

# ROCKWALL 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 Rockwall County. This chapter will give an overview of the planning process, research conducted and collected, the public outreach meeting, the transportation poll used to collect personal input on public transit needs, and the prioritized strategies for Rockwall 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 Rockwall County. Through the process and methods described, prioritized strategies were developed so that future public transportation projects can be implemented when federal and state funding becomes available. Two different types of research were conducted during this plan update: data-based and people-based.

Data-based research included obtaining, reviewing, and analyzing Census data; using Census data to

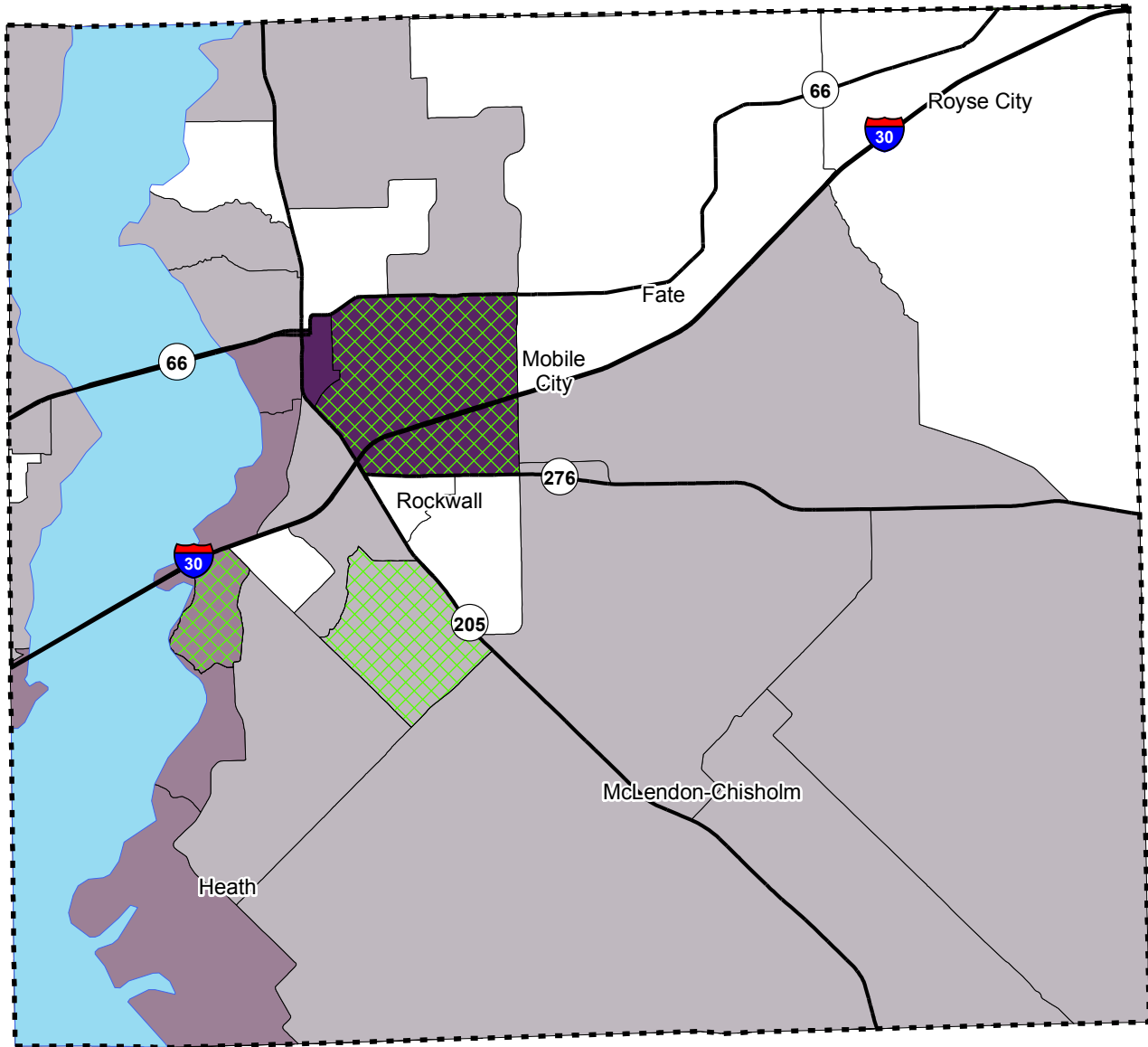
develop a mapping tool to identify locations where transit-dependent individuals may live; and identifying existing public transportation providers. The people-based research included reaching out to communities, organizations, and individuals to obtain feedback about the existing public transportation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

### RESEARCH

#### The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)

The TAIT was developed to identify locations with certain demographic factors that may indicate a greater need for public transportation. The populations of individuals over age 65, residents below the poverty line, and persons with disabilities were each compared to the regional percentage of the population in that demographic. A map was created based on areas that were above the regional percentage in zero, one, two, or all three of the demographic categories. The more categories that an area is deemed above the regional percentage, the more likely it is that area is to need transit. Zero car households was provided as a supplemental layer to identify households above the regional percentage that do not 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.

# Rockwall 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**



North Central Texas  
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In Rockwall County, there are census block groups where the populations of individuals age 65 and over, below the poverty line, and with disabilities are all above the regional percentage. The areas with all three variables above the regional percentage are located north of Rockwall along I30. West and north of Heath are the only census block groups with two variables above the regional percentage, with those variables being persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities. The block group southeast of I30 near Mobile City is the only block group with a single variable greater than the regional percentage based on a higher percentage of persons below the poverty line. The remainder of the block groups with a single variable greater than the regional percentage have a higher percentage of persons age 65 and over. Northeastern Rockwall County, the city of Rockwall, and some of the northwest part of the county have all variables at or below the regional percentage. The highest proportions of individuals 65 and older and persons living with a disability live near the city of Rockwall. Zero car households above the regional percentage are located in along I30 and SH 205 near the city of Rockwall.

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

Rockwall County continues to experience a tremendous amount of growth. According to the American Community Survey's 2015 5-year estimates, since the 2010 Census, Rockwall County's population has increased by 9.2%. In comparison, the 16-county region has grown 6.3% in that same time period. Public transportation needs will change as the population grows. Within Rockwall County, 5.2% of residents speak English less than very well. Efforts to promote existing or new transit services should include strategies to reach this population.

According to U.S. Census employer information as of 2014, Rockwall County is home to around 22,500 jobs, with around 6,500 employees of those jobs living within the county. Around 16,000 people commute into the county for work, while around 32,000

commute out of the county for work. Around 40% of employees in the county live within 10 miles of their jobs, while the majority of commuters into the county enter from the west and southwest. The economy in Rockwall County is somewhat diverse, with the retail trade and health care and social assistance industries proving one-third of the jobs. Employees in the county are fairly well educated, with around 43% of workers either having some college experience or a degree.

### **Transportation Resources**

STAR Transit is the main transportation provider in Rockwall County. They provide demand response service to older adults and individuals with disabilities. STAR Transit also operates the Medicaid transportation in Rockwall County. Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) also operates one vanpool that originates in the 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.

### **OUTREACH MEETING**

A public meeting for Rockwall County took place at Texas A&M University – Commerce at Rockwall on March 21, 2017. 67 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 25 people attended the meeting.

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.

The highest need that was identified in the public outreach meeting was the need to improve access to medical appointments in the city of Rockwall, mental wellness clinics, the YMCA, grocery stores and the Texas Workforce Commission in Dallas. The Texas Workforce Commission in Dallas is an important destination because it's necessary for some individuals to improve skills allowing them to return to work. Attendees also expressed that better information about available transportation resources is necessary. Those that already know and use STAR Transit find it incredibly valuable and noted it is the only way older adults and people with disabilities are able to get around.

A veteran's representative identified that Rockwall County veterans' transit needs include medical and counseling appointments in Dallas, the VA clinics in Dallas, Greenville, and Bonham, as well as local trips. Veterans who do not qualify for the VA's transportation have to find other ways to reach their appointments.

## TRANSPORTATION POLL

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

Rockwall County residents submitted twenty-two responses to the transportation poll. The average age of respondents is 67, with the youngest 19 and the oldest 90. Fourteen respondents said they get a ride with family or friends and eight said they take public transportation or the bus or van of a community organization or other agency for their transportation needs. Six respondents reported missing trips over the previous six months, with three responding they missed

medical appointments or shopping trips. Those who missed trips cited not having a car or someone to drive available as the reason for missing their trip. Nine respondents reported an interest in local bus service and five respondents are interested in commuter bus service.

## 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.

### Rockwall County Prioritized Strategies

**Rockwall Strategy 1** Improve access to:

1. Medical appointments in Rockwall
2. Mental wellness clinics
3. YMCA
4. Grocery stores
5. Texas Workforce Commission in Dallas

**Rockwall Strategy 2** Create and maintain a coordinating committee to discuss ongoing transportation needs

**Rockwall Strategy 3** Explore partnerships to increase the affordability of fares for those most in need

**Rockwall Strategy 4** Improve transit connections across county borders, particularly for medical appointments and access to education

**Rockwall Strategy 5** Coordinate with local residences, businesses, medical centers, and other organizations to group trips to improve efficiency and the rider's experience

**Rockwall Strategy 6** Advocate for agencies to integrate funding sources to maximize efficiency and increase available affordable public transportation

**Rockwall Strategy 7** Continue to conduct targeted marketing to local agencies about existing transporta-

tion resources

**Rockwall Strategy 8** Work with 2-1-1 at least twice a year to ensure public transportation resources are up-to-date

## Regional Strategies for Coordinated Public Transportation

Much like the county strategies, the regional strategies may also be applicable to Rockwall 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 Rockwall County, please see Appendix C-Rockwall, 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 Rockwall 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.