

**Interim Status Report on Coordination of Public Transportation
to TxDOT-PTN Division**

**From the Houston-Galveston Area Council
For the 13 County Gulf Coast Planning Region**

July 2006



Background

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) 13-County Region is located on the upper Texas Gulf Coast, encompasses 12,500 square miles, 132 cities and is home to 5.4 Million residents. By 2020, the region is projected to grow to a population of more than 8 Million. Included within the H-GAC region is the 8-county Transportation Management Area (TMA) for air quality non-attainment, which consists of Harris and the seven (7) surrounding adjacent counties. In layman's terms the 8-county TMA is required to meet EPA and TCEQ goals for air quality improvements. These 8 counties therefore are eligible to receive Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) funding, for which the H-GAC Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Transportation Policy Council (TPC) is responsible for programming in the semi-annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Through a 2004 Presidential Executive Order on Human Service Transportation Coordination, and Texas Legislature (HB 3588), coordination of public transportation services are mandated on a regional and statewide level, with the core building blocks of coordination being laid at the local level. More important than federal and state mandates, is that transportation coordination is necessary to deliver transportation services to the people that need it most, in a cost effective manner.

The 13 County Gulf Coast Planning Region, and includes the following diverse counties, which include both heavily urbanized, and extremely rural communities:

Austin	Liberty
Brazoria	Matagorda
Chambers	Montgomery
Colorado	Walker
Fort Bend	Waller
Galveston	Wharton
Harris	

Enhancing Public Transportation Services through Coordination

The counties and communities within the H-GAC region have long-recognized the need for enhanced public transportation services, and are using this opportunity to not only create "a plan for coordination", but also to create a framework for improving real world service delivery to citizens of the region by addressing gaps in service, and the general lack of connectivity within the region. In order to fully assess coordination opportunities and identify unmet transportation needs of our diverse population, a comprehensive analysis of the region's transit and social service providers operating characteristics and perceived needs, balanced against a demographic profile of each county in terms of its overall population size and density (persons per square mile), geographic scale, demographics (age, income, % of persons with disabilities). However, despite the best in ridership forecasts models, there are also real world "barriers" to coordination that impact the ability for services to be coordinated. For these reasons it was necessary for H-

GAC to formally move forward with a formal planning process, to address the plan goals, barriers, and opportunities that exist for coordination.

Moving Forward with a Project Team

In April 2006, a selection committee from the 13 County Gulf Coast Planning Region, which is overseen by the Houston-Galveston Area Council, selected the following Project Team through a public procurement process to conduct a comprehensive public transportation coordination study of the region:

The Goodman Corporation (Prime)
 Nelson Nygaard & Associates (Subcontractor)
 Texas Southern University (Subcontractor)

Subsequently to selection by the committee a formal contract between the consultant team and the H-GAC Board of Directors was executed.

Forming a Project Steering Committee

Subsequent to selecting a consultant, the H-GAC Board of Directors expanded the membership of the selection committee, to include an even more diverse group to represent the various interested parties and stakeholders throughout the 13 County region. The Board formally selected the following persons, which represent transit providers, social service agencies, local and county governments, non-profits, for profit entities, the Texas Department of Transportation (5 districts), transportation management organizations, advocacy groups and the council of governments workforce and area agency on aging departments.

Steering Committee Representation

	Members	County(s) Represented in H-GAC Region
Transportation Providers		
Public		
Urban – METRO	Mary Ann Dendor, Wanda Brandon *	Harris
Harris County Coordinated Transportation	Vernon Chambers	Outside METRO service area
Small Urban and Rural	Michael Worthy	Galveston
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Island Transit, • The District-Brazos Transit • Connect Transit 	Lyle Nelson James Hollis	Liberty, Montgomery, Walker Brazoria, Galveston
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Valley Transit • Fort Bend Transit 	Vasteen Olier Paulette Shelton	Austin, Colorado, Waller, Wharton Fort Bend
Private		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Profit- Liberty Cab 	Rudolph H-Bruhns	Greater Houston Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Profit-Red Cross 	Martha Mays	Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, Polk, Waller, Wharton
Texas Department of Transportation		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Transportation 	Russel Armstrong Donna Shea	TxDOT Medical Transportation (South & East Texas)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Houston District 	Lucy Lapaglia	Brazoria, Ft. Bend, Galveston, Harris, Montgomery, Waller
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beaumont District 	Steve Stafford Lynn Babin	Chambers, Liberty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yoakum District 	Wanda Carter-Dyer	Austin, Colorado, Matagorda, Wharton
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryan District 	Darla Walton	Walker
Health and Human Service Agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Way • The Friendship Center • Center for Independent Living • Care for Elders 	Peggy Boice Chris Schaefer Mary Ann Vaca-Lambert * Chamane Barrow Jane Bavineaux	Harris Montgomery County senior citizens Montgomery County senior citizens Brazoria Harris
Workforce Boards	Barbara Murphy * Lucretia Hammond	H-GAC Region
Area Agency on Aging	Curtis Cooper Geraldine McCray *	Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, Wharton
Local Governments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harris County • Brazoria County • Montgomery County • Liberty County 	Rose Hernandez Gerald Roberts Steve Sumner (TCID) Kellie Buchanan	Harris County Brazoria County Montgomery County Liberty County
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Houston • City of Houston • City of Baytown • City of Conroe • City of Lake Jackson • City of Pasadena 	Alvita McKinney Jim Weston Ferni Greene-Small Julie Martineaux Gerald Roznovsky Tim Tietjens	Houston – The Mayor’s Office Houston – Adrian Garcia Baytown Conroe Lake Jackson Pasadena
Other Interested Parties		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy Groups • Bay Area Transp. Partnership • University • Customers/Users 	Glenn Gadbois Shirley Meadows James Wong Rebecca Jasso Dr. Lalita Sen Adela Porawski	Statewide Austin County City of Sugar Land S.E. Harris, Brazoria, N. Galveston Statewide North West Houston

Note: * Alternate

The Project Steering Committee has held 4 formal meetings to date (one per month), and has discussed public outreach, identification of other stakeholders, survey methods, designation of liaisons within each of the 13 counties. In addition the project steering committee has created elected 3 officers (a Chairman, and 2 Vice-Chairs), and created 2 subcommittees to address specific technical details during the course of the study, including the Subcommittee on Public Outreach, and the Subcommittee on Regional Assessment & Planning. Both of these subcommittees are tentatively scheduled to meet separately each month.

Mission Statement

“To Enhance Public Transportation Services within the 13 County Region, through Coordination, Connectivity and Cooperation”

Establishing Plan Goals

The Project Steering Committee has established the following plan goals, including:

- 1) Survey transportation providers and client to better assess the transportation needs for the 13-county area;
- 2) Identification of “barriers” to coordination that may exist
- 3) Examine ways to improve existing services through planned coordination between public transportation providers and social service providers;
- 4) Create cost effective solutions for new services (Pilot Projects)
- 5) Identify capital & operating funding sources to support ongoing operations

These goals will be met by the specific tasks that have been identified in the scope of work.

Barriers to Coordination

Although other “barriers” to transportation coordination are anticipated to arise during the survey and regional assessment phases of work, to date

- **Operating Rules:** Several client based organizations may not be able to “mix” their dpecific clients with the general public.
- **Insurance Coverage:** Several non-profits and faith based groups that own vehicles may not have adequate insurance coverage to allow others entities to utilize their vehicles.
- **Lack of Connectivity:** There is limited connectivity between the multiple public transportation providers within the region. For example, there is no one-fare payment system between providers. Additionally, there are several gaps (unserved areas altogether) that lie between provider boundaries.
- **Lack of Coordination:** In general, dialogue between existing transportation providers and social service agencies has been somewhat limited until now.
- **Lack of Funding/Other Resources:** Limited resources may preclude some entities from picking up additional riders.
- **Geography of Region:** Both the vast size (12,500 miles), and the diversity of land use (urban versus rural) is a challenge for coordination between providers.

Project Outline

The following tasks and associated subtasks provide a general outline of the major activities that are being undertaken in the Phase I portion of the project.

Task 1 – Establish Mission and Goals

Subtask 1.1 Peer Review

Subtask 1.2 Draft Goals and Objectives

Task 2 - Regional Assessment

Subtask 2.1 Review of Existing Plans

Subtask 2.2 Contact List of Client Based and Service Based Agencies

Subtask 2.3 Draft and Review Survey

Subtask 2.4 Administer Survey

Task 3 - Develop a Public Involvement Plan

Subtask 3.1 Develop Public Involvement Plan for Ongoing Participation

Subtask 3.2 Facilitate Public Meetings

Task 4 - Develop Plan for Coordination

Subtask 4.1 Identify Service Gaps and Overlaps

Subtask 4.2 Identify Barriers to Coordination

Subtask 4.3 Develop Working Pilot Projects

Subtask 4.4 Facilitate Coordination Planning Workshops

Subtask 4.5 Review Pilot Project Critiques

Task 5 – Develop Financial Plan

Subtask 5.1 Develop Status Quo Budgets

Subtask 5.2 Develop Costs

Subtask 5.3 Develop Regional Funding Allocation Methodology

Task 6 – Develop Draft Report and Presentation of Findings

Project Schedule

The table below represents the overall schedule for Phase I of the project.

Task	Description	Deliverable	Timeframe for work	Est. Completion Date(s)
0	Project Management	N/A	Ongoing	31-Oct-06
1	Mission and Goals	Concise plan goals and objectives	2 weeks	15-Apr-06
N/A	<i>1st Interim Report to TxDOT</i>	<i>Progress Report on work through June 30, 2006</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>15-Jul-06</i>
2	Regional Assessment	Census data, demographic profile & maps, survey	3 months	15-Aug-06
3	Outreach/Public Information Plan	Public Meetings, Public Info. Plan	1 month	15-Aug-06
4	Plan for Coordination	Chapter in report recommending preferred regional model(s) for coordination	1 month	15-Sep-06
5	Finance Plan	Chapter in report recommending funding resources to facilitate coordination	1.5 months	31-Sept-2006
N/A	<i>2nd Interim Status Report to TxDOT</i>	<i>Progress Report on work to through September 2006</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>01-Oct-06</i>
6	H-GAC Coordination Report	Complete final report for MPO Approval	1 month	31-Oct-06
N/A	<i>Submittal to TxDOT-PTN</i>	<i>Submit final document to TxDOT</i>	<i>1 month</i>	<i>01-Dec-06</i>

Project Progress To Date

Survey Analysis

At the direction of the Steering Committee, the project team has already made significant progress on survey related activities:

- Updated and sent out TTI Public Transportation Provider Survey to the region's providers. To date there have been seventeen responses to the TTI Survey via www.surveymonkey.com. Some highlights of the TTI survey include:
 - The majority of respondents operate demand response services, requiring 1 day advanced notice
 - The majority of respondents serve portions of Harris County
 - The majority of trips are for work/employment seekers, and medical purposes
 - 2 way communication between operators/schedulers and drivers are maintained through cellular phones
 - The extent to which most respondents already coordinate is primarily limited to joint procurement of vehicles, joint/self insurance, and shared maintenance.
 - A significant number of respondents would be open to coordinating scheduling, dispatching, driver and dispatcher training, and customer referrals.

- The biggest perceived problems or barriers that respondents have with coordination are 1) funding constraints (rules prohibiting services to non-core clients) and 2) Limited number of other service providers in the general area.
- The Team has also drafted 3 other survey instruments for distribution to the following target groups:
 - Health and human service agencies
 - Economic development/Chamber of Commerce Groups
 - Consumers

The United Way has allocated additional resources to support Just Transportation in administering the Consumer Survey and soliciting additional public input above and beyond the approved scope of work between TxDOT and H-GAC.

Demographic Analysis

The project team has already initiated work on a demographic profile of 13 county area based on U. S. Census data, which will provide as basis for creating a Transit Needs Index, which includes important characteristics such as:

- The percentage of households without automobiles
- Percentage of low income households
- Percentage of elderly
- Percentage of persons with disabilities.

Although it will not be the only determinant, the Transit Needs Index, coupled with comments from the public will help to identify specific areas of the region that are particularly underserved, and may be candidates for Pilot Projects. For example, a low-income area may need better access to employment, possibly in a “non-traditional” commute pattern (trip destinations outside of the Houston central business district). This analysis may help to identify where a potential “Job Access/Reverse Commute” Pilot Project could be successfully implemented.

FTA ITS Demonstration Program Submittal

In an effort to improve system efficiency and connectivity, the Project Team has submitted to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Division, a demonstration project request for the development of software to support a region-wide public transportation scheduling and trip planning, real-time travel information, and electronic fare payment, to be managed through a central Transportation Management Coordination Center (TMCC). This would be a technological first for the 13-County Houston-Galveston region, and would hopefully result in a more user-friendly public transportation system.

Public Outreach

The Project Team has developed a plan of action for near term public outreach, which has included:

- Selection a logo for the “*Ride The Gulf Coast*” branding for this regional planning effort
- Reserving URL: www.ridethegulfcoast.com and initiating work on project website
- Identified liaisons to work with in each of 13 counties to assist in the public outreach process
- Identification of locations for public meetings
- Creation of press releases and fliers for distribution

H-GAC and its stakeholders will hold a series of public meetings throughout the 13 county area to help generate ideas and comments from the general public. These meetings will offer all stakeholders, citizens, social service organizations, and other interested parties opportunities to play an active part in the regional planning process and discuss community public transportation needs and services. The meetings that have already been scheduled include:

Monday, July 24 Waller County 6:00 p.m.

United Way Waller Center, 531 FM 359 South, Brookshire 77423

Tuesday, July 25 Austin County 6:00 p.m.

Austin County Courthouse, One East Main Street, Bellville 77418

Wednesday, July 26 Wharton County 6:00 p.m.

Wharton Depot, 100 Sunset Street, Wharton 77488

Thursday, July 27 Colorado County 6:00 p.m.

Colorado County Service Facility, 305 Radio, Columbus 78934

Monday, July 31 Montgomery County Time TBA

The Friendship Center, 1202 Callahan Avenue, Conroe 77301

Tuesday, Aug 1 Chambers County 5:00 p.m.

City of Baytown, Pecan Room, 2407 Market Street, Baytown 77520

Tuesday, Aug 1 Harris County 10:00 a.m.

Golden Acres Center, 5001 Oak Avenue, Pasadena 77503

Wednesday, Aug 2 Fort Bend County 6:30 p.m.

University of Houston-Sugar Land, 14000 University Blvd., Sugar Land 77479

Thursday, Aug 3 Galveston County 6:00 p.m.

City of Texas City, Nessler Center – Captain’s Room, 2010 5th Ave North, Texas City 77590

Tuesday, Aug 8 Matagorda County 6:30 p.m.

Bay City Civic Center, 201 7th Street, Bay City 77414

Monday, Aug 14 Liberty County 9:00 a.m.

Cleveland City Council Chambers, 203 East Boothe, Cleveland 77327

Monday, Aug 14 Liberty County 3:00 p.m.

Liberty County Courthouse, Commissioner’s Courtroom, 1923 Sam Houston Ave, Liberty 77575

**NOTE: Partial meetings list. Information on additional meetings for Brazoria, Montgomery, and Walker counties is forthcoming.*

Interim Report Conclusions

The 13 County Gulf Coast Region has made significant headway into the region coordination planning process by initiating meaningful dialogue between public transportation providers, social service agencies, and other interested parties. It is anticipated that the upcoming public meetings and the completion of detailed demographic analysis will provide additional insights into the challenges that the region faces, as well as opportunities for improvements in both coordination and connectivity.