

**Access North Texas
 Combined Meeting for Parker County and Palo Pinto County
 February 21, 2017
 Weatherford, Texas**

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1. Meeting Summary

a. Welcome

Kelli Schlicher from the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the Parker County and Palo Pinto County meeting. Ms. Schlicher also announced that Mike Hensley with the North Central Texas Area Agency on Aging (AAA) would be hosting a public hearing after her presentation. The AAA public meeting was an opportunity for residents and advocates to share current and future needs for older adults and individuals with disabilities in addition to transportation.

b. Introduction to Access North Texas

Ms. Schlicher provided a [short presentation](#) and covered the following material:

- An overview of NCTCOG
- What Access North Texas is and is not
- The general timeline of the plan update
- A summary of the 2013 plan

c. Interactive Questions and Discussion

The attendees answered several interactive polling questions and participated in open conversation about the public transportation needs and challenges in Parker County and Palo Pinto County. The polling questions and discussion are summarized below.

With the agency you work for, what is the highest day-to-day transportation need?

44% of respondents indicated that the highest day-to-day transportation need for their agency is medical trips, while 25% specified that work-related trips is their highest transportation need. Medical transportation for veterans, older adults, for hospitals, and for mental health appointments were identified as high needs. Regarding work trips, it was noted that a lack of transportation affects job prospects. Additionally, access to grocery stores and other services (such as counseling) can be hampered because of a lack of access to transportation.

Regarding public transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, low-income individuals, etc., what is your primary area of concern?

30% of respondents indicated that their primary area of concern was funding new services, and an additional 30% specified that increasing coordination between agencies was their primary area of concern. One possible new service mentioned was transportation access to extracurricular activities for the youth of the community. A lack of coordination was identified as a problem. Increasing coordination/centralization were mentioned as important in order to increase efficiency. When it comes to enhancing the user's experience, it was mentioned that many dialysis patients using transportation find their trip back home difficult. On the ride home on transit after their treatment, they might experience extended waiting times at other dialysis centers (as other riders are picked up) and may not have assistance to get off the bus once they arrive at their final destination. It was mentioned that a lack of transportation was impacting some people needing trips to the Housing Authority, with some clients missing appointments. Others might have to pay for transportation (which some can't afford), and sometimes they might have to wait for an extended period of time for transit to pick them up after their appointments.

What funding approach will have the biggest impact on improving access to transit?

35% of attendees answered that a focus on getting additional federal or state investment in transit would have the biggest impact, while 29% chose a focus on integrating funding sources from multiple programs (Aging, Workforce, Medicaid, etc.), and an additional 29% chose a focus on increasing user choice. Federal and state investment were mentioned as more likely to provide funds than local sources. Integrating funding sources was mentioned as important in order to obtain as much benefit as possible out of what is currently available. Increasing the user's choice was mentioned as imperative because currently there are very limited transportation choices (including limited service time frames). More funding for public transit would provide more opportunities. Currently, when community members need to go for unplanned medical care, they might end up using ambulance services (which is costly) because of a lack of alternative transportation options. Similarly, many patients who are discharged from hospitals have no ride back home. Many times, hospitals might pay for a taxi ride for them, which would be more affordable than an overnight stay at the hospital. However, in Mineral Wells, there are no taxi options available after 5 PM on weekdays or on the weekends to bring patients who have been discharged from a hospital back home. The need to learn about transportation network companies (TNCs like Uber and Lyft) latest efforts to serve people with special needs (including people with disabilities and older adults) was also mentioned.

What method could improve the awareness of available services?

33% of respondent indicated that targeted marketing to local agencies could improve awareness, while an additional 33% specified "other" in their answer. 27% answered that a public marketing campaign could improve the awareness of available services. It was noted that there aren't many options currently available, and many people might know what's available already. There is a small pool of transportation options and limited service hours. More focus should be placed on service expansion than increasing awareness of available services.

What about coordination between agencies is the biggest barrier for you?

36% of respondents indicated that identifying appropriate contacts was the biggest barrier to coordination, while 29% indicated that knowing where to start was the biggest barrier. Participants asked if other agencies provided transportation within Parker and Palo Pinto Counties. NCTCOG staff asked attendees to think more broadly about coordination rather than just between transit agencies. For example, an agency in need of transportation may coordinate with 10 other local agencies to help fund additional transit services (i.e. an additional hour of service in the evenings to accommodate trips home from work). Regarding identifying appropriate contacts, local agencies and the private sector could coordinate to formulate a system to effectively identify and contact other agencies. An individual who works with a hospital in Mineral Wells picked knowing where to start because building a network of appropriate social contacts within other agencies and churches is key in order to get people to their destinations. In a smaller town like Mineral Wells, hospitals can be a hub for coordination.

Another agency noted that they've had transportation on their referral list for a couple years, but only some clients have used the service. The attendee was unsure if this is because people aren't fully aware of the available transit service or if they're unsure of how to actually use it. At their Weatherford clinic (more so than in Mineral Wells), riders find the time required between pick-up and drop-off can be inconvenient for quick trips because they have to wait (typically one hour) for their return trip.

A participant suggested one way to provide 24-hour transit coverage is for agencies to cover different shifts. Getting to appointments (such as a counselor) that aren't covered by Medicaid transportation can be difficult. Additionally, for Medicaid trips, individuals are not able to take other passengers (such as additional children).

What is the best way to enhance the user's experience?

42% of attendees voted for additional assistance provided by the driver or personal attendant, while 33% voted for better information about how to use transit. Regarding additional assistance, a couple other attendees noted their concerns about the 5-minute window (particularly in inclement weather). The rider may wait over an hour for the bus to arrive and then only have 5 minutes to board upon its arrival. If the rider misses the 5 minute window, they have to wait even longer. They noted a potential solution could be the driver getting off the bus to greet the rider. A participant mentioned that older adults and individuals with disabilities overall need more assistance. Showing and teaching them how to use public transit is better than just providing information.

Another attendee mentioned that the meeting's conversation about transit has been population-specific (for older adults and people with disabilities). Moving forward, the transit system should be inclusive of all people and right-sized to the community's density and transit needs.

Which technology advances are most likely to help improve transportation options for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income individuals in the next five years?

38% of attendees believed that transportation network companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft are most likely to help improve transportation options. Conversely, another 31% of attendees indicated that most people wouldn't access these options. One attendee thought the addition of TNCs would provide another transportation option for Parker and Palo Pinto Counties. A participant noted that these populations may not have or know how to utilize the technology necessary to access these services. However, it could be possible for them to access the services through their caretakers, caseworkers, and social service providers. It is important to ensure the information within any technology resource is maintained with up-to-date details. The cost of private transit service may be an additional barrier for people with low incomes. From a social worker's perspective at a Mineral Wells hospital, the trouble is finding the transportation service more so than finding the funds to pay for patient trips.

d. Priorities & Solutions

In closing, Ms. Schlicher asked participants to rank the priorities (through a dot exercise) that were most important to them or indicate if new priorities have since arisen for Parker and Palo Pinto counties.

Participants ranked priorities for Parker County in the following order:

1. Pilot program of fixed route or trolley service in areas with potentially high ridership. (Parker County)
2. Develop centralized access to information about public transportation options in the county and surrounding area through a one call one click project coordinated among regional partners. (Parker County)
3. Acquire vehicles to better match vehicle size to type of service provided and evaluate the need for every vehicle in a provider's fleet to be ADA accessible. (Parker County)
4. Identify and serve regional connections to Tarrant County and Wise County. (Parker County)
5. Grow service in the northeast corner of the county including Springtown (coordinate with existing providers. (Parker County)
6. Create and maintain a county coordinating committee to focus on ongoing transportation needs. (Parker County)
7. Coordinate existing services in the northeast Parker County and Azle area. (Parker County)

Participants ranked priorities for Palo Pinto County in the following order:

1. Acquire vehicles to better match vehicle size to type of service provided in order to more effectively use resources by using smaller vehicles for transporting one or two riders at a time. (Palo Pinto County)
2. Create and maintain a county coordinating committee to focus on ongoing transportation needs. (Palo Pinto County)
3. Improve the customer experience and ability to partner with funding agencies, including fare card improvements. (Palo Pinto County)

4. Identify connections to regional transit services and improve access to destinations outside the county including Weatherford and Tarrant County. (Palo Pinto County).
5. Expand local and regional job access. (Palo Pinto County)
6. Increase outreach and education about transit services for transportation disadvantaged populations in the county, especially in the southwest corner. (Palo Pinto County)
7. Increase awareness of available transit services and partnership opportunities. (Palo Pinto County)

e. Next Steps

A point-person committee for Parker County and Palo Pinto County will soon be developed. The committee will discuss and further refine transportation needs and solutions. Agencies or individuals interested in participating should contact Ms. Schlicher.

The final plan is slated for fall 2017 and implementation will begin in early 2018. The final plan will include prioritized solutions will improve the coordination and availability of public transportation for the 16-county region.

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 Sarah Chadderdon, AICP, Principal Transportation Planner, North Central Texas Council of Governments; (817) 695-9180, schadderdon@nctcog.org

2. Attendee List

Advocate: Kyle Miller, Woody Willhite, and Teresa Willhite
 Center of Hope: Jana Marbut-Ray
 City of Weatherford: Terry Hughes
 Graham: Kent Pettus
 Lena Pope: Kristen McNeill
 Mineral Wells ISD: Michaela Rothe, Parisa Lerma
 North Central Texas Area Agency on Aging: Mike Hensley
 North Central Texas Council of Governments: Sarah Chadderdon, Kelli Schlicher, Karina Maldonado, Chris Reed
 Outreach Health Services - Palo Pinto County WIC: Tonya Fry
 Palo Pinto General Hospital: Eric Werne
 Parker County: Judge Mark Riley, Joel Kertok
 Pecan Valley Centers for Behavioral and Developmental Healthcare: Janice Byrd
 Public Transit Services: Terry Roberson
 Weatherford Housing Authority: Rosie Mucino
 Weatherford ISD: Danny Miller
 Weatherford Regional Medical Center: Carolyn Hamilton