affiliated county-based maps.

See Appendix E, Outreach Meeting and Supplemental Information, for a list of previously held virtual meetings by county with a copy of the presentations.