Author’s Note: This is the sixth in a series of profiles of state human service transportation coordination programs. Profiles on Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Washington and Wisconsin were previously completed.

Introduction

In a state with nearly unrivaled size and a growing population, coordination of transportation services in Texas has proven to be a challenge. The public transportation network consists of 39 rural transit districts, 30 urban transit districts and eight large urban systems (see Appendix A).\(^1\) Combined, these systems make approximately 298.1 million trips per year.\(^2\) In addition, 135 private and non-profit organizations in the state receive federal funds to provide trips to older adults and persons with disabilities.\(^3\)

These transportation systems contribute to personal mobility for all individuals, but especially for the transportation disadvantaged—people who are impaired by age or disabilities that prevent them from operating a vehicle, or those with income constraints. Due to the vast geography of Texas, individuals who live in small rural regions of the state face far different obstacles than do those living in larger urban areas.\(^4\) Moreover, a 2008 study found that for Texans who traveled between jurisdictions—from rural or suburban communities to cities, or vice-versa—public transportation was found to be a difficult or unviable transportation mode due to the disconnection of services in rural and urban areas.\(^5\)

By 2030, the number of those considered to be transportation disadvantaged, especially older adults, is expected to increase significantly across the United States. Texas’s population over age 65 is projected to grow by more than 150 percent—or an additional 3.1 million older adults—during the next 20 years. Older adults will make up 15.6 percent of the total Texas population by 2030,\(^6\) and families and caretakers may also be affected by their mobility needs. More than 20 percent of Texas households included an adult over age 65 in 2010.\(^7\) Since one in five older adults does not drive,\(^8\) at least 622,730 more Texans will need alternative transportation options in the coming decades.

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2. Jaime Rall, Alice Wheet, Nicholas J. Farber and James B. Reed, Transportation Governance and Finance: A 50-State Review of State Legislatures and Departments of Transportation, (Denver: NCSL, 2011), 139.
3. TxDOT, Public Transportation Division.
Six percent of all households in the state, or more than 514,000 homes, have no available vehicle.\(^9\) To add to this need, over 1 million Texans between the ages of 16 and 64 had a physical disability in 2007,\(^10\) potentially restricting their ability to drive. This group also had a lower individual median income of $20,308 per year compared to $28,118 per year for individuals without physical disabilities.\(^11\)

Trips to medical appointments are a key mobility need for people who lack access to reliable transportation. The federal health care reform law (the Affordable Care Act, P.L. 111-148 and P.L. 111-152, enacted in March 2010) is expected to increase the number of individuals eligible for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) under Medicaid by raising the maximum eligible income level to 133 percent of the federal poverty level. In 2014, an estimated 1.2 million Texans will become eligible for Medicaid and NEMT.\(^12\) However, in Texas, a decreasing number of doctors in rural areas accept Medicaid payment and as a result, beneficiaries in rural areas often need to travel long distances—sometimes more than four hours—to receive treatment from doctors participating under their plan.\(^13\) This creates a significant burden for the state’s NEMT program.

These are troubling numbers for a public transportation system that is already overburdened and experiencing funding shortfalls. However, Texas is one of a large group of states\(^14\) that have established proactive measures to coordinate among public agencies and other stakeholders. Coordination is intended to ensure transportation delivery programs will provide adequate transportation for transportation-disadvantaged populations while saving state money and resources. This brief explores the effort to coordinate transportation services in Texas, how the programs are funded and the results the state has seen since its coordination mandate was enacted in 2003.

**Program Description**

For years, Texas has been a leader in transportation coordination efforts nationwide. In general, the state has pursued a distinctly decentralized approach to coordination planning, reflecting a belief that...
plans work best if they are tailored to the unique needs and assets of each area. At the same time, state entities have maintained a strong supportive role, including significant coordination and oversight of funding.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has primary responsibility for provision of public transportation services in the state, and its Public Transportation Division (assigned the abbreviation PTN) provides coordination of, and other types of assistance to, the state’s transit providers. Also, each TxDOT district office has a Public Transportation Coordinator (PTC) that is charged with coordinating services among local public and private transportation operators, which complements PTN’s work at the state level.

In 2003, House Bill 3588 was enacted, which mandated cooperation among public transportation providers to allocate specific services in coordination with each other, and for TxDOT to facilitate this process. To implement these provisions, in 2005 the Texas Transportation Commission—the five member governing body of TxDOT—established the Regional Planning and Public Transportation Study Group (hereafter referred to as the Study Group). The mission of the Study Group was “to review current public transportation planning and programming practices within metropolitan, suburban and rural areas and to enhance service delivery, customer satisfaction, efficiency and effectiveness.”

The Study Group was comprised mostly of non-TxDOT representatives from transit and other stakeholder groups who gave their insight and guidance on how to best implement state and federal coordination mandates. The group recommended that a unique coordination plan be developed in each of the state’s 24 planning regions—defined by the boundaries of the 24 councils of governments—to analyze existing public, private and non-profit transportation services within each region (see Appendix B). The first Regional Transportation Coordination Plans (RTCPs) were presented to

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15 Public Transportation Division of TxDOT (PTN), *Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program*, (place of publication not ascertainable: TxDOT, 2009).
16 Capital Area Regional Transit Coordination Committee (RTCC), *Regional Transportation Coordination Plan for the Capital Area*, (Austin: Capital Area RTCC, 2006), 9.
19 See section on Authority.
20 John H. Overman, Linda K. Cherrington, and Jeffrey C. Arndt, *Regional Public Transportation Coordination in Texas* (College Station, Texas: TTI, 2008), 1–2.
21 The current multi-year federal surface transportation law—the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), signed into law in 2005—requires “locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans” as a condition for receiving funds from certain Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs. The plans are typically re-developed every four to five years, but only entities that wish to be funded by the relevant FTA programs must complete them; they are not otherwise federally required. For more about this, see Jaime Rall and Nicholas J. Farber, *Regional Human Service Transportation Coordinating Councils: Synthesis, Case Studies and Directory* (Denver: NCSL, 2012), 7–8.
22 PTN, *Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program*. 
the TTC in Dec. 2006. These initial plans identified transportation needs and gaps as well as coordination barriers, strategies and opportunities, and were the result of extensive public outreach. The Study Group further recommended designation of a lead agency in each region to direct planning efforts. Lead agencies formed steering committees of representatives from transit providers, health and human service agencies, workforce agencies, citizens and other interested parties in the region. Some of these groups are now called “regional coordinating councils” or “coordination committees.”

TxDOT sponsored the Study Group and delivery of its primary objectives, including a website and information clearinghouse for the regional plans, at www.regionalserviceplanning.org; facilitation of RTCP development efforts; and technical assistance and information resource services for the planning regions. With the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), TxDOT also held 50 presentations and meetings across the state from Sept. 2005 to Aug. 2007. Working in partnership with local entities, the primary targets for these meetings were the lead agencies and other local stakeholders. These meetings helped regional lead agencies connect with other key organizations, especially from the health and human services communities. TxDOT had executive-level support from the Health and Human Services Commission to gather the right representatives from these agencies. On at least five occasions over the same two years, the Study Group convened all 24 regions to share their progress and address common issues or concerns. TxDOT has also held other meetings throughout the state as necessary.

The 24 planning regions also held regular meetings with a wide range of stakeholders represented; some meetings had more than 100 people in attendance. These interactions helped establish a set of common goals and objectives that were critical to the development of coordination plans. The regional planning website was often used to announce the meetings and post other relevant information. In addition, TxDOT has funded local feasibility studies and trainings on coordination issues. Examples of these studies include a software feasibility study in rural El Paso County, a study of rural and small urban system consolidation efforts in the areas of San Angelo and Galveston, and studies of regional maintenance centers in Waco and Longview. At least three courses on mobility management have

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24 Ibid.
25 For contact details or more information about regional coordinating councils nationwide, see Rall and Farber, *Regional Human Service Transportation Coordinating Councils*.
26 Overman, et al., *Regional Public Transportation Coordination in Texas*, 1–2.
27 Ibid., 4.
28 PTN, *Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program*.
29 Ibid.
30 Overman, et al., *Regional Public Transportation Coordination in Texas*, 5–6.
31 Ibid., 4.
32 Ibid.
33 PTN, *Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program*.
been held since 2006, attended by a total of 109 individuals from 27 agencies across the state.\textsuperscript{34} In July 2008, TxDOT, TTI and the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) arranged a two-day workshop entitled, “Building Partnerships: Moving Forward.”\textsuperscript{35} Nearly 200 individuals gathered with lead agencies and partners for guidance and information sharing on ways to enhance community transportation services through coordination. The five areas of focus were building partnerships, coordinated planning, technology, marketing and outreach, and public involvement.\textsuperscript{36}

An ongoing planning and implementation process has since been occurring at the regional level. Lead agencies must meet regularly with their region’s respective regional transportation coordination steering committee and PTC. The consistent engagement of the steering committees “is at the core of the regional planning effort and part of the contractual agreement with the Texas Department of Transportation.”\textsuperscript{37} It is the responsibility of the lead agency to assure that committee members have meaningful roles and ongoing opportunities to provide insight and guidance on implementation and future priorities.\textsuperscript{38} Each planning region is now engaged in implementing or updating, or has recently updated, their RTCP. The newer plans incorporate many of the same elements as those from 2006, but also seek to identify funding to sustain coordination programs and activities.\textsuperscript{39}

**Authority**

In Texas, no statewide transportation coordination council has been created by statute. Rather, state law—in Chapter 461 of the Transportation Code, which went into effect on Sept. 1, 2003\textsuperscript{40}—declares legislative intent “to eliminate waste in the provision of public transportation services, to generate efficiencies that will permit increased levels of service, and to further the state’s efforts to reduce air pollution.”\textsuperscript{41} Among other provisions, Chapter 461 directs TxDOT to identify overlaps, gaps and other inefficiencies in the provision of public transportation services\textsuperscript{42} and to encourage public transportation providers to allocate specific services in coordination with each other. The statute requires transportation providers to cooperate with TxDOT\textsuperscript{43} and authorizes TxDOT to incorporate discussions with providers into “planning processes such as the development of the statewide transportation improvement program or a local transportation improvement plan.”\textsuperscript{44} In addition, the law allows the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Presentations available online at http://www.regionalserviceplanning.org/coordination/workshops/07_23-24_2008/.

\textsuperscript{36} PTN, Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} East Texas RTCPCS, East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan: Final Report 2011, 3.

\textsuperscript{40} Enacted as House Bill 3588 in 2003. See also page 4.

\textsuperscript{41} Texas Transportation Code Ann. §461.001; House Bill 3588 of the 78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003.

\textsuperscript{42} Texas Transportation Code Ann. §461.004.

\textsuperscript{43} Texas Transportation Code Ann. §461.006.

\textsuperscript{44} Texas Transportation Code Ann. §461.005.
Transportation Commission to require state human service agencies that provide transportation services to contract with TxDOT for those services.\textsuperscript{45}

Funding

For the past several years, TxDOT has provided funding for public transportation in a way that promotes coordination, and also has put resources specifically towards coordination planning. TxDOT has oversight of state public transportation funding through the PTN,\textsuperscript{46} which provides financial, technical and coordination assistance to the state’s transit providers.\textsuperscript{47} Since 2006, the Texas Transportation Commission has used formulas based on need and performance to allocate most state and federal funds for public transportation to transit agencies.\textsuperscript{48} TxDOT is also the designated recipient for many Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant programs for non-urbanized and urbanized areas, and makes grants from these awards to regional and local agencies.\textsuperscript{49}

TxDOT has initiated a new process for soliciting proposals for FTA-funded programs, to facilitate and promote coordination. Rather than issue individual competitive calls throughout the year, TxDOT created an annual “Coordinated Call for Projects” in which one request for proposals is issued for all competitive programs, to encourage comprehensive proposals. Awards to coordinated proposals have included federal funds from Section 5304 (Planning, formerly called State Planning Assistance); Section 5311(b)(3) (Rural Transportation Assistance, or RTAP); Section 5311(f) (Intercity Bus); Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute, or JARC); Section 5317 (New Freedom);\textsuperscript{50} and portions of anticipated non-urbanized discretionary fund programs.\textsuperscript{51} The objectives of this effort are to “promote comprehensive system development proposals, provide grantees with a more a predictable process, create greater flexibility and efficiency by allowing grantees to anticipate grants from multiple funding streams simultaneously, and assist in public transportation coordination efforts.”\textsuperscript{52}

Since 2006, TxDOT has also provided resources—in the form of funds and significant amounts of staff time—specifically to sustain coordination planning efforts.\textsuperscript{53} From 2006 to 2009, TxDOT awarded close to $5.5 million to support coordination planning efforts in each of the 24 regions; about half of the funds

\textsuperscript{45} Matt Sundeen, James B. Reed, and Melissa Savage, \textit{Coordinated Human Service Transportation: State Legislative Approaches} (Denver: NCSL, 2005). General duties and responsibilities of the TTC are outlined in Texas Administrative Code §1.1.

\textsuperscript{46} Capital Area RTCC, \textit{Regional Transportation Coordination Plan for the Capital Area}, 9.

\textsuperscript{47} TxDOT, \textit{Public Transportation Division}, last accessed March 7, 2012.

\textsuperscript{48} Public Transportation Division of TxDOT (PTN), \textit{2010 Texas Transit Statistics} (Austin: TxDOT, 2011), 1.

\textsuperscript{49} PTN, \textit{Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program}.

\textsuperscript{50} Public Transportation Division of TxDOT (PTN), \textit{Annual Request for Proposal(s) for Small Urban and Non-Urbanized Public Transportation Projects for Various Programs} (Austin: PTN, 2011), 2.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.; Public Transportation Division of TxDOT (PTN), \textit{Public Transportation Grants}, last accessed March 22, 2012.

\textsuperscript{52} PTN, \textit{Public Transportation Grants}; PTN, \textit{Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program}.

\textsuperscript{53} PTN, \textit{Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program}. 
were state dollars, and the remainder came from federal programs such as Section 5304 and RTAP.\textsuperscript{54} TxDOT has also partnered with TTI and CTAA to provide funding and program support for various coordination planning activities.\textsuperscript{55}

**Results**

In 2009, the Texas Regional Planning Coordination Program was one of five programs selected from across the country to receive a United We Ride (UWR) National Leadership Award presented by the U.S. Department of Transportation. TxDOT produced a summary of the program as an example of best practices for a state DOT in furthering the goals and objectives of the UWR program.\textsuperscript{56}

A main objective of the Study Group was to address barriers and constraints to coordination throughout the state. The six most commonly cited barriers and constraints were insurance, technology, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) vehicle requirements, vehicle fleets, driver training and state alternative fuel requirements. In 2006 and 2007, TxDOT, the Study Group and TTI researched these issues in greater depth, and TTI prepared five white papers to dispel common misunderstandings. TxDOT and the Study Group also had the opportunity to clarify policies that might affect these issues.\textsuperscript{57} A 2008 study by TTI found that the identified barriers and constraints were often overcome through this research process as well as through education and outreach, the policy clarifications, and new initiatives.\textsuperscript{58}

The report lists positive outcomes of the coordination effort in Texas, including:

- Increased inter-agency coordination;
- Improved information technology in transit applications;
- Peer-to-peer and shared driver training practices;
- Reducing risks for insurance coverage;
- Group purchases and cooperative purchasing agreements for vehicle fleets; and
- Clarification of alternative fuel and ADA requirement policies.\textsuperscript{59}

Additionally, expanding lines of communication and understanding among coordination stakeholders is an ongoing outcome of the state’s coordination efforts.\textsuperscript{60} Throughout the whole process, TxDOT has emphasized communication and dissemination of best practices as critical to a successful and sustainable planning process.\textsuperscript{61} The Regional Service Planning website represents continuation of this practice and is a permanent resource for regional planning agencies. The website contains a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Overman, et al., *Regional Public Transportation Coordination in Texas*, 17–20.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 20.
\item \textsuperscript{59} For detailed examples and case studies, please see ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Overman, et al., *Regional Public Transportation Coordination in Texas*, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{61} PTN, *Texas’ Regional Planning Coordination Program*.
\end{thebibliography}
“coordination clearinghouse” detailing Web links, archived newsletters and other materials that may be useful in developing regional plans; a similar clearinghouse about transportation system maintenance; Study Group information; coordination-related news, events and documents; a calendar of events; contact information for each region; an email group; and online communities.\(^{62}\)

While the state mandate provided the momentum for coordination, and the TTC and TxDOT responded with a statewide effort and initial funding to create the regional coordination plans, regional leadership has and will continue to be the heart of coordination efforts in Texas.\(^{63}\) The lead agencies will continue to facilitate collaboration among local transit providers, client advocates, elected officials, and health and human service agencies as plans are updated and new projects are initiated.

Acknowledgements: NCSL gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Federal Transit Administration and the Department of Labor that makes this report possible. NCSL also thanks Dan Dirks, United We Ride Ambassador for Region VI and Urban Transportation Specialist for the Community Transportation Association of America, for providing information and helping to review this profile. The author also thanks Jaime Rall and Simon Workman, NCSL Transportation Program staff, for contributing their time to help review and publish this profile.

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\(^{62}\) Overman, et al., *Regional Public Transportation Coordination in Texas*, 7–10.

\(^{63}\) East Texas RTCPSC, *East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Plan*, 50.
Appendix A. Geographic Coverage of Public Transportation in Texas:
Cities and Counties Served by Public Transportation Systems

Source: TxDOT Public Transportation Division, April 2010
Appendix B. Lead Agencies for Regional Public Transportation Planning

Source: TxDOT Public Transportation Division, July 2008.

Legend:
COG – Council of Governments
MPO – Metropolitan Planning Organization
RPC – Regional Planning Commission