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16. Abstract Regional mobility is cumbersome, confusing, and often a frustrating experience for many Texans. Those living in larger urban areas have access to public transportation, while others depend on social service agencies and are required to meet financial and/or medical eligibility criteria. In some regions, churches and private companies offer limited transport services. Even with the various transportation providers throughout the region and despite federal and state funds spent on transportation, there are still unmet transit needs throughout Texas. House Bill 3588, is a statewide mandate to coordinate public transportation services and funding among Health and Human Service agencies, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) at the regional and local levels. The intent of HB 3588 is to achieve the following: 1) eliminate waste in the provision of public transportation services; 2) generate efficiencies that will permit increased levels of service; and 3) further the state's efforts to reduce air pollution. TxDOT commissioners wanted to ensure that the general public and pertinent stakeholders were included in the planning process. This report examines the various public involvement plans and activities implemented by the MPOs and COGs within eight areas, (Austin, East Texas, Corpus Christi, Houston-Galveston, Beaumont, El Paso, North Texas, and San Antonio), as they developed regional coordinated transportation plans.					
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**An Assessment of Public Involvement for the 2006 Regional Transportation
Coordination Planning Process
in Selected Texas Cities**

by

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and

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Research Report SWUTC/10/473700-00054-1

Sponsored by
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ABSTRACT

Regional mobility is cumbersome, confusing, and often a frustrating experience for many Texans. While people living in larger urban areas have access to public transportation, others depend on social service agencies that require their clients to meet financial and/or medical eligibility criteria. Churches and private companies may offer limited services in some regions to fill the transit gap. Despite the various transportation providers throughout a region and funding from federal and state governments, many Texans still lack transport.

To help these Texans and to be fiscally responsible with government funds, the state legislature created and the Governor Perry signed into law House Bill 3588. This bill called for a statewide effort to coordinate public transportation services and funding among Health and Human Service agencies, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) at the regional and local levels. The intent of HB 3588 was to: 1) eliminate waste in the provision of public transportation services; 2) generate efficiencies that will permit increased levels of service; and 3) further the state's efforts to reduce air pollution.

The task of creating a coordinated plan was left with TxDOT and TxDOT's Commission. TxDOT commissioners wanted to ensure that the general public and pertinent stakeholders were included in the planning process, because their input and participation was viewed as critical to the success of the coordinated public transportation project. Working within each of the 25 districts, TxDOT tasked metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and/or councils of governments (COGs) with creating local coordinated transportation plans. In Spring 2006, most MPOs issued Request for Qualifications (RFQs) seeking assistance in the development of a regional coordinated transportation plan. Because the MPOs are required to follow SAFETEA-LU regulations for public involvement, stakeholders and the general public were required to actively participate in the planning process. The process culminated with the completion of a final document submitted to TxDOT in early Spring 2007.

This report examines the various public involvement plans and activities implemented by the MPOs and COGs within eight areas: Austin, East Texas, Corpus Christi, Houston-Galveston, Beaumont, El Paso, North Texas, and San Antonio. A look at demographic data, land area, key stakeholders and public involvement activities were examined through reviewing each region's final regional transportation coordination plan and interviewing agency staff.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2003, House Bill 3588 called for coordinated public transportation services and funding among Health and Human Service agencies, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) at the regional and local levels. The intent of HB 3588 was to: 1) eliminate waste in the provision of public transportation services; 2) generate efficiencies that will permit increased levels of service; and 3) further the state's efforts to reduce air pollution. On the onset, TxDOT commissioners mandated that the public participate and provide input into this coordinated planning process.

Each of TxDOT's 25 districts worked with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and/or councils of governments (COGs) to create regional coordinated transportation plans during 2006-2007. An important element of this planning process was the ability of each region/district to reach, educate, and engage the public throughout the entire planning process. While most plans incorporated public involvement activities, e.g. meetings, steering committees, and surveys, the amount and degree of public involvement varied widely. Below is a brief synopsis of key findings and recommended strategies to improve public involvement.

Findings

First, districts with large populations and territories, i.e. 13-county H-GAC region, held more meetings than smaller districts with only four to six counties. Likewise, larger regions had more resources, i.e. staff, money, and volunteers, than smaller regions to use during the public involvement process. Conversely, larger districts had multiple problems and varied populations/constituencies to engage versus smaller districts. For example, larger districts had both rural and urban areas, various languages spoken in the regions, and larger distances for people to travel to attend a meeting. Next, almost all MPOs and COGs, i.e. the Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) and Houston-Galveston (H-GAC), mentioned efforts to reach persons with disabilities, seniors, and lower income families.

Another finding shows that most districts looked at the demographics of their areas to help them assess their transportation needs, but they did not use the data to help determine how to strategically target traditionally underrepresented populations, i.e. low-income households, women, or low literacy populations, to get their participation in the planning process. Next, notification regarding meetings or plan updates involved traditional methods of reaching the public, i.e. flyers, email and regular mail. Finally, creativity and ingenuity are essential components of the public involvement, especially during meetings. Of the regions examined, none employed the latest technologies, i.e. visualization, on-line/interactive graphics packages to assist the public in the planning process. Most districts used presentations and maps to convey key concepts to the public.

Recommendations

In the future, the 25 regions should employ the following public involvement strategies:

- Use census data to help evaluate the area and determine who the population is.
- Spend time identifying low literacy populations in both English and Spanish.
- Use storyboards to convey the message for non-English speakers.
- Work with public schools, who serve as a wealth of information on non-English speakers, low income, etc.
- Evaluate public involvement efforts using a map to display the areas/populations represented.
- Rely more on community groups to gain entry into various minority populations.
- Use visualization tools to help the public understand conceptual ideas.
- Secure additional funding to implement the tools necessary to appeal and engage the public.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The beginning of public involvement lies in the adoption of National Environmental Act (NEPA) in 1969. This federal legislation determined that the government needs to be transparent and open to the public. In 1991, Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) provided the public entrée into the transportation planning process (FHWA website, retrieved 2007). This legislation required Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) with populations over 250,000 to provide opportunity for public review of draft transportation plans and programs prior to final approval of such plans and programs (PL 102 240 Section 134(e)(6)).

This act was followed by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) 1998. TEA-21 allowed participation in the planning process by interested parties, i.e. citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, providers of freight transportation services, and other interested parties a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed plan (PL 105 178 Section 1203 (h)(1)(B) and Section 1204 (e)(3)(A)).

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) 2005 goes the further than inviting interested parties to comment. This legislation requires that MPOs use the following methods to engage the public: post documents/plans on the world wide web, published in documents, employ visualization techniques to describe plans, and hold public meetings at convenient times. In addition, interested parties are also given the opportunity to participate in the development of the program (PL 109-59 Section (h)(5)(A)(B)(C) and (j)(4),(7)(A)(B). To date, this represents the most inclusion in the transportation planning process that the public/interested parties have been given. Additional laws that offer the public/interested parties the right to participate are listed below:

- Clean Air Act
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Title VI, Civil Rights Act
- Executive Order on Environmental Justice 12898 (signed in 1994)
- 1997 USDOT Order on Environmental Justice
- 1998 FHWA Order on Actions to Address Environmental Justice (policies and procedures for EO 12898)
- 1999 FHWA/FTA issue memorandum implementing Title VI requirements in metropolitan and statewide planning

Today, numerous federal agencies in the US and UK are realizing the importance of the public involvement i.e. EPA, Transportation and Health Care (July 3, 2007, <http://www.invo.org.uk/>). In addition state legislators have adopted these federal mandates and worked with state departments of transportation to ensure that Metropolitan Planning Organizations MPOs) conduct inclusive program planning and project planning processes.

Public involvement takes many forms. At times communication is one way without a required response, e.g. informational flyers. In other instances, the public is asked to participate by attending an informational public meeting. Another type of involvement actually seeks input from participants e.g. surveys. Finally, the highest form of public involvement empowers the public giving them a major role in the decision making process (Rowe and Frewer, 2000).

Best Public Involvement Practices from Other States

Fully involving the public in the planning decision-making process and/or in the project development process requires that transportation planners develop a plan of action, acquire skills in facilitation, and engage in outreach activities to the public and media. The following synopses explore public involvement techniques, and tools used by transportation officials and planning organizations.

Preference Polling on the Downtown Louisville Ohio River Crossing: Structured Public Involvement from the Designer's Standpoint - Strong activities allowed the public to select proposed bridge designs for the cross-river transportation in the Louisville-Southern Indiana region. The design team employed a unique analysis and modeling technique created by the University of Kentucky Transportation Research Center called Casewise Visual Evaluation, or CAVE.

The design team generated 31 3d designs and presented them to participants at several public meetings in Louisville, KY and Jefferson, IN. The participants scored each concept on a scale of 1 to 10 using an electronic keypad. After all the public open houses were complete, the team aggregated and mapped the data. Once the range of concepts was narrowed to six concepts, a new round of renderings and animations was produced to illustrate these new concepts from key perspectives. A second series of public meetings was then held with scoring on these six refined alternatives. Finally, three alternatives were identified as Single Tower Cable Stayed, Three Tower Cable Stayed, and Three Span Thru Arch.

Making a Good First Impression: Improving Pre-design and Environmental Public Information and Public Involvement - Informing the public requires attention to three important topics: underserved populations, core groups, and communicating information. In the State of Virginia to reach out to the African American community, VDOT takes the initiative by including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on community advisory committees. The City of Huntsville, Alabama encourages the involvement of underserved populations by advertising meetings and other public involvement events in minority publications.

Other factors such as disabilities play an important role. The Spokane, Washington Transit Authority employs "Rider Alert" and paratransit programs to increase the involvement of those with disabilities by providing information and transportation services tailored for the disabled. The California Department of Transportation makes the state's long range transportation plan available in Braille, large print, on audiocassette, and computer disk. The City of Los Angeles,

California, provides sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, and adaptive equipment for those who need it.

Buford Highway Public Involvement Plan - The Buford Highway is a seven mile state highway located between DeKalb and Fulton Counties. As DeKalb County planned a streetscape project along the road, discussion emerged regarding safety. Buford Highway serves as the focal point in the predominantly Asian business community and a predominantly Hispanic residential community. Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and County officials identified key stakeholders and interviewed them. Survey instruments were developed for business owners and the general public. Posters and flyers were translated into Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. Offices worked with the media groups from the Hispanic and Asian communities. Because of the diversity of the groups, Asian businesses with Hispanic residents, officials developed two separate public involvement plans (Morris, 2006).

Planning officials achieved success because they used demographic information to determine the target audiences: Asian businesses and Hispanic residents. They also used school records to confirm language spoken in the community, used translators, sought the help from community organizations to gain entry into the Asian businesses and Hispanic population, and learned cultural norms. While the Hispanic stakeholders attended meetings, the Asian community did not. The cultural norms of the Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese business owners did not permit them to neglect their businesses by attending meetings; in turn, escorted interviews scheduled meetings with Asian business owners at their businesses (Morris, 2006). Officials placed interviewers with surveys in local mall and grocery store frequented by Hispanic residents. Both public involvement plans proved valuable and successful for the Buford Highway project.

Accountable Public Involvement: A Partnership Approach to a Proposed Transportation Project - The Bernalillo County transportation officials in Bernalillo County, New Mexico process required engaging Spanish-speaking citizens, persons with disabilities, and youth. Bernalillo County created a demonstration project that focused on reaching individuals less than twenty years of age, persons who are primarily Spanish speaking, and persons with disabilities (long-lasting blindness, deafness, or severe vision or hearing impairments, difficulty of walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying, physical, mental, or emotional conditions lasting six months or more that made it difficult to perform certain activities).

Mapping social and resource networks allowed the project team to assemble an advisory committee representative of stakeholder groups. The stakeholders were aware of community events and activities where the project team could quickly and efficiently interact with the public to raise awareness, provide an opportunity for input, and gather needed information.

In addition to providing live, large-print captioning, sign-language interpretation, and Spanish translation, the project team emphasized a balance between visual and oral presentations, hands-on activities to gather input, focused discussions for comments and questions, and small-group discussion for those who may be intimidated by speaking in front of large groups. As for the disabled community, participants represented a cross-section of disabilities, including visual, hearing, mobility, and mental impairments. Sign interpreters, hard-of-hearing captioning was provided, and also handouts were available in large print and Braille.

Public Outreach in the Pedestrian Plan for Durham, NC: Effectiveness in a Diverse Community

- This study looks at the public involvement activities conducted during the City of Durham North Carolina Pedestrian Plan, *Durham Walks!* The City took an inventory of the sidewalks, trails, etc to help them develop a comprehensive pedestrian plan for the future. The project looked at demographics, income, vehicle availability, and race. Durham's population is diverse, with 46 percent White, 44 percent African American, and eight percent Hispanic. The City also used these tools and data to create a public involvement plan to engage minorities, women, seniors, and low-income families in the planning process. The City also wanted to run a cost-effect public involvement project.

Durham's public involvement efforts were evaluated using geographic information system (GIS). Staff gathered address information from meeting attendees, surveys, and phone calls and geocoded these data. Staff used 2000 Census tract information (boundaries and demographic information) to assist in their evaluation. Staff created maps showing the spatial distribution of respondents' addresses with income and race overlaid. Using GIS as a tool to analyze participation by low income and minority groups proved effective; however, the results revealed that very low-income and/or minorities did not participate (Lewis and Lane, 2006). Nonetheless, this tool will help staff focus on engaging these groups in the planning processes.

Conclusion

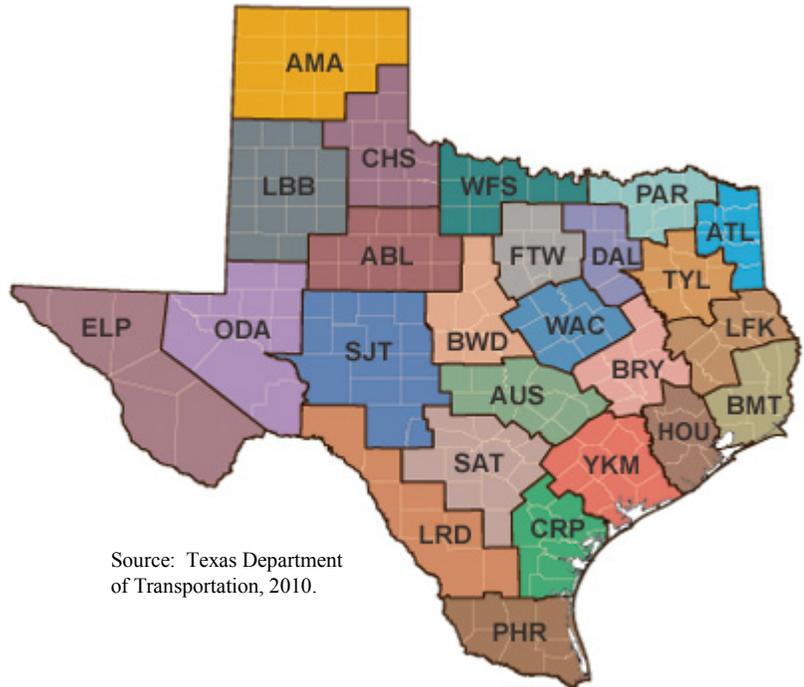
The information above provides an overview of best practices for public involvement in the transportation decision making processes. The examples addressed engaging persons from all communities: the general public, persons with disabilities, elderly, non-English speakers, persons with low literacy or limited English and historically underrepresented groups. These practices do not ensure success, but simply demonstrate different approaches to engage the public during transportation planning processes.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Texas House Bill 3588

Regional mobility is cumbersome, confusing, and often a frustrating experience for many Texans. Even people living in larger urban areas have varied levels of access to public transportation. Some residents depend on social service agencies, which require their clients to meet financial and/or medical eligibility criteria, for transportation. In some regions, churches and private companies offer limited transport services. Even with the various transportation providers throughout the region, there are still unmet transit needs in the region.

The 78th Texas Legislature created House Bill 3588, which called for a statewide mandate to coordinate public transportation services and funding among Health and Human Service agencies, Texas Workforce Commission, and Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT's) 25 districts. In addition, House Bill 3588 promoted three goals: 1) to eliminate waste in the provision of public transportation services; 2) to generate efficiencies that will permit increased levels of service; and 3) to further the state's efforts to reduce air pollution (HB3588, Article 13, Chapter 461, Section 461.001).



Source: Texas Department of Transportation, 2010.

Figure 1. TxDOT's 25 Districts

The task of creating a coordinated plan was left with TxDOT and TxDOT's Commission. TxDOT commissioners wanted to ensure that the general public and pertinent stakeholders were included in the planning process, because their input and participation was viewed as critical to the success of the coordinated public transportation project. Working with each of the 25 districts, TxDOT tasked metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and/or councils of governments (COGs) with creating local coordinated transportation plans. In Spring 2006, most MPOs issued Request for Qualifications (RFQs) seeking assistance in the development of a regional coordinated transportation plan. Because MPOs are required to follow SAFETEA-LU regulations for public involvement, stakeholders and the public were required to actively participate in the planning process. The process culminated with the completion of a final document submitted to TxDOT in early Spring 2007.

This report examines the various public involvement plans and activities implemented by the MPOs and COGs within eight areas: Austin, East Texas, Corpus Christi, Houston-Galveston, Beaumont, El Paso, North Texas, and San Antonio. A look at demographic data, land area, key stakeholders and public involvement activities were examined through reviewing each region's final regional transportation coordination plan and interviewing agency staff.

CAPITAL AREA - Austin region

The Capital Area consists of the following 10 counties, Llano, Burnet, Blanco, Williamson, Travis, Hays, Lee, Bastrop, Caldwell and Fayette. The area is approximately 8,480 square miles and includes the Austin-Round Rock urbanized area, which has an estimated 2005 population of 1,560,614; this reflects a 16% increase from a population of 1,346,833 in 2000.

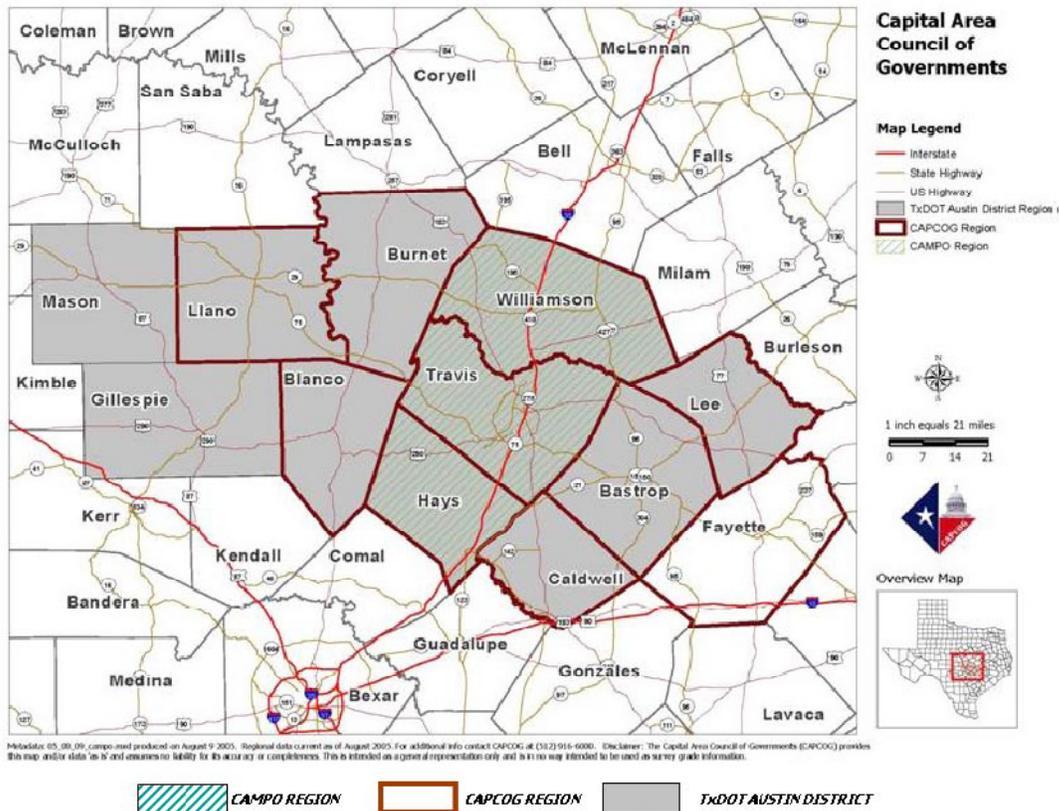


Figure 2. Capital Area Council of Governments Boundaries

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

The Capital Area Regional Transit Coordination Committee included 19 area agencies:

- Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority
- Capital Area Rural Transportation System
- Hill Country Transit District
- Texas Bus Association
- Texas Department of Transportation Austin District
- City of Austin, Parks and Recreation-Senior Support Services
- Hill Country Community Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center

- Austin Groups for the Elderly
- Austin-Travis County Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center
- Capital Area Agency on Aging
- Work Source
- Capital Workforce Development Board
- Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Capital Area Council of Governments
- 2nd Vice-Chair, Capital Area Council of Governments
- Executive Committee
- Meals on Wheels
- Austin Resource Center for Independent Living
- Community Action Network
- User of Public Transportation – Urban
- User of Public Transportation – Rural
- Interested General Public
- Texas State University
- Yellow Cab
- West Austin Caregivers
- Older Adult Rural Services
- Hays Consolidated Independent School District
- Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

What were the public involvement activities?

The regional coordination planning effort was supervised by Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) and the plan was created by Wilbur Smith and Associates. CAMPO has specific planning guidelines for the implementation of public involvement. As the region’s metropolitan planning organization (MPO), CAMPO adopted a federally-mandated Public Participation Plan which guides the MPO’s public involvement activities.

During the Regional Coordination Transportation Plan effort conducted in 2006-2007, CAMPO held public meeting(s), issued press release, created flyers, developed media kits: articles, agency website or project website, and formed focus groups to get input from the public. CAMPO also worked with various regional partners to engage each of these groups. The Regional Transit Coordination Committee also involves urban and rural public transit users and the general public; they also used existing networks through established client-based organizations; in addition, on-board media and surveys were used as reach out tools to existing transit users. The most creative ways or best public involvement practices CAMPO used during Regional Coordination Transportation planning process were website and on-line comment form. These options garnered a lot of use. CAMPO received, compiled, and forwarded comments to the transportation providers.

ARKANSAS-TEXAS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (ARK-TEX) – Paris-Texarkana

The Arkansas-Texas Council of Government (ATCOG) serves Region 5 which totals covering over 6,400 square miles. ATCOG consists of the following counties: Bowie, Cass, Delta, Franklin, Hopkins, Lamar, Morris, Red River and Titus Counties in Texas and Miller County in Arkansas. This area encompasses TxDOT's Atlanta and Paris districts.

The region's nine counties have a combined population of 270,468 according to the 2000 Census. Data from the Census Bureau's 2005 estimates show the population has grown to 275,449. The most populous counties are Bowie, Lamar, and Hopkins. Texarkana and Paris are the largest cities in the area and their populations total 35,746 and 26,539 residents respectively.

Eleven transportation providers offer low-cost transportation for residents of Bowie, Cass, Delta, Franklin, Hopkins, Lamar, Morris, Red River and Titus counties from their homes or other designated pick up points to their various destinations. This rural transportation network does not provide intercity transportation within Nash, Texarkana, or Wake Village.

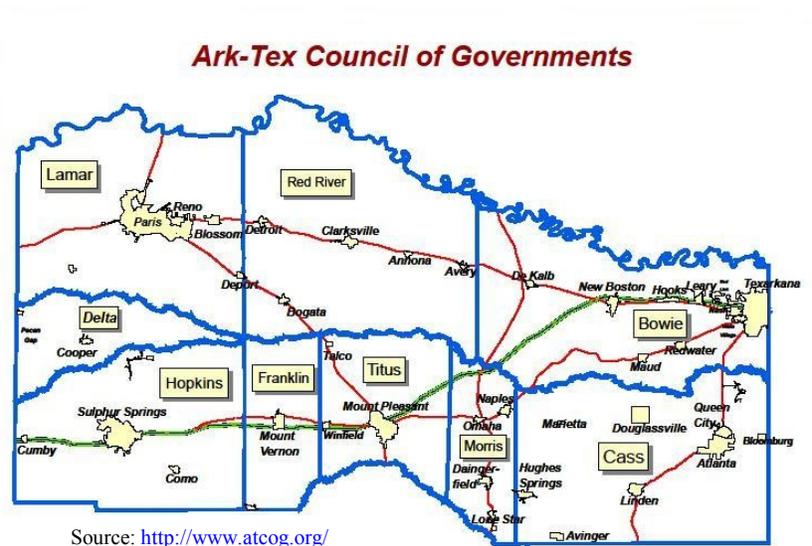


Figure 3. Ark-Tex Council of Government map

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

Ark-Tex was responsible for recreating the regional coordination plan. They employed the services of a consultant to assist them. As a part of their planning effort, a committee was formed to help with the regional coordinated planning process. The following stakeholders from all nine counties participated:

- County Judges and other elected officials
- MPOs, county planning departments
- Human service agency representatives

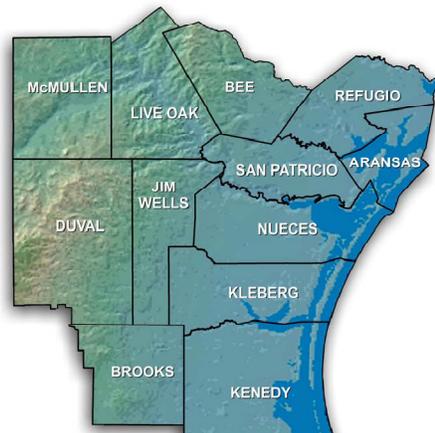
- Veterans groups
- All transportation operators
- Hospitals/Medical Centers
- Transit user representatives from each county
- Intercity carriers
- Others identified as appropriate

What were the public involvement activities?

To gain entry into the community, stakeholders arranged community outreach sessions. Transportation planners presented information at meetings scheduled by various community groups and organizations. In addition, one-on-one interviews in-person and via telephone were conducted. Area residents could also provide input at public meetings or via email.

COASTAL BEND - Corpus Christi

Nestled along the Gulf of Mexico, the Coastal Bend Council of Governments Region contains over 12,943 square miles which encompasses 12 counties: Refugio, Aransas, San Patricio, Nueces, Kleberg, Kenedy, Bee, Live Oak, Jim Wells Brooks, McMullen, and Duval. The combined population for these counties is over 549,012 in 2000. Corpus Christi is the largest city and only urban area in the region with a population of 277,454; Kingsville is the next largest city with a population over 25,575. Census data reveal 10 additional cities with the largest populations between 5,000 and 25,000. Data regarding race shows the planning area as predominately White and Hispanic.



Source: Coastal Bend COG, 2006

Figure 4. Coastal Bend – Corpus Christi Council of Governments

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

To develop and create the regional coordination plan, the Coastal Bend Council of Governments hired a consultant. To obtain maximum input in the process, a committee was formed.

Stakeholders from the following agencies participated in the process:

- Coastal Bend Council of Governments
- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)
- Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Org.
- Area Agency on Aging (AAA)
- Coastal Bend Center of Independent Living
- Regional Transportation Authority
- Health and Human Services Commission
- Work Source
- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
- Workforce Network
- Rural Economic Assistance League, Inc.
- Bee Community Action Agency
- Kleberg County Human Services
- Community Action Council of South Texas
- LeFleur Transportation
- Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS)
- Department of Assistive & Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
- Regional Transit Authority (RTA)

What were the public involvement activities?

The Coastal Bend conducted a survey to get assistance assessing community transportation usage and needs. Unlike most regions, the Coastal Bend area concentrated their efforts on the surveying users. More specifically, 100 surveys were distributed and completed at “a veteran’s conference, health conference, education conference, health clinic, and Social Security office” (Coastal Bend Council of Government 2006, 28). These locations are the cities of Beeville, Corpus Christi, and Kingsville, with most of the respondents residing in Corpus Christi (Coastal Bend Council of Government 2006).

HOUSTON-GALVESTON AREA COUNCIL (H-GAC) - Houston

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is the region-wide voluntary association of local governments in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning region of Texas. The service area consists of 12,500 square miles and contains more than 5.7 million people. Almost eight percent of the population are seniors and more than 16.5% of population has a disability.

H-GAC governmental services include transportation planning, cooperative purchasing, homeland security, air and water quality planning, forecasting, and mapping for the 13-county regions: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Wharton. Figure 5 shows the 13-county region.

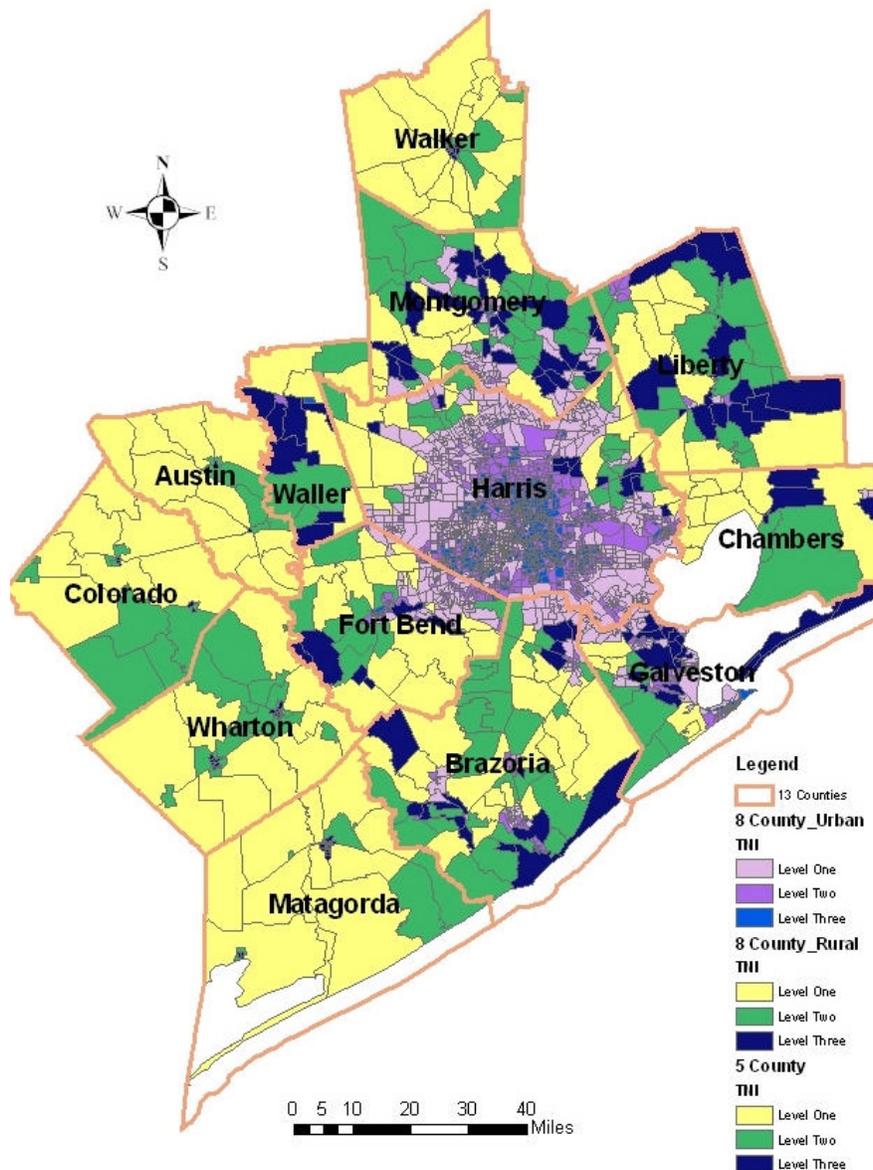


Figure 5. Houston-Galveston Area Council of Governments (H-GAC)

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

H-GAC was the lead agency for the coordination plan. The following agencies were asked to participate in the planning process:

- Urban – Houston Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO)
- Harris County Coordinated Transportation
- Small Urban and Rural
- For Profit Liberty Cab
- Non-Profit Red Cross
- Medical Transportation
 - Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Medical Transportation
 - Houston District
 - Yoakum District
 - Bryan District
- United Way of Texas Gulf Coast
- The Friendship Center
- Center for Independent Living
- Care for Elders
- City of Houston
- City of Baytown
- City of Conroe
- City of Lake Jackson
- City of Pasadena
- Advocacy Groups
- Bay Area Transp. Partnership
- University
- Customers/Users
- Fort Bend County

What were the public involvement activities?

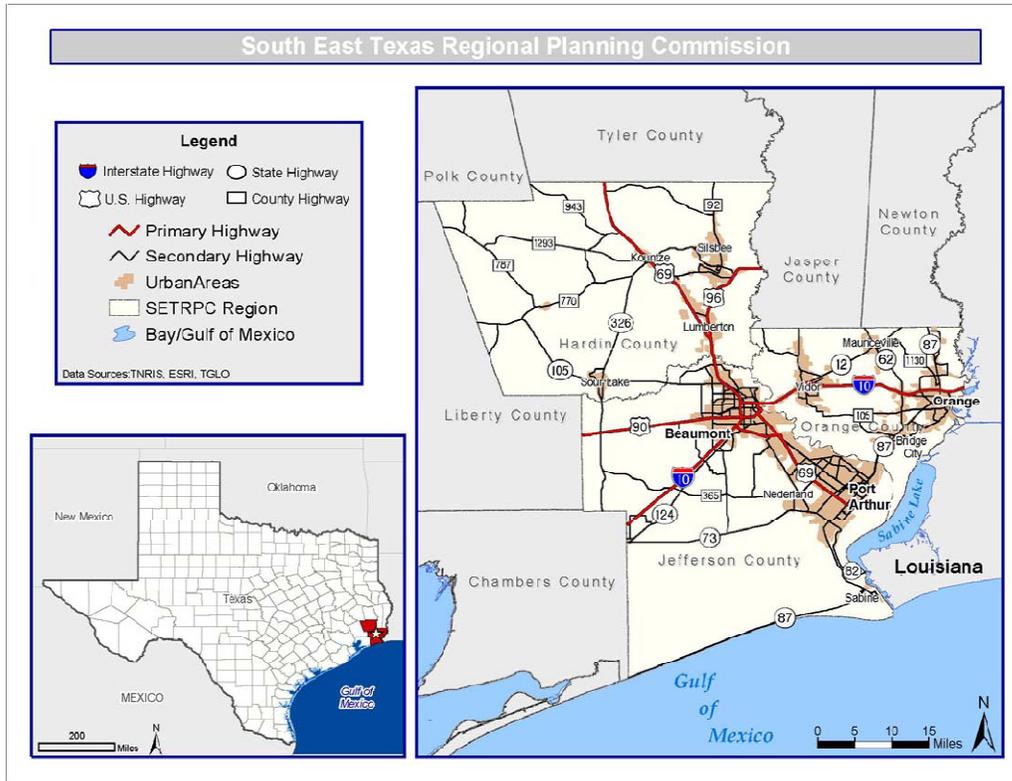
For this region, H-GAC created a 43 member Steering Committee with two subcommittees: Regional Assessment and Planning and Public Outreach. From July 24, 2006 to August 18, 2006, 18 public meetings were held with at least one public meeting held in each of the 13 counties comprising the H-GAC region. Over 350 people attended these meetings. The Public Outreach subcommittee determined the meeting locations and assisted in the creation of mailing lists. Over 1,300 consumer surveys, 136 social service surveys, 23 public transportation inventory surveys and 146 economic development surveys were conducted. In addition, the United Way of The Gulf Coast conducted a survey and held 12 workshops in the four counties they serve.

Over 90 media outlets were contacted throughout the planning process. To inform the public of the coordination efforts, flyers and e-invites were sent to various stakeholders, elected officials, general public, transportation service providers, and social service agencies. Project progress was also accessible via a project website to support this planning effort. Efforts were also made to engage persons with disabilities, persons with limited English and low literacy, and historically disadvantaged ethnic/racial populations. To reach these groups various community

and social service agencies were engaged, and members of minority media outlets were contacted.

SOUTH EAST TEXAS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (SETRPC) - Beaumont

The Southeast region consists of Hardin, Jefferson and Orange counties with an estimated 2005 population of 383,530; this reflects a decrease from a population of 385,090 in 2000. The region's median age was 35 in Jefferson and 36 in Hardin and Orange counties. These older median ages reflect the large number of persons 65 and older. This category showed Hardin and Orange counties with over 12 percent seniors and Jefferson County with 13.6 percent seniors (SETRPC, 2006).



Source: Southeast Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan, 2006

Figure 6. Southeast Texas Regional Planning Commission District

A look at race in 2000 revealed the greatest diversity in Jefferson County where approximately 57 percent were White, 34 percent African American, and three percent Asian. Hispanics represented four percent of the population. Hardin and Orange counties contained 90 percent and 88 percent White respectively, seven percent and nine percent African American respectively; in both counties, Asians only represented one percent of the population. The Hispanic population was less than one percent.

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

The Southeast Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC), which is the region's MPO, was the lead agency for the planning process. In the steering committee members included 19 area agencies:

- Nutrition and Services for Seniors
- City of Port Arthur / Port Arthur Transit
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Workforce Centers of Southeast Texas
- City of Sour Lake
- Orange County Transit
- Beaumont Municipal Transit
- Texas Workforce Development Board
- Orange County Economic Dev. Corp.
- South East Texas Transit
- Spindletop MHMR
- ABC Transit
- Catholic Charities
- Texas Department of Human Services
- Advocacy Incorporated
- Area Agency on Aging
- Texas Dept. of Health & Human Services
- Port Arthur Transit
- City of Beaumont
- City of Bridge City
- City of Orange
- RISE – Resource, Information, Support and Empowerment

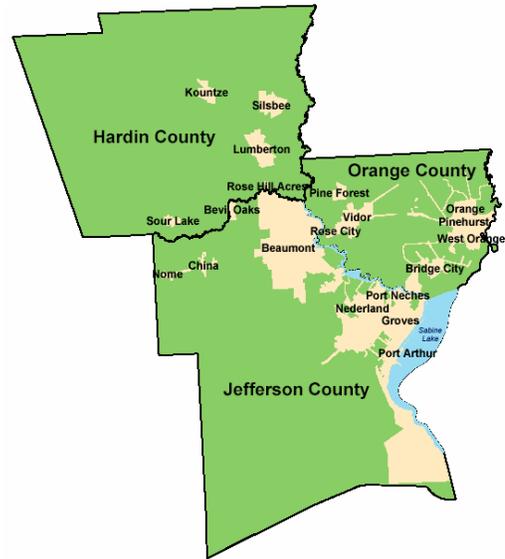


Figure 7. Southeast Regional Council of Governments

What were the public involvement activities?

Southeast Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC) held five general meetings in February, March, and November of 2005 and March and August of 2006. Like other districts, SETRPC formed a Steering Committee which held four meetings: April, July, August, and November 2006. To engage the public, three rounds of public meetings were held: April, July, and November 2006. These meetings were held in Beaumont, Port Arthur, Lumberton, and Orange. In most cases, SETRPC used public notices in newspapers and distributed flyers through various agencies and transportation providers. They also mailed flyers to key community leaders and stakeholders. SETRPC also conducted a survey for the public and one for transit providers from May through July 2006. To obtain continuous input from the public, SETRPC created a project website.

UPPER RIO GRANDE – West Texas/El Paso region

The Rio Grande Council of Governments (RGCOG) was created in 1967. The RGCOG serves 33 local governments, seven county governments, 12 municipalities, and 14 special districts. RGCOG is governed by a board of directors that is comprised of 19 local officials from the area.

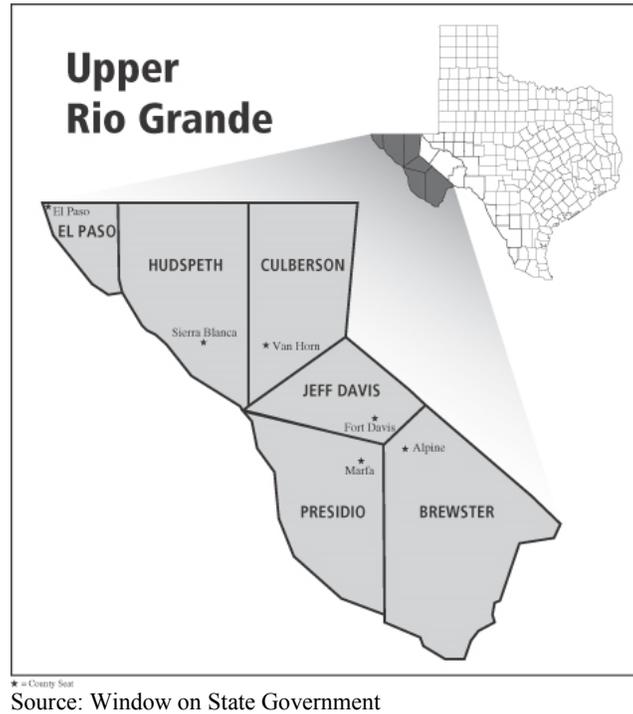


Figure 8. Upper Rio Grande Council of Governments

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

The Upper Rio Grande Council of Governments assisted in the development of the regional coordination transportation plan with cooperation from the following entities:

El Paso County Transit	Housing Authority of the City of El Paso
Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Council	LULAC Project Amistad
Texas Department of Transportation	Lutheran Social Services of the South, Inc.
Aliviane No-Ad, Inc	The Sunshine House
Avance	The Town of Van Horn
Bienvivir Senior Health Services	Thomason Hospital
Big Bend Community Action Agency	White Acres Good Samaritan Retirement Village
Big Bend Episcopal Mission	Texas A&M University, Colonias Project
Big Bend Regional Medical Center	Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services
Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe	Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services
City of Marfa	Texas Department of State Health Services

City of Presidio	Texas Health and Human Services Commission
Family Crisis Center of the Big Bend	Upper Rio Grande @ Work
Upper Rio Grande @ Work	El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization
Rio Grande Council of Governments	Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (Tiguas Tribe)
AARP	Area Agency on Aging
Desert ADAPT	El Paso Lighthouse for the Blind
Project BRAVO VOLAR	Center for Independent Living
American Red Cross	Texas Governor's Division of Emergency
Management Seniors Accessing Long-Term Care through Strategic Planning and Advocacy (SALSA)	
ITS Consultant	Fort Bliss Garrison Command
SALSA	Socorro Independent School District
New Mexico Department of Education	El Paso County Transit

What were the public involvement activities?

The El Paso MPO, in accordance with 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613, have an adopted Public Participation Program that is followed. This plan is available online at <http://www.elpasompo.org/Portals/0/Publications/PIP/Public%20Participation%20Program%20Document%207%2025%202008.pdf>.

The goal of the Public Participation Program (PPP) was to include residents, community and neighborhood groups and associations, non-profit groups, business sector groups, transportation providers, federal, state, and local government agencies, and others to participate in a proactive planning effort that provides full access to making key transportation decisions early and throughout the planning process. In addition, the MPO conducted an interactive planning and data exchange process with its neighbors in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Accomplishing the task of planning for transportation needs in the present day, five, ten and even twenty years from now, requires the MPO to coordinate and collaborate with many types of public and private groups to provide mobility to housing, schools, jobs, recreation, and freight movement.

An on-line and a paper survey were available to the public, transportation providers, potential users and current users. A regional transportation summit was held in November. Over 168 participants attended the forum to learn about “best practices” in transportation coordination and participants provided additional recommendations regarding the best ways to increase coordination across the region’s various transportation systems. Additional meetings were held in El Paso and Alpine.

Additional public participation efforts were seen via outreach to agencies that served targeted populations. Consultants and the steering committee made speeches, submitted newspaper articles. Finally, public comment was solicited on the draft plan; this period gave the public thirty days to review the draft plan.

TEXOMA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT

The Texoma region consists of Cooke, Grayson, and Fannin counties. Their combined populations totaled 178,200 in 2000 and an estimated 188,273 in 2004. A more detailed look at their population shows that 22.7 percent of the population has a disability and 14.4 percent are 65 years of age or older. These numbers are higher than the State's percentages. In addition, 15 percent of all persons are below poverty, which is almost equal to the State's percentage. According to the 2000 Census, seven percent of the population in the tri-county area reported themselves as being of Hispanic origin.



Officials and stakeholders deemed these percentages as indications of the growing need for transportation services in their counties. Furthermore, the rural counties face continued challenges “as younger, more educated residents follow job opportunities to urban areas, leaving behind a demographic that is more dependent upon a wide range of social services” (Texoma COG 2006, 6).

Figure 9. Texoma Council of Governments

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

In April 2005, Texoma developed a regional committee. By April 2006, regional committee developed the following list of stakeholders to help develop their regional transportation coordination plan:

TAPS	Texoma Council of Governments
Workforce Texoma	TxDOT
Area Agency on Aging and Disability	MHMR
United Way of Grayson County	Goodwill Industries
Red River Hospital	Texas Health and Human Services Commission
Grayson County College	APART
County Judges	Senator Office-Estes
Senator Office-Phillips	Precinct Commissioners
Local transportation agencies	General Public from all 3 counties
Sherman/Denison Metropolitan Planning Organization	

What were the public involvement activities?

To reach the general public regarding the coordination plan, Texoma held 10 public meetings in the three counties. Meeting times and locations were published in four local newspapers and Texoma's website. At the meetings, surveys were distributed. The largest meeting was in Gainesville with 163 attendees. Surveys were also randomly mailed to 1500 households in their water bill statements. Roughly, 280 surveys were returned.

ALAMO AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS - San Antonio

The Alamo Area Council of Government (AACOG) represents the 12 county regions: Gillespie, Kendall, Comal, Guadalupe, Wilson, Karnes, Atascosa, Frio, Medina, Bandera, Kerr, and at the center, Bexar. San Antonio, the tenth largest city in the US, is located in this region. Three cities have populations over 20,000, but most cities are under 10,000. The 2000 Census reveals that more than 49 percent of the population is Hispanic.

Which organizations comprised the planning committee?

Outreach efforts included assembling a stakeholders committee of the following:

- County Judges and other elected officials
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), county planning departments
- The Council of Governments Board
- Human service agency representatives
- Veterans groups
- Senior and disabled advocates
- All transportation operators
- Hospitals/Medical Centers
- Transit user representatives from each county
- Intercity carriers
- Others identified as appropriate



Figure 10. Alamo Area Council of Governments

What were the public involvement activities?

This agency has adopted specific planning guidelines for the implementation of public involvement. To reach the public, Alamo Area hired a consultant that set up open meetings in every county, working through the each county judge's office. Meeting attendance varied with some counties seeing over 20 participants while meetings in other counties were not well attended. Suggestions from the meetings were incorporated into the plan; however, ideas that were immediately beneficial to the community were implemented before the regional coordination transportation plan was adopted, i.e. creation of vanpool services by the Alamo Regional Transit (ART). Other requests from the meetings included the need for flex routes and commuter routes.

Alamo Area advertised the public meeting using catchy flyers and press releases. The intended populations included seniors, persons with disabilities, minorities, non or limited English speakers, and persons with low literacy, and also business in the specific areas. The best public involvement practice Alamo Area used was to utilize stakeholders to invite the public to meetings.

Findings & Recommendations

Findings

The 2006-2007 Regional Transportation Coordination planning process proved successful as all 25 TxDOT regions completed their plans. While most plans incorporated public involvement activities, e.g. meetings, steering committees, and surveys, the amount and degree of public involvement varied widely from region to region.

Districts with large populations and territories, i.e. 13-county H-GAC region, held more meetings than smaller districts with only four to six counties. Likewise, larger regions had more resources, i.e. staff, money, and volunteers, than smaller regions to use during the public involvement process. Conversely, larger districts had multiple problems and varied populations/constituencies to engage versus smaller districts. For example, larger districts had both rural and urban areas, various languages spoken in the regions, and larger distances for people to travel to attend a meeting. Almost all MPOs and COGs like the Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) and Houston-Galveston (H-GAC) mentioned efforts to reach persons with disabilities, seniors, and lower income families.

Most districts looked at the demographics of their areas to help them assess their transportation needs, but they did not use the data to help target traditionally underrepresented populations, i.e. low-income households, women, or low literacy populations, to get their participation in the planning process. Generally, notification regarding meetings or plan updates involved traditional methods of reaching the public, i.e. flyers, email and regular mail. Creativity and ingenuity are essential components of the public involvement, especially during meetings. Of the regions examined, none employed the latest technologies, i.e. visualization, on-line/interactive graphics packages to assist the public in the planning process. Most districts used presentations and maps to convey key concepts to the public.

Recommendations

In the future, the 25 regions should utilize the following public involvement strategies:

- Use census data to help evaluate the area and determine who the population is.
- Spend time identifying low literacy populations in both English and Spanish.
- Use storyboards to convey the message for non-English speakers.
- Work with public schools, who serve as a wealth of information on non-English speakers, low income, etc.
- Evaluate public involvement efforts using a map to display the areas/populations represented.
- Rely more on community groups to gain entry into various minority populations.
- Use visualization tools to help the public understand conceptual ideas.
- Secure additional funding to implement the tools necessary to appeal and engage the public.

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Appendix

Public Involvement Survey for the Regional Transportation Coordination Planning Process

Hello, my name is _____, and I am a graduate assistant at the Center for Transportation at Texas Southern University. Currently, we are conducting research on TxDOT's Regional Transportation Coordination Planning Process that occurred in 2006-07. We would like to get your input on six short questions.

1. How would you describe public involvement?

2. Has your agency adopted specific planning guidelines for the implementation of public involvement? If so, briefly describe the guidelines.

3. Thinking back to the Regional Coordination Transportation Plan conducted in 2006-2007, what did your agency do to get input from the public?
 - A. Public meeting(s)
 - B. Press release
 - C. Flyers
 - D. Media kits: articles
 - E. Agency website or project website
 - F. Focus group

4. Which groups did your agency reach: seniors, persons with disabilities, minorities, non or limited English speakers, and persons with low literacy?

5. What tools did you use to reach these groups?

6. What were the most creative ways or best public involvement practices your agency used during Regional Coordination Transportation planning process?

That concludes our survey. Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please call Gwen Goodwin at 713-313-7283 or email goodwingc@tsu.edu.