

WISE 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 Wise County. This chapter will give an overview of the planning process, the 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 Wise 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 Wise 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

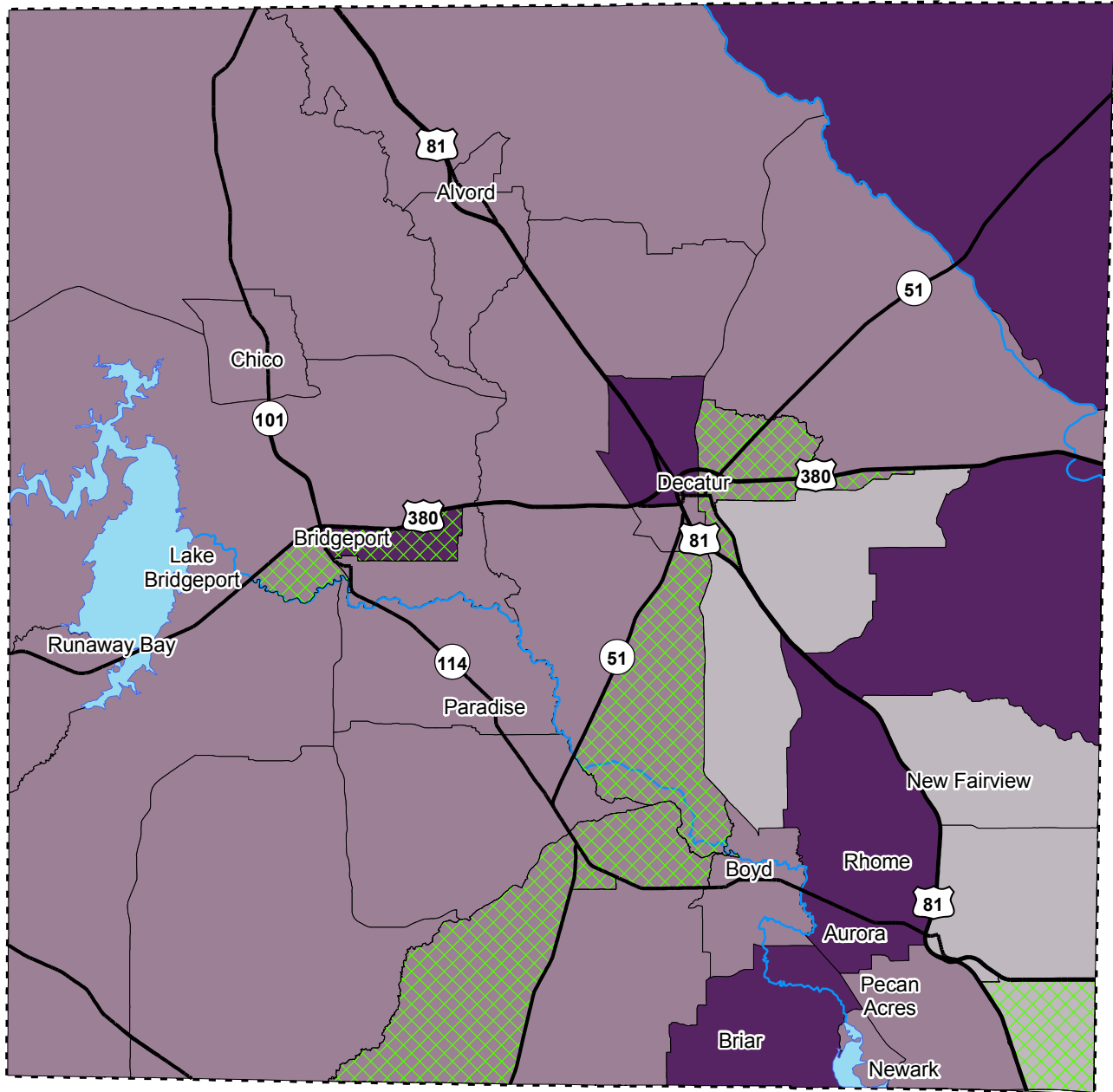
develop a mapping tool to identify locations where transit-dependent individuals may live; and identifying existing public transportation providers. The people-based research included reaching out to communities, organizations, and individuals to obtain feedback about the existing public transportation 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 have 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.

Wise County Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)



0 2.5 5 Miles

N

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
Council of Governments

In Wise 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 percentages. These areas are mostly in the rural eastern part of the county, with block groups also located along the US 380 and SH 51 corridors in Decatur and south of US 380 in Bridgeport. Except for Chico, all census block groups with two variables above the regional percentage have a higher percentage of persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities. Chico has a higher percentage of persons below the poverty line and persons with disabilities. All areas with a single variable above the regional percentage have a higher percentage of persons with disabilities. There are no census block groups with all three variables below the regional percentages. Zero car households above the regional percentage are located south of US 380 in Bridgeport, along the SH 51 and US 380 corridors near Decatur, and the rural southeast corner of Wise County.

Additional Demographic and Commuter Information

Wise County continues to experience a steady amount of growth. According to the American Community Survey's 2015 5-year estimates, since the 2010 Census, Wise County's U.S. Census' population has increased by 3.6%. 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 Wise County, 5.6% 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, Wise County is home to 21,000 jobs, with around 8,000 residents also employed within the county. Almost 13,000 workers commute into the county for work, while around 16,000 workers leave the county for work. Only one-quarter of Wise County employees live within 10 miles of their workplace, with the majority of commuters entering the county

from the south and southeast. The economy in Wise County is somewhat diversified, though the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction industry provides nearly 19% of the jobs in the county. Employees in the county are fairly well educated, with around 40% of workers having either some college experience or a degree.

Transportation Resources

The main public transportation provider is Texoma Area Paratransit System (TAPS), which serves the general public, including older adults and individuals with disabilities. TAPS' service is a demand response curb-to-curb service that is scheduled on an on-call basis. Currently, a majority of their trips serve older adults and individuals with disabilities. The Wise County Committee on Aging also provides limited transportation to older adults in the county. The Fort Worth Transportation Authority (FWTA) and Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) operate four commuter vanpools that originate in the county.

See Appendix B4, 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 Wise County took place at Decatur Civic Center in Decatur on January 19, 2017. 86 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 meeting. A total of 19 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.

Attendees identified that additional capacity is needed for essential transit trips. These include trips to dialysis in Wise County and doctor's appointments in Wise County, Tarrant County and Denton County. There is also a need to provide additional transportation to work opportunities. Public transportation providers and school districts noted that it has been challenging to recruit and retain drivers. The most recent challenge is the Department of Transportation's (DOT) new standards to obtain or renew a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). Local workforce centers may be able to help prepare drivers looking to obtain or renew their CDL. Additionally, better information on how to access and use transit needed. The public needs more information about how to access the service, the impact of no shows and cancellations on service, and how to book a trip when a personal attendant is needed.

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.

Wise County residents submitted two responses to the poll. The ages of the respondents were 42 and 70. Both respondents drive themselves for their transportation needs, and have not missed any trips. One of the respondents is interested in seeing local bus service in Wise County.

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.

Wise County Prioritized Strategies

Wise Strategy 1 Improve access to:

1. Dialysis appointments
2. Out-of-county medical appointments, particularly in Tarrant County and Denton County
3. Medical facilities in the evenings and early mornings

Wise Strategy 2 Develop partnerships with non-profits, employers, medical facilities, and other partners to improve access to local and regional destinations

Wise Strategy 3 Explore partnerships to provide additional transportation for needs other than medical or work

Wise Strategy 4 Continue to conduct targeted marketing to local agencies about existing transportation resources

Wise Strategy 5 Conduct travel training or train-the-trainer that covers topics such as:

1. Available transit services
2. How to schedule a trip
3. Cost
4. Filing a complaint
5. Impact of no shows and cancellations
6. Policies for attendants and multiple riders

Wise Strategy 6 Advocate for transit agencies to integrate funding sources to maximize efficiency and increase the availability of affordable public transportation

Wise Strategy 7 Establish consistent and effective driver recruitment and retention programs for public

transportation services to address difficulties in retaining drivers in Wise County

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

Wise Strategy 9 Contract with local agencies with a language program to provide translated transit info (over the phone, online, print, etc.)

Regional Strategies for Coordinated Public Transportation

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