

# PALO PINTO & PARKER COUNTIES

### 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. 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 Palo Pinto County and Parker 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 Palo Pinto County and Parker 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,

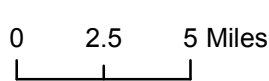
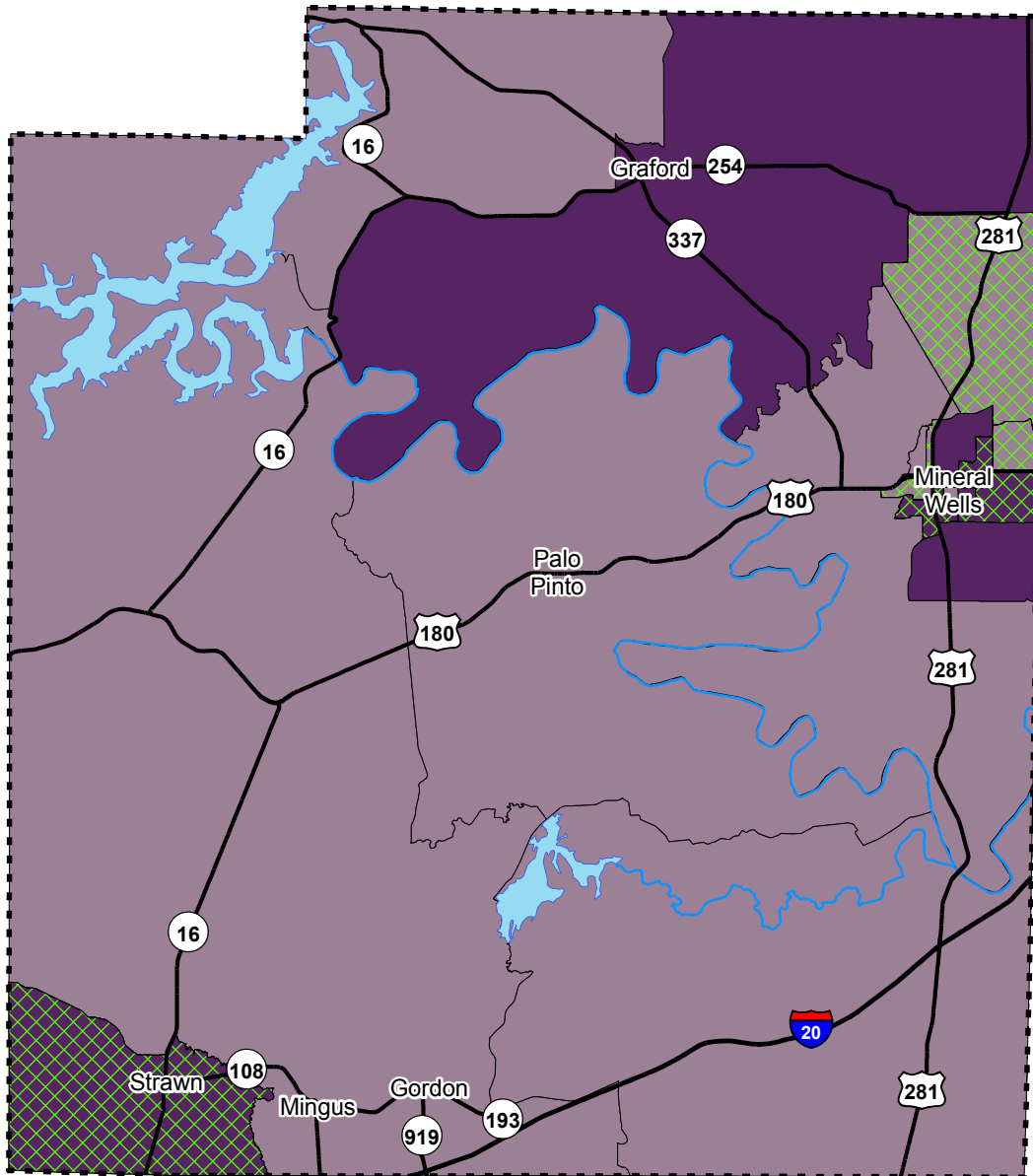
and analyzing Census data; using Census data to develop a mapping tool to identify locations where transit-dependent individuals may live; and identifying existing public transportation providers. The people-based research included reaching out to communities, organizations, and individuals to obtain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

# Palo Pinto 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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In Palo Pinto 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 along US 180 in Mineral Wells, along SH 16 in Strawn, and along SH 337 and SH 254 in Graford. The remainder of the county's census block groups have two variables above the regional percentage. All but one of the census block groups in Mineral Wells is higher than the regional percentage in persons below the poverty line and persons with disabilities. The remainder of the county is higher than the regional percentage in persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities. Zero car households above the regional percentage are located near Strawn, along US 180 in Mineral Wells, and along US 281 north of Mineral Wells.

In Parker 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 along the SH 199 corridor near Reno and Springtown, north of Weatherford along SH 51, and the southwest corner of the county. The vast majority of block groups with two variables above the regional percentage contain a higher percentage of persons age 65 and over and persons with disabilities. One census block group east of Weatherford has a higher percentage of persons below the poverty line and persons with disabilities, while the census block group north of Hudson Oaks has a higher percentage of persons age 65 and older and persons below the poverty line. Along I20 near Aledo and Willow Park, north of US 180 in Mineral Wells and western Weatherford, and east of SH 51 in Springtown, the only variable above the regional percentage is persons with disabilities. Hudson Oaks and the rural area east of SH 171 contain only a higher percentage of persons age 65 and over. Annetta has the only block group where all three variables are at or below the regional percentage. Zero car households above the regional percentage are predominately located on the edge of Parker County, including west of Horseshoe Bend, Mineral Wells, the SH 199 corridor

in Springtown, and central Weatherford.

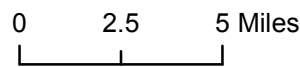
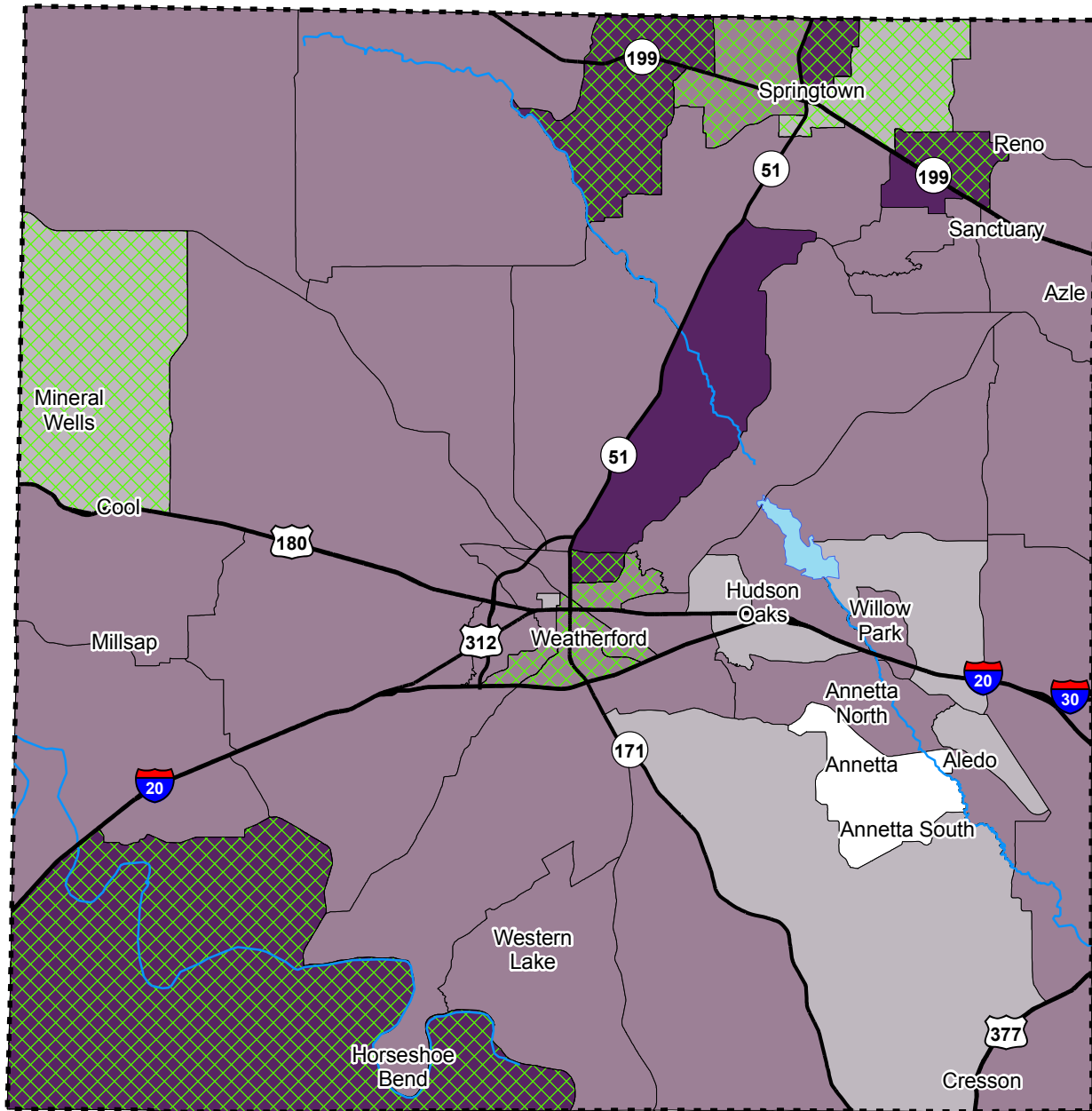
### **Additional Demographic and Commuter Information**

According to the American Community Survey's 2015 5-year estimates, since the 2010 Census, Palo Pinto County's population has decreased by 0.7% while Parker County's population has increased by 3.8%. In comparison, the 16-county region has grown 6.3% in that same time period. Public transportation needs will change as the population changes. Within Palo Pinto County and Parker County, 6.8% and 2.8% of residents, respectively, 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, Palo Pinto County is home to around 7,000 jobs, with about 3,300 employees residing within the county. Around 3,600 workers commute into the county, while nearly 6,000 leave the county for work each day. Around 40% of Palo Pinto County employees work within 10 miles of their home, with the vast majority of commuters into the county entering from the east. The economy is somewhat diverse, with the retail trade industry providing around 17% of the jobs in the county. Workers in the county are fairly well educated, with around 40% having either some college experience or a degree.

According to the same set of data, Parker County is home to approximately 32,000 jobs, with about 13,000 of those employees residing within the county. Almost 19,000 commuters travel into Parker County for work, while around 36,000 commute out of the county to access their jobs. Around one-third of Parker County workers live within ten miles of their jobs. The majority of commuters into the county enter from the east. The economy of Parker County is somewhat diverse, with four industries, including mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction; manufacturing; retail trade; and educational services providing approximately 45% of jobs. The county's workforce is fairly

# Parker County Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)



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well educated, with around 40% of employees having either some college experience or a degree.

## **Transportation Resources**

The main public transportation provider is Public Transit Services (PTS). They serve the general public as well as older adults and individuals with disabilities in Palo Pinto County and Parker County. Services include demand response curb-to-curb service on a call-in basis, deviated routes with generalized schedule, and a weekly dialysis clinic route. PTS provides Medicaid transportation services and medical transportation on a non-emergency basis. The Parker County Committee on Aging also provides some transportation to older adults in Parker County. The Fort Worth Transportation Authority (FWTA) also operates vanpools in Parker County, with 12 vanpools originating 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 joint public meeting for Palo Pinto County and Parker County took place at the Weatherford Library in Weatherford on February 21, 2017. 137 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 18 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.

Comments and discussion during the outreach meeting identified that additional capacity is necessary to improve access to mental health appointments, social service appointments, medical appointments, job training, and job opportunities. For existing service, attendees noted that wait times can be lengthy. A lack of coordination was also identified as a problem. Increasing coordination/centralization were mentioned as important in order to increase the efficiency of transit service. While attendees were aware of PTS, the main public transportation provider for Palo Pinto County and Parker County, not everyone understood how to access their transit service.

## **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.

Parker County residents submitted five responses to the transportation poll. The average age of respondents is 59, with the youngest 24 and oldest 73. Four of the five respondents said they drive themselves and three respondents said they get a ride with friends or family members for their transportation needs. None of the respondents missed any trips in their last six months, though three responded they would be interested in local bus service and two cited interest in commuter bus service.

No poll responses were received from Palo Pinto County.

## **HOW TO USE THE PLAN**

The strategies below identify ways to address the most important public transportation needs stake-

holders 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.

### Palo Pinto County and Parker County Prioritized Strategies

**Strategy 1** Improve access to:

1. Mental health appointments
2. Social service appointments
3. Medical appointments
4. Job training and job opportunities

**Strategy 2** Improve the ride and wait times on transit services to increase the feasibility and acceptability of transit for everyday trips

**Strategy 3** Create and maintain a coordinating committee to discuss ongoing transportation needs

**Strategy 4** Explore partnerships with local employers, medical centers, cities, and other agencies to fund additional transit services

**Strategy 5** Explore partnerships to increase the affordability of fares for those most in need

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

**Strategy 7** Conduct targeted marketing to local agencies about existing transportation resources

**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 Palo Pinto County and Parker 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 Palo Pinto County and Parker County, please see Appendix C-Palo Pinto and Parker, 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 Palo Pinto County and Parker 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.

