

Community Outreach and Public Involvement Process

Survey Outreach

Information was gathered using a multi-pronged approach. First, stakeholders in the Panhandle region were identified using the Regional Transportation Advisory Group's (RTAG) network of contacts and the United Way 2-1-1 Resource Directory. In all, 221 organizations were identified in the Panhandle region as either likely to provide or need transportation services. Types of organizations contacted include transit agencies, health and human service agencies, churches, medical- and patient-support nonprofit organizations, senior citizen centers, county and city officials, for-profit and non-profit assisted living and nursing care centers and community organizations.

Initial contact was made with an introductory letter from the RTAG accompanied by a short survey that was developed by the consultant team and based upon research conducted by the Transportation Cooperation Research Project (TCRP) and the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). The survey sought to establish the type of agency, service area, client type and size, transportation needs (including number, type, and scheduled trips and unmet trips), current method of meeting transportation needs, and general interest in coordination strategies. The survey was made available in hard-copy and on-line in order to encourage a higher response rate. The surveys, along with an introductory letter from the Regional Transportation Advisory Group, were mailed and emailed on Wednesday, April 26, 2006. To solicit more responses, a reminder postcard and email message was sent on Tuesday, May 16th to non-responsive agencies. Fifty-four responses (a 24% response rate) had been collected when short survey was closed on May 31st.

Summary Survey Results

The Panhandle Transportation Coordination Survey consisted of 42 questions divided into four parts. Part I provides contact information. Part II defines service characteristics. Part III details transportation issues. Part IV explores receptivity to coordination strategies. The survey was sent to 221 agencies and 52 agencies responded, yielding a 25 percent response rate. Given that, the results are statistically significant however, it is cautioned that the results be conservatively extrapolated.

Part I consisted of Questions 1 to 11 and provided respondent contact information. For Panhandle Community Services and Texas Workforce Commission, survey invitations were sent to and replies were received from multiple offices of these agencies in order to gain an understanding of local/county level concerns and perspectives. (The following summary detail does not address these questions. See Appendix X: Panhandle Transportation Coordination Survey Respondents for list of responding agencies.)

Part II consisted of Questions 12 to 17 and provided information about the responding organization - specifically type of organization, service area, type of client served and other agencies served.

- Most of the respondents identified themselves as representing agencies that are private, nonprofit transportation (15 percent) or federal or state human service agencies (21 percent). Organization types that had very low representation include for-profit transportation company (0 responses) and municipal and county governments (2 responses). Consequently, the survey will be highly reflective of only a segment of the target market. (Note: The lack of survey response by some groups led the survey team to follow-up with phone calls to county judge and city manager offices. The result of this follow-up work is summarized in a later section.)
- The survey reflects service areas that touch each of the Panhandle's 26 counties. This is due, in part, to response from PCS which serves the entire region and federal and state agencies which also have regional responsibilities. Counties that has minimal representation other than that provided by regional service providers (0 or 1 agency responding) include Armstrong, Brisco, Castro, Hemphill and Parmer counties. Of these, Brisco, Castro and Parmer counties may have a higher potential transit needs as measured by the Transit Needs Index. (See Chapter X.) Future iterations of coordination plan may concentrate more on learning about transit needs in this region through more intensive outreach to these areas.
- Type of client that was most frequently served was elderly and/or disabled (40 percent). Fourteen respondents indicated that they serve other agencies and the one most frequently cited was the Health and Human Services Commission. Other agencies mentioned include Child Protective Services and law enforcement agencies.

Part III: Questions 18 to 34 provide transportation-related information: travel patterns, access to transportation services, trip needs, type of service provided. (Note: In the following detailed results, Questions 23: What Days is Service Impossible to Obtain and

Question 24: What Days is Service Difficult to Obtain has been combined since the responses were virtually identical. Likewise, Question 25: What Time is Service Impossible to Obtain and Question 26: What Time is Service Difficult to Obtain have been combined.)

- **Access to Transportation Services:** Access to transportation is most difficult on weekends and between the hours of 5:00 pm and 12:00 midnight. Forty-one percent of respondents indicated that they could access transportation services seven days a week and a number indicated that they had no difficulty delivering trips, no matter what the time. These respondents were most frequently assisted living or nursing homes with access to their own transportation resources.
- **Trip Needs:** Sixty percent of respondents indicated transportation prevented their clients from receiving services, at least sometimes. Sources of the difficulty most commonly cited included the need for trips with less than 24-hours notification and for work trips located outside service areas. Of those agencies that responded to this question, most reported ten or fewer trips unmet. The agency reporting the highest level of unmet trips is the Panhandle Health and Human Services Commission (400 trips/month). Large transit providers indicated very few missed trips. The discrepancy between these two responses may reflect that missed trips are occurring outside of current operating hours. Conversely, they may also represent riders choosing to forego trips because they are unable to meet the 24-hour notification requirement.
- **Type of Transit Service Needed:** Most respondents indicated that they concentrate on serving the elderly and disabled population. Consequently, medical and shopping/personal trips rank high the types of trips needed. Work- and education-related trips were also frequently cited.
- **Type of Transit Service Provided:** Thirty-one percent indicated that they do not provide transportation; many of these were small assisted living or nursing centers or social service agencies that serve the very-low income and homeless populations. However, the Department of State Health Services also responded that they do not provide or arrange for transportation. Many agencies indicated that they arrange for transportation. The largest of these were state agencies: the Health and Human Services Commission and the Department of Rehabilitative Services. Direct providers include Amarillo City Transit, Panhandle Community Service, Amarillo YMCA, and a number of assisted living and nursing center. Other providers noted include Greyhound, Volunteers (Moore County Senior Center and Harrington Cancer Center), and Medicaid.
- **Number of Trips Provided:** Almost 40 percent of the organizations provided less than 10 trips per month. These included the smaller social service agencies and some assisted living and nursing centers. Large transit-focused organizations deliver over 10,000 trips per month.

Part IV: Questions 35 to 42 were directed to organizations that directly provide or arrange for transit services and were focused on issues of transit coordination.

Greatest Challenges to Providing Transportation: Lack of funding, rural service delivery area and a lack of awareness of transportation options were listed as the most significant challenges faced in providing service.

Interest in Coordination: Out of those organizations that do provide service, more organization indicated that they were “Not Interested” in pursuing any coordination strategy. The strategy that solicited the most interest was “Modifying Fixed Routes” followed by “Working Together to Purchase Service.” Future coordination workshops may choose to address these issues with these organizations. Moreover, future coordination planning efforts may need to more fully explore the source of resistance to coordinating resources and to inform agencies about transit coordination.