

**Access North Texas  
Rockwall County Meeting  
March 21, 2017  
Rockwall, Texas**

1. Meeting Summary.....	p.1
a. Welcome.....	p.1
b. Introduction to Access North Texas.....	p.1
c. Interactive Questions & Discussion.....	p.1
d. Priorities & Solutions.....	p.4
e. Next Steps.....	p.4
2. Attendee List.....	p.4

**1. Meeting Summary**

**a. Welcome**

Kelli Schlicher from the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the Rockwall County meeting.

**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 Rockwall County. The polling questions and discussion are summarized below.

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

36% of respondents indicated that the highest day-to-day transportation need for their agency is medical trips, while 29% specified that work trips are their highest transportation need. A participant noted that there is an intensive daily transportation need to mental illness clinics, as well as a need to visit doctors in Rockwall. A rider mentioned that getting transportation to medical appointments improves their quality of life. An attendee mentioned that low-income individuals are relying on friends and neighbors to get rides to their destinations, but this is not always a consistent way to get around. Someone representing the YMCA in Rockwall voiced a concern for older adults who no longer drive, but that need access to the YMCA for exercise and socialization. Lastly, a rider mentioned that grocery shopping was also a need.

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

39% of respondents indicated that their primary area of concern was improving awareness of available transportation services, while 22% specified that increasing coordination between agencies was their primary area of concern. A participant explained that increased coordination between agencies is necessary. The challenge is getting Rockwall County residents to Texas Department of Assistive and

Rehabilitative Services (DARS) in Dallas in order to improve skills to return to work. Individuals are instructed to go to Dallas for an initial evaluation, but there's not a transportation option to get there. Royse City ISD is located in Rockwall County, Hunt County, and Collin County. Rockwall is the closest need for employment opportunities, but the high school is in Hunt County. Better communication between agencies is needed so that students can seek the job opportunities. Increased coordination between STAR Transit and residential facilities to schedule group trips for grocery and doctor trips could increase efficiency.

A participant mentioned that getting to doctor's appointments and the grocery store are her primary concerns. Another rider noted that STAR Transit enables her travel for her daily needs. Without this transit service, she wouldn't have a way to get around. An attendee identified that there are some time and day restrictions for scheduling out of county medical trips. This could be tricky for riders if they're unable to line up their medical appointments on the appropriate day with transportation.

Regarding enhancing the user's experience, it would be helpful if a group of riders could schedule a coordinated trip to and from the same location. For example, a group of residents may want to ride together to the grocery store together.

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

39% of attendees answered that a focus on integrating funding sources (Aging, Workforce, Medicaid, etc.) would have the biggest impact on improving access to transit, while 28% answered that focusing on getting additional local government investment in transit would have the biggest impact. STAR Transit is a great example of an agency that utilizes Medicaid, Aging and traditional transportation funding, enabling them to do more with less. Regarding local government investment, a Rockwall County resident mentioned that they have seen impacts on the level of service when the local government decreased the annual funds contributed to STAR Transit. Additionally, if STAR Transit's level of service is decreased due to less local funding, other transportation options need to be available.

### **What method could improve the awareness of available services?**

56% of respondents indicated that a public marketing campaign is the best method to improve awareness, while 31% answered that targeted marketing to local agencies would be the best method. A participant had a suggestion that marketing materials should be available at highly popular and potentially highly popular locations frequented by riders. Also, a water bill insert could raise awareness about available transit services, particularly for those individuals who do not drive. Another attendee mentioned that targeted marketing to local agencies working with potential clients would be the best avenue because they already have an existing relationship with their clients. Materials provided in another language, namely Spanish, would be helpful for Rockwall County Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clients.

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

43% of respondents indicated that identifying the appropriate contacts is the biggest barrier to coordination, while 21% indicated that knowing where to start and developing agreements between agencies were equal barriers to coordination.

Knowing where to start would help the client find information. It is important to identify who is responsible for transportation in Rockwall County. Rockwall County has a small geography, so there's great potential for collaboration. Cities can participate and contribute through the Rockwall County Road Consortium to express their unique transportation needs.

An attendee identified a concern with potential legislative barriers for cities working with transit agencies. Currently, there aren't any legislative barriers to coordinating or working with DART. Typically, the biggest issue is that cities don't want to commit their sales tax to become a DART member. However, there are other ways to contract with DART or connect to DART without committing sales tax. If there is an additional need within a community for transit services, city officials could reach out to DART or STAR Transit to learn about what's possible.

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

36% of attendees voted for better information on how to use transit, while 27% voted for personal instruction on the phone or in person. Currently, residents may not know what transportation services are available. Personal instruction over phone or in person was preferred because automated systems can be a barrier for some individuals receiving the information they need.

**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?**

29% of attendees believed that web or smartphone apps with information on multiple providers is most likely to help improve transportation options. 18% of attendees believed that transportation network companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft and driverless cars, buses or shuttles were most likely to help improve transportation options. Conversely, another 18% of attendees indicated that most people wouldn't access these options because technology is not economically accessible for many of the individuals they work with on a regular basis. Regarding web and smartphone apps, more older adults are utilizing this technology each day. An attendee noted that females may not be as comfortable utilizing TNCs, particularly since it's with someone they've never met before in their personal vehicle. Some clients may be intimidated by using public transit with multiple people, multiple stops and a changing environment. For those riders, TNCs could be a good fit because it's a personal trip to their end destination and it's potentially less stressful. It's also important to see what the market's doing. Ford is looking at the future of transportation and changing how they do business and adapting how driverless cars may be used by transit agencies in the future.

**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 Rockwall County.

Participants ranked priorities in the following order:

1. Increase transportation options for seniors, low-income residents, and people with disabilities, including increased daytime, evening, and weekend service to improve access to community destinations.

2. Explore partnerships to increase the affordability of fares for those most in need.
3. Improve public awareness of existing and new public transportation services.
4. Identify, plan for and provide transportation options for access to regional employment opportunities.
5. Improve condition and availability of sidewalks and crosswalks in order to facilitate access to transit.
6. Explore needs for transportation service to identified employment clusters within Rockwall County.

**e. Next Steps**

A point-person committee for Rockwall 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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**2. Attendee List**

Advocate: Willie Strange, Pricilla Anderson, Buz Eason, Judi Johnson, Bennie Moore, Emily Shrum, Rustie Petty  
 City of Fate: Justin Weiss  
 City of Rockwall: Joey Boyd  
 Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART): Kendra Bullard  
 Evergreen Congregate Center: Tonya Carpenter  
 J.E.R Chilton YMCA at Rockwall: Marilyn King  
 Lakes Regional Community: Kindell Weatherford  
 North Central Texas Council of Governments: Sarah Chadderdon, Kelli Schlicher, Edgar Hernandez, Chris Reed, Jesse Brown  
 Rockwall Area Chamber of Commerce: Dana Macalik  
 Rockwall County Indigent Health: Donna Mussotter  
 Rockwall Housing: Tony Rios  
 Rockwall Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Maggie Lozano  
 Royce City ISD: Dorcas Schale, Debi Wood  
 STAR Transit: Omega Hawkins, Tommy Henricks, Kim Britton  
 Texas Department of Transportation: Sunil John