

# DENTON 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 Denton County. This chapter will give an overview of the planning process, research conducted and collected, public outreach meetings, the transportation poll used to collect personal input on public transit needs, and the prioritized strategies for Denton 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 Denton 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 public outreach meetings and a transportation poll. Through an interactive process, stakeholders prioritized concerns about transit access.

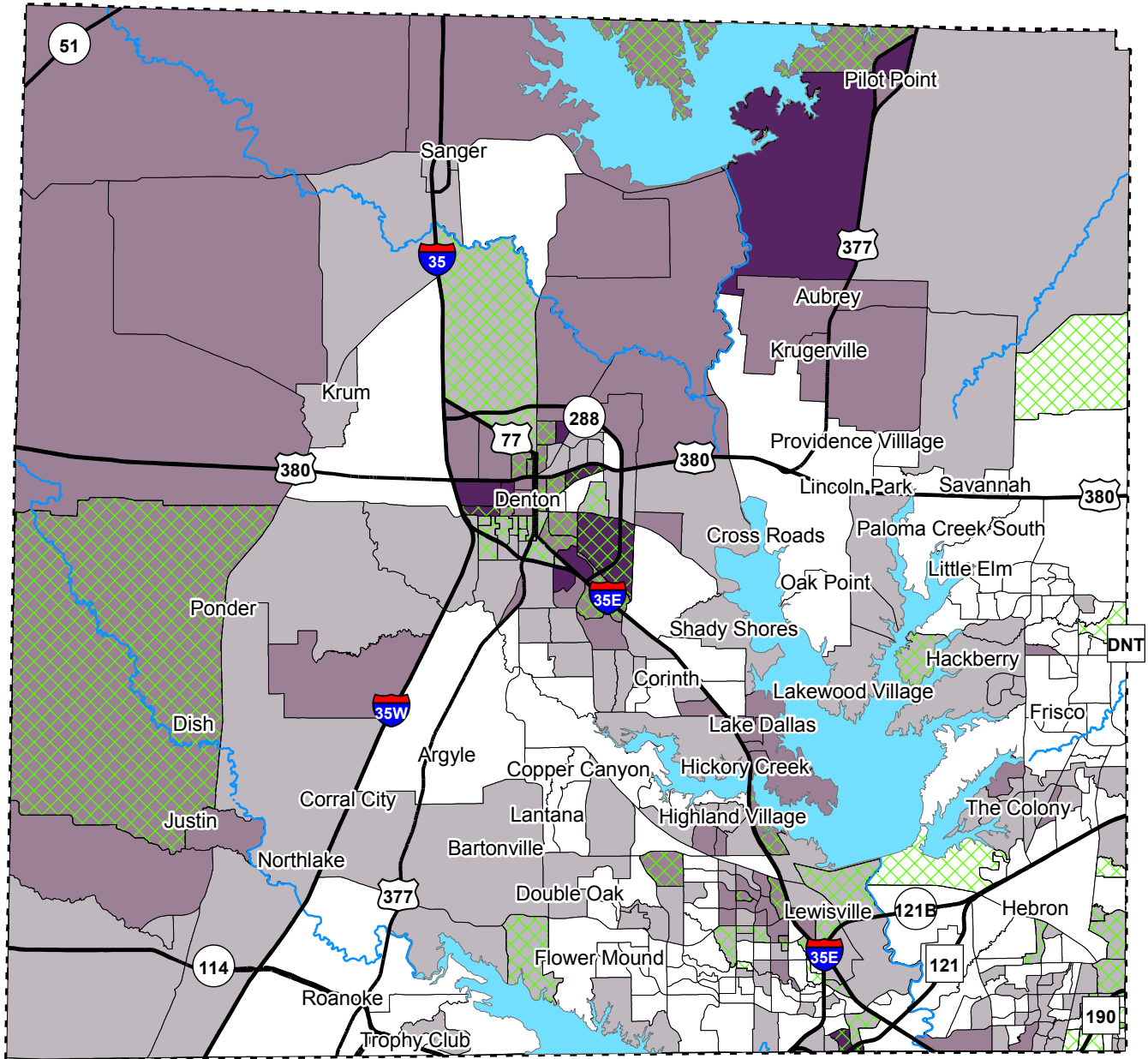
### RESEARCH

#### 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 having 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.

In Denton County, there are census block groups where the populations of individuals age 65 and over, below the poverty line, and with disabilities are all

# Denton County 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**



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above the regional percentages. These areas include west of US 377 near Pilot Point and within the city of Denton. The majority of census block groups with two variables above the regional percentages see higher percentages of persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities. Some census block groups to the south of Denton, near Lake Dallas and Lewisville, see higher percentages of persons below the poverty line and persons with disabilities. In Denton, most of the block groups with one variable above the regional percentage have higher percentages of persons below the poverty line. County wide, the vast majority of census block groups with one variable above the regional percentage see either a higher percentage of persons age 65 and over or persons with disabilities. Many of the census block groups in east and south Denton County see all three variables at or below the regional average. Zero car households above the regional percentage are mostly seen in and around the city of Denton, and the southeastern portion of the county. The census block groups northwest of Pilot Point and west of Ponder, Dish, and Justin also have a higher percentage of zero car households.

### **Additional Demographic and Commuter Information**

Denton County continues to experience a significant amount of growth. According to the American Community Survey's 2015 5-year estimates, since the 2010 Census, Denton County's population has increased by 10.4%. In comparison, the 16-county region has grown 6.3% in that same time period. Public transportation providers have continued to steadily expand service within Denton County, however there are still populations and areas without transit service. Additionally, within Denton County, 8.5% of residents speak English less than very well and information about available transit services may be difficult for these individuals to access if it is provided only in English.

According to U.S. Census employer information as of 2014, Denton County was home to just under

200,000 jobs, with around 86,000 workers living within the county. Approximately 109,000 workers commuted into Denton County, while nearly 264,000 commuted out of the county for employment. The majority of commuters into the county came from the south and east. Both the educational services and retail trade sectors made up around 25% of the county's jobs combined, with approximately 45% of the workforce having some college education or a degree.

### **Transportation Resources**

The main transportation provider, Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA), offers several services to the general public in the greater Lewisville and Denton area. These services include local bus service in Denton, Lewisville and Highland Village. DCTA offers Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service in Denton, Lewisville and Highland Village. DCTA operates campus shuttles to the University of North Texas and North Central Texas College. A commuter rail service, the A-train, connects passengers from the city of Denton to downtown Dallas with stops in Denton and Lewisville. Commuter vanpool service is available for those living or working in Denton County through DCTA, Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority (FWTA). In all, 23 vanpools originate in Denton County, with 32 vanpools ending with Denton County as their destination. DCTA, in partnership with FWTA, operates bus service that connects Denton with downtown Fort Worth with a stop in Alliance.

Span, Inc. (Span) provides demand response public transportation to several areas in Denton County. Span also provides transportation to Denton County veterans to the Veterans Affairs hospitals in Fort Worth and Dallas.

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.

## OUTREACH MEETINGS

Two public meetings were held:

- April 19, 2017 at the City of Lewisville's Municipal Annex Building
- April 26, 2017 at DCTA's Downtown Denton Transit Center

283 invitations were mailed and emailed to interested parties throughout the county. 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. A total of 50 people attended the meetings.

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 from both public meetings identified that it is difficult for veterans to get to the Veterans Administration clinic in Bonham. Tarrant County and Dallas County also are difficult trip destinations for medical appointments. Additionally, better information about the available transportation services and how to access them needs to be distributed. A participant noted that there are certain social services that people are required to access in Denton, but struggle to find the transportation from rural Denton and neighboring counties.

## 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 per-

sonal 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. Respondents totaled 69 from Denton County.

49% of respondents indicated that they get around by riding with a friend or family member. Individuals indicated that no available public transportation services and the inability to have a friend or family member drive them are the biggest barriers to getting where they need to go. The transportation services that sounded most appealing to poll takers were local bus service and community-wide dial-a-ride service.

Poll respondents identified that better connections to Dallas County, Tarrant County, and Collin County are necessary. Specific locations included Dallas, Fort Worth, Alliance, and Plano. Individuals also noted that they are open to Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), like Uber and Lyft, being part of the transportation solution.

## 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.

### Prioritized Strategies

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

**Denton Strategy 2** Improve affordable public transportation to the VA clinic in Bonham

**Denton Strategy 3** Improve regional access to medical appointments in Dallas County and Tarrant County

**Denton Strategy 4** Increase awareness of public transit availability through opportunities such as:

1. Presentations to city councils about available services
2. Outreach events
3. Targeted marketing to local agencies about existing transportation resources

**Denton Strategy 5** Increase awareness of how to use available transit services through opportunities such as:

1. An Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) rights campaign
2. Training on how to qualify or apply for transit services
3. Training on how to schedule a trip

**Denton Strategy 6** Continue to conduct customer service focused training for transit agency employees

**Denton Strategy 7** Conduct planning to assess needs and identify transportation solutions to improve access to education and education facilities

**Denton Strategy 8** Improve partnerships and coordination between existing transit providers to simplify regional trips and explore cost-sharing options for services that cross service area or geographic boundaries

**Denton Strategy 9** Advocate for agencies to integrate funding sources to maximize efficiency and increase available affordable public transportation

**Denton Strategy 10** 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

**Denton Strategy 11** Continue coordinating committee meetings to discuss transportation needs within Denton County

**Denton Strategy 12** Create partnerships between transit agencies, municipalities, and community organizations to increase the accessibility of bus stops and paths to transit

## Regional Strategies for Coordinated Public Transportation

Much like the county strategies, the regional strategies may also be applicable to Denton 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 Denton County, please see Appendix C-Denton, available online at

[www.accessnorthtexas.org](http://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 Denton 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.