

**THE ROAD MAP  
FOR  
REGIONAL COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

*West Texas/El Paso Region*



*Regional Service Plan for*

**Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio  
Counties**

*Submitted by the*

**West Texas/El Paso Regional Coordinated Transportation Planning Coalition**

*Prepared by*

**El Paso County Transit  
December 1, 2006  
El Paso, Texas**



# COORDINATED REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PLAN

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. **Title Page**.....1
- II. **Table of Contents**.....2
- III. **Acknowledgments**.....3
- IV. **Stakeholder Committee Members**..... 4
- V. **Executive Summary**.....6
- VI. **Framework for the Plan**.....10
- VII. **Background**.....13
- VIII. **Regional Service Coordination Planning**.....22
- IX. **Coordinated Transportation Plan**.....36
- X. **Appendices**.....48

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This plan was developed under a contract between El Paso County and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), with significant assistance from a number of organizations, agencies, partners and individuals in the West Texas/El Paso Region and beyond. We thank the many volunteers who led the development of this plan and representatives from the community who gave their input and insight into public transportation needs and suggestions for improvement. In addition to the Stakeholder Committee, with its broad representation from throughout the region, without the technical expertise and voluntary contributions from a number of other organizations and individuals, this plan and the regional transportation coordination venture, in general, would not have been achieved to the degree evidenced to date.

Bob Geyer, El Paso County Transit Manager, managed the TxDOT contract and the planning project. A number of individuals and entities contributed significantly to the completion of this plan. The following organizations and individuals deserve special commendation for their exceptional contributions to regional coordinated transportation:

### **Presidio County**

The Honorable Jerry Agan, County Judge

### **El Paso County**

Jesse Acosta

### **Texas Department of Transportation**

Kris Dudley  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Under the direction of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the West Texas/El Paso Region launched the Regional Service Planning requirements of Texas Transportation Code, Chapter 461 – Statewide Coordination of Public Transportation, in June 2005. Responding to the chapter’s legislative intent to eliminate waste, generate efficiencies and further reduce air pollution through improved coordination of public transportation, a core group formed a steering committee, set up a work plan and secured grant funds from TxDOT to carry out the steps of that plan over the next eighteen months and meet the plan delivery date of December 1, 2006. TxDOT awarded the planning grant to El Paso County Transit. A Stakeholder Committee was formed with representation from over 43 organizations to provide input and support for the development of this plan.

The West Texas/El Paso Region is composed of Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio Counties, with nearly 750,000 citizens (U.S. Census data, 2005) and 21,709 square miles. The region constitutes the Texas counties and communities in the Rio Grande Council of Governments. Outside the City of El Paso, the region is sparsely populated with vast geographic distances between communities. In most cases, regional communities are closer to the neighboring Permian Basin Regional Planning Commission for shopping, medical and other essential needs, often requiring trips, in some cases, of over four hours each way. Very few basic needs are available in these remote, small and rural communities.

Insofar as public transportation, the region offers public transit and health and human services transportation through nineteen inventoried transportation providers. Sun Metro operates the single large urban metropolitan transit district, created under Chapter 453 of the Texas Transportation Code, providing service within the corporate boundaries of the City of El Paso. Sun Metro offers fixed route, demand response and Job Access/Reverse Commute (JARC) services. Within the boundaries of El Paso County, El Paso County Transit operates fixed route service in the communities of Anthony, Canutillo, Westway, Vinton, Montana Vista, Horizon City, Socorro, Clint, Fabens and Tornillo. There is no rural transit service in the counties of Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis or Presidio.

LULAC Project Amistad was recently awarded the TxDOT Medical Transportation Program contract for the region. An additional fourteen providers operate transportation services in the region, primarily aimed at meeting the travel needs of the elderly, and individuals with disabilities or low income. These include: Aliviane No-Ad, Inc. (Alpine and El Paso), Bienvivir Senior Health Services, Big Bend Community Action Agency, Big Bend Episcopal Mission, Big Bend Regional Medical Center, Centro de Salud La Fe, Inc., City of Marfa, City of Presidio, Lutheran Social Services of the South, Inc., Permian Basin Community Centers for MHMR, Presidio County Veterans Services, The Sunshine House, Town of Van Horn and Thomason General Hospital. Most are able to purchase

vehicles for these services with Section 5310 funds of the Federal Transit Administration that are distributed through the TxDOT El Paso District office. LULAC Project Amistad was recently awarded a contract to provide JARC services in several of the *colonias* in El Paso County to increase connection with El Paso County Transit and Sun Metro services. Not technically transit providers but entities that underwrite transportation services, the Upper Rio Grande @ Work (the workforce development board for the region) and several health and human services agencies in the region provide resources to purchase transit services or compensate individuals for travel necessary to achieve other outcomes such as job training, medical services, job interviews and employment.

Collectively, these transit providers spend nearly \$59 million annually in transportation services in the region, operate a combined bus and van fleet of 321 vehicles, most being alternative fuels (e.g., compressed natural gas and propane). They provide a ridership of just under 13 million trips a year; most offer service with vehicles that are ADA compliant, with lifts for wheelchairs; two offer taxi subsidization.

The bulk of the population resides within the city limits of El Paso, which already experiences a higher incidence of aging and disabled citizens than the national average, placing demands on the demand response transit services. The region will experience about a 7.7% increase in population over the next four years, with an anticipated 9.1% growth in the population 65 and above. Growth models for El Paso County indicate the increase in 2020 among this segment of population alone will be 17%. The region is home to Fort Bliss, a military facility that is set to receive, under the Base Realignment and Closure decisions, some 20,000 – 25,000 new troops between 2008 and 2011. When these are added to the anticipated new civilians needed to serve this growth in troops and the accompanying dependents, the influx will approach 70,000. More military personnel in the region will likely impact an increase in military retirees who chose to stay here for the pleasant weather and presence of enhanced military services. These factors will increase burdens on public transit in El Paso alone, as the community of seniors will rise, many who will be unable to or choose not to use personal vehicles for their travel.

The public transit problems during the past year have been documented from various studies and reinforced with surveys conducted as a part of this plan. Many of the problems center around the high mileage and age of the vehicles, inadequate preventive maintenance, inadequate training of drivers and mechanics, inadequate planning for fleet replacement, procurement and capital financing.

The vision for transit in the region is that of a world-class system that offers mobility choices for all our citizens. The goals of the plan are:

<p><b>Mobility</b> The system will provide personal mobility.</p> <p><b>Reliability</b> The system will improve the reliability and safety of existing and future transportation services.</p> <p><b>Livability</b> The system will support quality of life in the service areas.</p> <p><b>Flexibility</b> The system will maintain an on-going self-assessment process and adopt a philosophy of continuous improvement.</p>	<p><b>Accessibility</b> The system will improve accessibility of people to major activity centers in the region.</p> <p><b>Environmental Sustainability</b> The system will minimize negative environmental impacts.</p> <p><b>Accountability</b> The system will be accountable to the taxpayers and the customers in its use of resources and the service it provides.</p> <p><b>Advocacy</b> The system will endeavor to discover and commit to fill all unacceptable gaps in service through expanded financial support to achieve universal mobility.</p> <p><b>Communications</b> The system will maintain a central providers and users clearinghouse for the on-going discussion and realization of coordination opportunities and system improvements.</p>	<p><b>Efficiency</b> The system will maximize current and future transportation resources and eliminate waste.</p> <p><b>Equity</b> The system will distribute services equitably based on geographic, demographic and economic factors.</p> <p><b>Action</b> The system will maintain the capacity to and successfully implement agreed upon Coordination strategies.</p> <p><b>Compliance</b> The system will honor its Regional Services Plan so as to minimally maintain and possibly expand those sources of transit funding dependent on plan requirements and local priorities.</p>
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The Coordination Action Plan involves twenty-three actions built around the identified needs and gaps. These actions fall under three overarching strategies of Adequate Maintenance, System Efficiency and Strategic Partnerships.

<b>COORDINATION ACTION PLAN ITEMS</b>		
Standardized Driver Training	Website	Access to TxDOT alternative fueling stations
Vanpools	Intelligent Transportation Systems Development	Bulk Purchasing
Pursue funds to sustain planning effort	Mechanics training for vehicles using alternative fuel	Driver Recognition
Community Transportation Forum	Volunteer Driver Support	Community Guide of Transportation Services
Pursue additional funding to increase services to targeted groups	Linking the public transit services with volunteer and faith-based services	One stop trip planner and information
Establishment of system for cost sharing	Carpools	Lower insurance costs
Incentives for paratransit riders to use the fixed routes	Establish El Paso Countywide transit authority	Community Based Transit Planning
Eliminate eligibility criteria and obtain revenue sources to allow all transit providers to transport all special needs populations under a real-time dispatch system thereby eliminating all duplication, maximizing use of system capacity and minimizing vehicle miles traveled while providing greater mobility for more users	Establish deviated fixed route, inter-city transit system linking cities, towns and villages in Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties currently unserved by any public transit system	

Interest among the Stakeholder Committee, the general public and elected officials is to sustain the coordination of regional transportation beyond this plan. Over the course of the development of this plan, the region has become increasingly aware of the impact public transit has on our regional economy and quality of life. Therefore, it is envisioned

that the momentum achieved over the course of this plan development will increase, more partners will join the effort and more resources will be secured for planning and implementing this plan to build a comprehensive network of transit services by working with the community, transit providers and the public transit decision makers. This system will be built on a recognition that our citizens travel both within the six counties of the region and across international and state borders. This coordinated system will focus on using our resources efficiently and seeking adequate and alternative funding to meet the growing transit needs of the elderly and individuals with low incomes and disabilities. Such an effort will require a long-term commitment to coordinated regional transportation by all the providers, public and policy makers in the region, as no one entity could achieve the actions necessary to realize the vision laid out in this plan.

# PLAN FRAMEWORK

*None of us is as smart as all of us.*  
Phil Condit

## **Commitment to Regional Coordinated Transportation**

Responding to state and federal mandates outlined below, transportation, human services, advocate, and general public stakeholders of Far West Texas and El Paso undertook this planning to improve transit services for all persons in the region through enhanced coordination and cooperation and coordination. These stakeholders came together, forming the West Texas / El Paso Regional Coordinated Transportation Planning Coalition, to mutually identify transportation goals with particular attention devoted to the health and human services related mobility needs of the elderly, disabled and low income. Fundamentally, the planning goals identified for the region are to:

- provide more cost effective service delivery;
- increase use of existing capacity;
- improve the quality of services;
- inform the public about transportation services so they can be easily understood and accessed; and
- increase capacity to serve unmet needs.

## **Scope of this Plan**

Blending the requirements of the state and federal planning mandates, this plan is intended to address all health and human service transportation services listed in state law and public transit services funded by federal transportation legislation. The plan attempts to inventory all appropriate transportation resources in the region, examine service duplication and unmet need, identify opportunities for coordination between service providers and develop implementation strategies and priorities to realize the coalition's goals and vision for a seamless transportation system. Over time that scope may expand, depending upon the will of the partnership.

*Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.*

Henry Ford

## **Legal Requirements**

Both Texas and federal law require the development of local plans to coordinate public transportation. The West Texas/El Paso Regional Coordinated

Transportation planning partners incorporated provisions from both in establishing their scope and setting out the model to produce this plan.

### **State Law**

Recognizing that many Texans face significant obstacles to mobility, the 78<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature Regular Session in 2003 passed legislation mandating the development of regional plans that coordinate all public transportation within each of the 24 planning regions of Texas. The law is codified in Chapter 461 of the Texas Transportation Code (TTC). Oversight of this state mandate was assigned to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), which issued the directive to the state planning regions and provided technical assistance for this planning activity. TxDOT directed each region to determine a structure and model to plan coordinated transportation services within the region under the umbrella of Regional Service Planning (RSP). The intent of RSP is to create a more efficient and cost-effective system using all the publicly funded transportation services within each region.

### **Scope of State Law**

Each local plan is to include “any entity that provides public transportation services if it is a governmental entity or if it receives financial assistance from a governmental entity, whether state, local, or federal” (Chapter 461.002, TTC). Instructions from TxDOT listed the following health and human services transportation programs that should be part of the plan (by agency):

#### *Texas Department of Transportation*

- Medical Transportation

  - Children with Special Health Care Needs

  - Medicaid Transportation

#### *Department of Aging and Disability Services*

- Aging Services – Demand Responsive

- Nursing Facilities and Hospice Payments

- Community-Based Alternatives and Residential Care

- Day Activity/Adult Day Care

- Community Intermediate Care Facilities

- Mental Retardation Medicaid Waiver Program

- Mental Retardation State Schools

#### *Department of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services*

- Vocational Rehabilitation

#### *Department of State Health Services*

- Kidney Program – Chronic Diseases

- Mental Health State Hospitals

#### *Texas Workforce Commission*

- Texas Workforce Boards

### **Federal Law**

Additionally, the federal transportation law, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) of

2005, requires that, starting in FY 2007, any federal funds distributed to communities for public transportation emanate from a local coordinated transportation plan, called the public transit-human services transportation plan. Federal and state transportation agencies are required by this law to use these local plans for making decisions about distribution of federal public transportation funds.

**Scope of Federal Law**

SAFETEA-LU specifies that the local plan is to include all federal resources for public transit as well as other resources that address the transportation needs of health and human services clients. The act lists the transportation programs to be included in this plan as those described in Sections 5307, 5310, 5311, 5316 and 5317 of SAFETEA-LU.

Guidance for the implementation of the federal law has not been finalized, but states like Texas are proceeding with this coordinated transportation-planning requirement based on state statutes that were established in advance of SAFETEA-LU.

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**Section I:**

**BACKGROUND**

## REGIONAL DESCRIPTION

### Geography and Demographics

Located in far west Texas, bordered by New Mexico on the north and northwest, Mexico on the south and southwest and the Permian Basin region of Texas on the east, the West Texas/El Paso Region is a part of the Rio Grande Council of Governments (Council of Government Region 8), Health and Human Services Region 10, and includes the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization, Texas Department of Transportation El Paso District and the Upper Rio Grande Workforce Development Area 10 (see *Appendix A*). It consists of the six Texas counties of Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio, with the population of the counties and major communities as listed in Table 1. El Paso is the most populated county and Jeff Davis the least populated.

Table 1: 2000 Population, West Texas/El Paso Region

COUNTY <i>Census</i>		City/Town	Census	COUNTY <i>Census</i>		City/Town	Census
Brewster	8866	Alpine	5786	Hudspeth	3344	Dell City	413
		Marathon	455			Fort Hancock	1713
		Study Butte/ Terlingua	267			Sierra Blanca	533
Culberson	2975	Van Horn	2435	Jeff Davis	2207	Fort Davis	1050
El Paso	679,622			Presidio	7304	Valentine	187
		Anthony	3850			Candelaria	
		Clint	980			Marfa	2121
		El Paso	563,662			Presidio	4167
		Fabens	8043			Redford	132
		Horizon City	5233			Ruidosa	
		Socorro	27,152				
Tornillo	1609						

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Table 2 illustrates the region's higher incidence of elderly, poor and individuals with disabilities than the average for the United States. Other data confirm that employment rates and incomes are lower than state and the national averages as well, meaning fewer individuals are able to afford and/or operate personal vehicles and, therefore, must rely on public transit for access to basic needs. Individuals with disabilities and the elderly often need public transit, either fixed-route using vehicles that are ADA-compliant or, when more assistance is needed, demand-response services. In recent demographic estimates, El Paso County was identified as tied for the county with the third highest level of poverty in the nation.

Table 2: 2000 Census Population Characteristics for the Region

Census Population 2000	Percent Age 65+ County (US = 12.4)	Median Family Income 1999 Dollars County (US = 50,046)	Per Capita Income 1999 Dollars County (US = 21,587)	Percent Individuals Below Poverty County (US = 12.4)	Percent Individuals With Disabilities County (US = 19.3)	Percent 65+ Below Poverty County (US = 9.9)	Percent Persons Employed 16+ years County (US = 63.9)	Mean Travel Time to Work for Workers 16+ years in Mins. (US = 25.5)	
County									
<b>Brewster</b>	8,866	14.6	33,962	15,183	18.2	23.2	13.0	57.2	12.6
<b>Culberson</b>	2,975	11.2	28,547	11,493	25.1	18.2	19.4	59.2	13.1
<b>El Paso</b>	679,622	9.7	33,410	13,421	23.8	20.3	18.5	56.5	22.7
<b>Hudspeth</b>	3,344	9.9	22,314	9,549	35.8	20.6	42.6	48.3	17.0
<b>Jeff Davis</b>	2,207	16.3	39,083	18,864	15.0	24.5	19.6	59.3	24.1
<b>Presidio</b>	7,304	13.9	22,314	9,558	36.4	28.5	44.1	46.3	17.3

Source: Texas State Data Center

Rural El Paso County and the other five counties of the region have other transportation challenges due to demographics and geography. The number of *colonias* in this region total just under 300. The website of the Texas Office of Attorney General lists 289 *colonias* in El Paso County alone, with an estimated 2004 population of 36,100. Known as places of extreme poverty, by definition, *colonias* lack infrastructure, including paved roads, which present unique barriers to the provision of transportation services, thus limiting residents' ability to access the larger community for such services as education, job training, employment, and health care, as well as shopping and recreation. Inability to access human services and employment perpetuates poverty for the *colonias* families and limits their ability to become self-sufficient.

Table 3: Square mileage by county, 2000

County	Brewster	Culberson	El Paso	Hudspeth	Jeff Davis	Presidio
Square miles	6193	3812	1013	4571	2264	3856
Texas	261,797 square miles					

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

The region encompasses 21,709 square miles, with the largest county being Brewster and El Paso the smallest.

The region has unique transportation problems associated with its large geographic area and sparse population outside El Paso. There is a lack of many basic human and medical services in most of the region and an absolute lack of almost all specialty services. Currently, many routine medical services such as kidney dialysis, radiation and chemotherapy, drug abuse treatment, mammography, ophthalmology, and a whole range of other services common in

more populated areas of the state are unavailable in the five rural counties of the region. In addition, significant distance between communities, both within and outside the six counties, requires unusually long travel. A round trip of 400 plus miles to access these services is common for most residents of the rural counties and those residing in the most remote areas may have to travel over 500 miles. As a result of this enormous investment in travel time and increasing expense, many necessary medical needs are neglected. Transportation services for residents of Brewster, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties involve trips across the Council of Governments boundary into the Permian Basin communities of Midland and Odessa. Further, the vast distances between communities and the scarce transportation available impair access by many rural residents to education, employment and shopping.

The isolation and dearth of services in the remote communities of the region ironically lead to a greater incidence of domestic violence, substance abuse and poor diet, increasing the need for access to essential human and medical services. There is no fixed-route service in the counties of Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio. One commercial inter-city bus (All Aboard America, a division of Industrial Bus Lines, Inc.) stops in Presidio and Alpine on a very limited schedule; leaving the majority of the remote communities without any public transportation. There is more frequent Greyhound service along the I-10 corridor in the northern part of the region, but that service is limited to Van Horn, leaving even the I-10 adjacent communities of Sierra Blanca and Ft. Hancock without service. Presidio and Alpine are also the only communities with a local taxi service which is generally limited to trips within the respective city limits. The Presidio taxi service also provides transportation across the international border to Ojinaga, Mexico.

Traditionally a ranching area, a long drought and multiple economic factors have minimized its importance to the area's economy, with tourism now replacing it as the rural counties' most important industry. The resulting service industry jobs tend to be low paying, seasonal and often without benefits.

The remoteness of the rural counties, a frontier population density, combined with low incomes and economic prospects are further complicated by its proximity to the border with Mexico. Surplus, low-cost labor depresses wages; a large amount of local earnings are directed south; numerous bi-national families complicate eligibility and provision of services; and Spanish is often the only language spoken in many families even among citizens that have resided there for many years.

Table 4 depicts typical one-way distances between the larger rural communities and Van Horn and Ft. Stockton that are situated on I-10 and have Greyhound stops. The table also depicts distances to Odessa, Midland and El Paso, the closest location for many medical, dental and human services. While there are physicians, pharmacies and a small hospital in Alpine, none of these services exist in Presidio, Marfa, Terlingua, Marathon, Sierra Blanca and Dell City. Ft. Davis has one practicing MD but no pharmacy.

**Table 4: One-way distances in West Texas/El Paso region**

	Alpine	Van Horn	Ft. Stockton	Odessa	Midland	El Paso
Candelaria	135	183		279	299	304
Presidio	87	135	154	231	251	256
Marfa	26	74	93	170	190	195
Alpine	-	100	67	166	186	221
Ft. Davis	26	98	86	149	169	219
Van Horn	100	-	118	164	184	121
Terlingua	82	182	171	270	290	303
Marathon	31	131	58	157	177	252
Sierra Blanca						88
Dell City						97

Table 5 illustrates the estimates of transportation patterns among workers 16 and older in the region. The vast majority (78.5%) drove alone in personal vehicles; only 11.8% carpooled and less than 1% used public transit to get to work. This has serious implications for congestion and air quality. Commuter patterns can be altered when transit services are more convenient, dependable and reliable. A major goal is to develop a transportation network that provides a variety of mobility options to encourage an increase in public transit riders. Any industrial growth in the region should support business and industry collaborations that aim to reduce commuter congestion and pollution through carpooling, vanpooling and fare subsidization.

Table 5: **Journey to Work, 2000** (Estimates)  
Commuting to Work in the Region (for workers over 16 years)

	Total Workers 16+ years	Drove car, truck or van alone	Carpooled in car, truck or van	Public transportation (includes taxi)	Walked	Other means	Worked at home
Brewster	4,014	2,744	636	0	299	150	186
Culberson	1,262	943	198	14	40	22	45
El Paso	230,184	180,184	27,058	1,918	1,264	1,263	2,302
Hudspeth	1,105	804	174	1	91	20	15
Jeff Davis	1,014	687	172	0	63	28	64
Presidio	2,352	1,619	477	24	139	37	56

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

The military installation, Fort Bliss, has been in the area for 150 years and has a significant impact on the economy and transportation of the region. The Department of Defense recently conducted Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) deliberations, which resulted in decisions to expand Fort Bliss by about 25,000 troops by 2011. Population growth in El Paso County is estimated to be approximately 70,000 when dependents and civilian personnel are considered. This growth in both military personnel and civilians, expected between 2008 and 2011, will place a demand on our existing transportation services. The Pentagon, in making the BRAC decisions, considered local transportation resources. Transportation planning will have to

include the needs of Fort Bliss to be responsive to the anticipated expansion while ensuring that the current community transportation needs will be met.

Population growth estimates in Table 6 illustrate the need to plan now for the forthcoming transportation needs of the elderly in our region. While the total population in El Paso County is anticipated to grow 6.8% between 2005 and 2010, 6% between 2010 and 2015 and 5% between 2015 and 2020, the population over 65 will increase, respectively, in those same periods 9.1%, 15% and 17%. By 2020, the elderly population growth rate will be over three times that of the general population growth rate. The decisions that the elderly make about not using their own vehicles will increase demand for public transit. Additionally, many elderly with significant mobility limitations will impact the need for more demand-response services. The estimates in Table 6 do not reflect the anticipated expansion at Fort Bliss, which will increase military retirees and further impact public transit demand in the area.

Population growth is also occurring in the rural counties of the region, unlike more than 100 rural Texas counties that actually lost population since 1990. Indeed, Brewster, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties grew substantially between 2000 and 2005 and are projected to continue along this trend. As in El Paso County, much of this rural population growth is concentrated in the most elderly age cohort.

Table 6: Estimates of Population Growth by Age, El Paso County (Does not include increases that will occur as a result of BRAC)

Category	2005	% Change from 2000	2010	% Change from 2005	2015	% Change from 2010	2020	% Change from 2015
All ages	732,098	+7.7	781,599	+6.8	828,143	+6.0	870,402	+5.0
18-24	82,779		85,194		87,082		88,040	
25-44	199,854		207,462		218,968		230,443	
45-64	148,296		169,629		179,358		185,829	
65+	72,249		78,895		91,134		106,874	
<18	228,920		240,419		251,601		259,216	

Source: Texas State Data Center

## PUBLIC TRANSIT PROVIDERS

There are two major transportation agencies in the West Texas/El Paso region responsible for providing public transportation for the general public. Sun Metro is a department of the City of El Paso that provides service within the city limits of El Paso. El Paso County Transit is the operator of public transportation for the cities, town and *colonias* in the balance of El Paso County. There is no public transit provider in Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis or Presidio Counties, the only rural counties in Texas without such service (see *Appendix F*).

## **Sun Metro**

Sun Metro is the Section 5307 public transit operator owned by the City of El Paso. Begun in 1977 as SCAT (*Sun City Area Transit*), in 1988 Sun Metro became the El Paso Transit District under the authority of Chapter 453 of the Texas Transportation Code. A political subdivision of the state, Sun Metro is governed by the City of El Paso Mass Transit Board (the City Council and Mayor). It is the second largest public transit system along the US-Mexico border (the San Diego, California system is larger) and provides public transportation services to the city of El Paso, which encompasses 250 square miles and includes a population of approximately 600,000. The operating budget of Sun Metro is \$52 million which is supported by local sales tax, federal grants, advertising and farebox revenue. It has 58 routes, demand-response services, Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) services, circulator routes, special events service (UTEP home games), park & ride service, and an annual ridership of 12,469,976 (12,345,370 fixed route; 259,773 Paratransit; 41,833 JARC). Sun Metro operates with a fleet of 171 vehicles for fixed route, 55 for Paratransit and 8 for the JARC services.

## **El Paso County Transit**

El Paso County provides commuter bus service Monday through Saturday on four routes from the non-urbanized rural areas of the county to convenient Sun Metro transfer locations in the urbanized area. Service is currently provided to Anthony, Canutillo, Westway, Vinton, Montana Vista, Horizon City, Socorro, Clint, Fabens and Tornillo. Service is not provided on Sundays or holidays. A contract between El Paso County and Sun Metro allows transfers between the El Paso County transit system and Sun Metro. LULAC Project Amistad has contracted with El Paso County for to provide these fixed route services since 2000.

El Paso County also provides commuter bus service to areas of El Paso County which are not served by the other four county routes including the El Paso Community College Mission del Paso Campus, Clint, San Elizario and Socorro via Socorro Road. El Paso County obtained Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funds to pay for 80% of this service, after subtracting revenues, with the other 20% of the cost being shared by El Paso County, El Paso Community College Student Government Association (\$10,000 annually), the City of Socorro (\$5,000) annually and the Town of Clint (\$1,100 annually). El Paso County contracts with Sun Metro for the day-to-day operation of the service.

El Paso County Transit is the only Section 5311 (non-urbanized) provider in the six county region. El Paso County Transit initiated service in 1995 as a part of El Paso County government, with a current annual operational budget of \$596,315 that includes federal, state, local and farebox revenue. The El Paso County Commissioner's Court oversees its operations.

## **Client Transportation Providers**

Transportation services, funding or reimbursement are provided to clients through a variety of state or local health and human services agencies, workforce development programs or non-profit organizations. These transportation services are provided through various funding sources, primarily federal. Some of the organizations have vehicles to provide the services directly and others contract for or arrange with the public transit operators to provide services for their unique service population. Still others buy individual tickets, fare cards, bus passes, tokens, or reimburse the rider for authorized trips.

## **Direct Services Providers**

Appendix B provides the profiles of inventoried regional transportation operators that offer direct services to clients using their vehicles procured with federal, state or local funds. These operators are:

Aliviane No-Ad, Inc. (Alpine and El Paso)  
Bienvivir Senior Health Services  
Big Bend Community Action Agency  
Big Bend Episcopal Mission  
Big Bend Regional Medical Center  
Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe, Inc.  
City of Marfa  
City of Presidio  
LULAC Project Amistad  
Lutheran Social Services of the South, Inc. (Buena Vida Adult Day Care Centers)  
Permian Basin Community Centers for MHMR  
Presidio County Veterans Services  
The Sunshine House  
The Town of Van Horn  
Thomason General Hospital

The health and human services agencies (Health and Human Services Commission, Department of Aging and Disability Services, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Family and Protective Services and Department of State Health Services) provide transportation services to their clients as ancillary services. Generally, human service agencies contract with the major transportation providers in the area to provide needed transportation services for their clients. Agency protocols generally require each client to be certified as eligible under the specific program, and be assessed by agency staff in order to identify the transportation needs and services arranged by the staff member on behalf of the client. In some cases, the agency reimburses the client, relative or other authorized adult for providing the transportation needed by the client. When clients are Medicaid-eligible, agency staff assists the client to gain access to the transportation services of the MTP. When a client is not eligible for MTP, the staff must seek other available transportation resources

in the region. All health and human services, including transportation, are often tracked as unit rates for service; transportation expenditures in this structure are not identified separately. Several staff members of these agencies participated in the planning process.

### **Workforce Development Board**

Upper Rio Grande @ Work is a non-profit entity, incorporated in 1998 as the workforce development board for the Upper Rio Grande Workforce Development Area, which is the same counties as the regional service plan area. The current annual budget is approximately \$47 million, the bulk of funding coming from the US Department of Labor through the Texas Workforce Commission. The purpose of Upper Rio Grande @ Work is to find workers for employers and to assist workers secure employment or job training that leads to employment. A board of appointed representatives, the majority of which are from the private sector, oversees the delivery of services. The board does not operate services but procures them through competitive bids. Transportation and other services are provided through the board's network of career centers. Like the health and human services programs, transportation services from the board are provided to clients only when they are needed to access job training or employment. Individuals must be determined eligible for the programs, assessed by center staff for transportation needs and, when warranted, transportation assistance is arranged or authorized by center staff. Transportation assistance for clients is provided through gas cards, Sun Metro bus cards or reimbursement for mileage; the contractor that operates the career centers handles these contracts. Several Upper Rio Grande @ Work personnel are assigned to work on the regional service plan.

THE ROAD MAP  
FOR  
REGIONAL COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION  
*West Texas/El Paso Region*



**Section II:**

**REGIONAL SERVICE COORDINATION PLANNING**

## **REGIONAL SERVICE COORDINATION PLANNING**

### **Planning Process and Work Plan Descriptions**

As noted in the Plan Framework, numerous stakeholders came together in response to the federal and state call for regional human services transportation coordination plans, the opportunity to improve transit services and expand mobility options for all persons throughout the region. Upon receipt of directions from TxDOT in 2005 to begin regional coordinated transportation planning, this local core group launched meetings to establish a planning structure and model. That core group consisted of representatives from El Paso County Transit, TxDOT district office, TxDOT Medical Transportation Program (MTP), El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Rio Grande Council of Governments (RGCOG). There is no planning entity for public transportation in Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio Counties.

Invitations were extended to many regional stakeholders (representing providers and users in the region) to join this regional planning initiative. During the fall and winter of 2005, the stakeholder base grew to include representatives from over 43 entities, such as health and human service, workforce development, user advocacy groups, transportation providers, public housing, school districts, non-profit and community-based organizations, hospitals and economic development organizations from throughout the six counties. This broad-based group worked with the original core group to create the structure to craft this regional plan and selected El Paso County Transit to serve as the Regional Service Planning (RSP) lead entity.

### **Organization, Lead Entity and Other Involved Parties**

#### **El Paso County Transit**

To support planning responsibilities, El Paso County Transit submitted a proposal to TxDOT to fund staffing and related needs and El Paso County and TxDOT executed a contract in March of 2006 for El Paso County to serve as the RSP lead entity in the amount of \$138,044. El Paso County Transit hired two planning staff to support the work of the Steering and Stakeholder committees. The rural Planner offices in Marfa and maintains communications and works with the communities, transportation providers, elected officials, agencies and users in the five rural counties of Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio. Another planner offices in the El Paso County Courthouse Annex and works predominantly within El Paso County. Meetings are arranged and agendas, surveys and other documents are produced, distributed and maintained by these planning staff members.

## **Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)**

TxDOT is the state agency responsible for construction and maintenance of all interstate, U.S, state highways, ranch-to-market (RM) and farm-to-market (FM) roads within the state. The mission of TxDOT is to provide safe, effective and efficient movement of people and goods. The state is organized into 25 geographic districts, each responsible for local highway design and maintenance, right-of-way acquisition, construction oversight, and transportation planning. The West Texas/El Paso regional service planning area has the same boundaries as the TxDOT El Paso District.

TxDOT has funding oversight over state public transportation funding through the Public Transportation Division (PTN). In addition to management and oversight of traditional state and federal transit programs in the small urban and rural areas of the state, TxDOT became the agency with primary responsibility for transportation, including all of the responsibilities related to the provision of transportation services for clients of eligible programs, and transportation services provided as part of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) programs. While TxDOT is responsible for daily Medical Transportation Program (MTP) operations, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) remains responsible for ensuring the integrity of the Texas Medicaid Program, including sufficient oversight of MTP. The HHSC continues to serve as the single state agency for federal communication and will ensure program compliance with federal and state requirements. As a part of the scope of responsibilities for MTP, TxDOT operates Transportation Service Centers to authorize and schedule the MTP trips. As a part of this assumption of the MTP, TxDOT in 2006 selected the MTP contractors in all planning regions through a competitive bid process. MTP staff within TxDOT manage those contracts within each region.

TxDOT district offices also offer access for coordinating public transportation in the area. To complement the work of PTN at the state level, each TxDOT district has assigned the responsibility for working with local public transportation operators and client transportation providers to a Public Transportation Coordinator. Staff members from PTN and MTP actively contribute to the regional service planning process. In El Paso, the TxDOT district has provided mapping, technology services and meeting resources, as well.

## **El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)**

The El Paso MPO is the regional transportation planning agency responsible for working with local, state and federal agencies including transportation providers and neighborhood groups in El Paso County and southern Doña Ana County, New Mexico. As a City of El Paso department, its mission is to accomplish regional planning with one voice, which will provide the greatest benefit while at the same time reflecting the concerns of the communities within the study area.

The MPO works with various agencies to develop transportation plans, travel models, thoroughfare plans, transit plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans. Also, the MPO works with the state on funding issues for transportation improvements, on project planning issues, and on issues such as environmental impacts and air quality. The MPO also works with local governments to coordinate land use and transportation planning.

The MPO is the metropolitan planning organization established in 1973 by federal law to provide a forum for cooperative transportation decision-making. MPO's are designated for all urbanized areas having a population greater than 50,000 as identified by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The Transportation Policy Board (TPB) comprised of state, regional and local officials governs the MPO. Its annual budget is \$1.2 million supported by state and federal (Federal Transit Administration and Federal Highway Administration) funding. The purpose of the MPO is to coordinate regional transportation planning with area counties, cities, Sun Metro, El Paso County Transit, TxDOT, the New Mexico Department of Transportation and other transportation providers in the region and to approve the use of federal transportation funds within the region. As required by SAFETEA-LU, the regional service plan will become a part of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Plan for the MPO study area. Two staff members from the MPO have been working with the RSP. The MPO has contributed meeting space, conference calling and public involvement assistance toward the plan development.

#### **Rio Grande Council of Governments (RGCOG)**

RGCOG was organized in 1967 to serve local governments in its 7-county region of six Texas counties of Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio, along with Doña Ana County, New Mexico. The RGCOG is a regional planning commission organized under Chapter 391, Local Government Code and is one of 24 within the state of Texas. The primary focus of the RGCOG is to serve as an advocate, planner and coordinator of initiatives that, when undertaken on a regional basis, can be more effective and efficient. These include emergency services, elderly assistance, law enforcement training, criminal justice planning, solid waste reduction, infrastructure development, housing and economic development. The RGCOG has assigned staff to the RSP process and facilitated a regional transportation summit to further public involvement for the plan.

#### **Committee Structure Description**

In the planning infrastructure developed by the partner agencies, the Steering Committee serves as the regional service planning oversight committee. It sets infrastructure policies and procedures, meeting logistics and agendas, recruits members from interested agencies/parties to serve on the Stakeholder Committee,

mediates any disagreements and disputes among stakeholders, advises the planning staff funded under the TxDOT planning contract and reviews documents produced for the Stakeholder Committee, the public and involved agencies. The Steering Committee meets regularly at least twice a month to carry out its regional service planning advisory and oversight functions.

The Stakeholder Committee is designed to include all interested parties in the planning process, and, as such, it serves as the decision-making body of the planning process. Members present items for the agenda through the Steering Committee and each agency represented has one vote. Items are passed with a simple majority of those members present at the meeting. The group has a standing monthly meeting on the first Thursday of each month. Other meeting dates can be called as needed. The rules allow for members to attend through a conference calling option offered at the MPO facilities, where most of the Stakeholder and Steering Committee meetings are held. To complete the plan, the Stakeholder Committee agreed to the Work Plan tasks and timeline provided in Appendix C.

### **Other Stakeholders**

The Stakeholder Committee, over the course of this planning process, evolved into a body of transportation providers and users, representative of the region. In order to be more inclusive and to develop a comprehensive plan, the planning process included representatives from a number of organizations that were beyond the scope of programs initially set by the planning model. Membership grew in the last year to 47 individuals from 43 stakeholder organizations. The list of the Stakeholder Committee membership and the organizations they represent is provided in the front insert.

While many stakeholders may have either vehicles and/or financial resources to support transportation, this plan does not include such information in the online transportation inventory established by Texas Transportation Institute, as they did not meet the definition of a “provider” in Chapter 461 of the Texas Transportation Code (e.g., health and human service agencies). Again, to provide a complete picture of the transportation resources in our region, the Stakeholder Committee will be expanding the scope of this plan in the future. Measures will be taken to include resource information for all transit providers who elect to participate in the planning and plan implementation process.

To make recommendations on coordination projects, the Stakeholder Committee has formed a smaller group of providers, called the Provider Work Group. As other assignments warrant, there may be additional work groups formed over the course of the planning. Work groups report to the Stakeholders, who in turn vote on their recommendations for inclusion in the plan.

Meetings have taken place at a variety of locations but are now set for the El Paso MPO. The MPO, to facilitate an inclusive and member-friendly process, has

arranged for conference calling, allowing the more remote representatives to call in and participate in the meetings, thus eliminating long trips into El Paso. This allows for sustained larger public participation and the inclusion of the many diverse perspectives within our geographically large and challenging region.

The rural members of the Stakeholder Committee also meet regularly with the rural planner outside of the monthly scheduled Stakeholder meetings. The rural planner in turns visits with the remote providers and user organizations to get their input and keep them fully aware of activities while also seeking their regular participation in the regional service planning. The rural providers have formed a separate Provider Work Group to recommend to the Stakeholder Committee coordination activities suited to their unique needs.

The work plan for production of the Regional Service Plan is provided as Appendix C. The main activities of the work plan centered on:

- Establishing plan vision, goals and objectives
- Inventorying current conditions (provider resources and user needs)
- Listing and evaluating coordination actions to address gaps
- Writing the plan and presenting it for public comment
- Submitting the plan to the Texas Transportation Commission

These activities were achieved through meetings of the Steering and Stakeholder Committees, with substantial work being done in between those meetings by the Provider Work Group.

### **Outreach/Public Involvement Description**

Public outreach is a major aspect of Regional Service Planning, providing ample opportunity for input from the public in the development of the key components of the plan. The phase of the planning incorporated the needs of users and potential users into the planning activities. The process provided for seeking input beyond the stakeholders working on the plan, by going to advocate agencies and the staff of agencies whose service populations need transportation to gather input on the gaps and unmet needs of the transportation user community. This information was used to determine what steps were necessary to go from its current environment toward the ideal vision in phases, by determining which gaps and unmet needs will be addressed with our coordination actions.

Our approach was to identify the target groups that should provide this input, starting with those targets identified in SAFETEA-LU (individuals with disabilities, those with limited incomes and the elderly). We gathered public input during the inventory of current conditions through surveys (both online, through the use of a Survey Monkey address, and a paper survey that was distributed to the community through the network of stakeholder organizations). The MPO collected all the surveys and compiled the data to assist in the plan development. Surveys were also completed at the public forums (special events

in the communities and the regional transportation summit in November). Surveys were released throughout the region to ensure a comprehensive picture of transportation needs in all communities. Public involvement and results of the surveys are summarized in Appendix D.

Other means of public input included outreach to organizations, agencies, advocates and associations that serve the targeted populations, through speeches, newspaper articles on the planning process and the need for public comment on their transportation needs. The draft plan was released for public comment in October, allowing for a thirty-day review and comment period, during which the process provided for forums to gather public input on the plan. The plan was made available to the public through a number of channels (e.g., public libraries, project website, a regional transportation summit). Public outreach events were held in various locations around the region; public comment was encouraged in person, in writing or online.

## **HISTORY OF REGIONAL COORDINATION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

### **Past/Continuing Planning Activities (Before RSP Development)**

The Regional Service Planning process quickly engaged a broad array of stakeholders who set out to meet the directives of state government. That group continued to grow with each meeting as we learned of others with a potential interest or we saw in the cooperative planning an opportunity to overcome some obstacle in what remains a difficult geographic and social environment. Not wanting to wait for state or federal action on a completed plan, the stakeholders agreed from the outset to implement any coordination strategies not requiring external assistance. Many cooperative strategies were already underway, or had been operational before this planning process, and the mere process of bringing the various stakeholders together created a forum and environment for the cross-fertilization of ideas, sharing of resources and simple connections that greatly increased awareness of assets, programs and services. What follows is a list of coordination efforts that were initiated prior to the submittal of this plan.

#### **Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Sun Metro within City of El Paso**

Initiated in 2002, Sun Metro operates JARC services in El Paso with Section 5316 funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), enabling riders to travel to work and/or job training. “Job Express” was launched in 2002 with the purchase of eight vans. An agreement between Sun Metro and the Upper Rio Grande @ Work provides funds to train the unemployed as Sun Metro Coach Operators for this JARC program, who are then employed as drivers for the “Job Express” vehicles. The workforce development funds utilized for such training serve as the match funding required under JARC. In addition, Sun Metro’s JARC program experience and the partnerships established to plan and operate the program, enabled the region to prepare a proposal for the JARC *colonias* grant application in 2006. TxDOT awarded JARC Colonias funds to serve El Paso County in fall 2006 (see below under *Past and current implemented projects/services*).

### **Free Juror Duty**

The County of El Paso offers jurors a free ride via Sun Metro to jury duty at the county courthouse saving them the cost and inconvenience of parking. El Paso County reimburses Sun Metro at the same price normally charged the general public for a ride.

## **Past and Current Implemented Projects/Services (During RSP Development)**

### **JARC Funding for *Colonias* (El Paso County)**

The region, through Upper Rio Grande @ Work, the workforce development board, applied for and was awarded a JARC *Colonias* grant from TxDOT. That project designated the current Medical Transportation Program contractor, LULAC Project Amistad, to purchase and drive vans into the *colonias* in order to link riders with the El Paso county and city mass transit systems.

Over the past months, several of the regional services planning partners and TxDOT have been working out the details of this contract. The amount of the grant was reduced and the workforce board instructed TxDOT that they would no longer be seeking the grant. The group worked on a solution, which was to have the funds come directly to LULAC Project Amistad. LULAC notified TxDOT that it would accept the grant and enter into to a contract for these employment transportation services. The scope of the grant was narrowed to accommodate the smaller grant award but the structure remained as it was originally presented to TxDOT: service to *colonias* residents in El Paso County to access job training, job interviews and employment by linking riders to Sun Metro and El Paso County Transit routes. This service enables more *colonias* residents to access the jobs in the employment centers of El Paso. LULAC will purchase two new vehicles to provide this extra service to the *colonias*.

### **Transportation Coordination Planning Institute (Region)**

Four members of the Stakeholder Committee, from LULAC Project Amistad, Upper Rio Grande @ Work and El Paso County Transit, received scholarships to attend a Coordinated Transportation Planning Institute organized by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) in Washington, D.C. in August 2006. The four-day interactive course was offered to facilitate regional transportation coordination, in support of the SAFETEA-LU joint planning requirements. After hearing a series of state-of-the-art coordination models and visiting with several national leaders and experts on transportation coordination, the team laid out a work plan and timeline for a single coordination action. The team focused on the development of a one-stop trip planner and transit information system. Attendance at the CTAA Institute also comes with an opportunity to access available CTAA coordination planning funds that could be used to support the work outlined in this plan. The Institute extends free technical resources and a network of experienced authorities to each of the 20 teams over the course of the planning year, furthering CTAA commitment to support regional

transportation coordination. Such resources will bolster regional coordination activities after this plan is submitted to TxDOT.

### **Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Project (Region)**

The Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) approved \$145,000 in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311(b)(2) Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) funds on October 27, 2005, for El Paso County for an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Service Demonstration Project. The ITS "specification" to be prepared as a result of this grant award is to be developed for statewide use among rural transit agencies and demand-response providers. The \$145,000 in TxDOT funding was approved based on the fact that it was an additional aspect of a \$986,604 New Technology Research & Development (NTRD) Grant received by El Paso County and originally funded by the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

This NTRD Grant will result in the manufacture and deployment of a rear-wheel drive, low-floor, A.D.A. compliant, 33-passenger transit vehicle, which couples the latest natural gas engine technology with Hydraulic Launch Assist (HLA) to achieve emission reductions of up to 85 percent over conventional diesel vehicles.

This project combines ITS with the latest in clean transportation technologies to create a transit vehicle which substantially reduces criteria air pollutants, improves transit agency efficiencies and enhances driver and passenger satisfaction. Specifically, the ITS technology portion of the project consists of the following four primary components:

- Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) utilizing Global Positioning System (GPS)
- Real-time voice communication and automated data systems
- Automated Fare Payment and/or "Smart Card" Technology
- Passenger Information

#### *Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) utilizing Global Positioning System (GPS)*

Serving as a cornerstone of the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) will be the Automatic Vehicle Location tracking system utilizing GPS or DGPS (Differential GPS) technology to accurately track vehicle locations within the pre-designated service area. Current GPS technology allows vehicles to be tracked within 10-20 meters or less. Technologies to be integrated with the AVL system include mobile data terminals, covert audio and/or visual surveillance systems, emergency alarms, real-time digital communications and computer-assisted dispatch.

#### *Real-Time Voice Communication and Automated Data Systems, Computer-Aided Scheduling & Dispatch*

Real-time, two-way voice and communication between dispatch and drivers of both fixed-route and demand-response vehicles will be an essential component of the ITS effort. Project planners will examine available technology such as hand-

held data devices and the promise of devices like personal digital assistants, which provide real-time, two-way data transmission. Technologies such as computer-aided dispatch & scheduling software-enabling information regarding vehicle position, schedule adherence, operator and incident information (potentially customized vehicle status and engine conditions) to be displayed at dispatcher workstations will also be evaluated.

#### *Automated Fare Payment and “Smart Card” Technology*

In addition to automated fare payment, available opportunities to integrate billing and accounting systems from state, federal and local social service programs which now require individual swipe cards (or other less sophisticated forms of payment and accounting) will be the primary objective of the “smart-card” effort, allowing for seamless ITS coordination throughout the community. In the initial phase of the proposed effort, “smart card” technologies will be examined for integration into vehicles operated by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

#### *Passenger Information*

Historically, passenger information on ITS-capable transit vehicles has been limited to automated stop annunciation and destination signs. As part of the proposed effort, the project partners will utilize state-of-the-art LED or plasma displays placed strategically throughout the vehicle to broadcast public service announcements, health-related information, community calendars and possibly even customized destination announcements.

#### *Intelligent Software Agents*

Intelligent Software Agents collaborate with each other to provide the human operator a powerful, real-time, decision-support environment. The agents continuously monitor changes and utilize reasoning and computation capabilities to generate and evaluate courses of action in response to both real-world events and user interactions.

Other technologies to be explored as part of the initial technology assessment include real-time passenger information, automated passenger counters, and vehicle component monitoring.

#### *Anticipated Benefits of ITS Project*

While a comprehensive ITS system has never been integrated with a vehicle utilizing the clean transportation technologies such as those proposed in this project proposal, based on data derived from the deployment of ITS system components in other regions of the country benefits can be expected. As an example, some transit systems that have deployed ITS components have improved schedule adherence by as much as 23 percent, lowered driver assaults by 20 percent and increased fare revenues by up to 12 percent.

In addition, operational and efficiency benefits to transit organizations have been realized in the following categories through deployment of ITS components:

- System Operations
- Communications
- Passenger Information
- Customer Relations
- Scheduling and Planning
- Safety and Security

*ITS Project (Second Phase)*

El Paso County Transit will also receive \$785,000 in Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funds to install the final hardware and software developed as a result of the first phase of the ITS Project on 16 vehicles which will be utilized throughout the six county region. The vehicles will be installed on El Paso County Transit and LULAC Project Amistad vehicles.

*Texas Transportation Institute Involvement (TTI) in ITS Project*

The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) recently opened an office in El Paso. One of the primary purposes of the new TTI office is to design and implement a Regional Transportation Data Warehouse for the El Paso region. El Paso County Transit and the El Paso TTI office agreed on September 29, 2006, that all information gathered from the ITS Project would be shared with TTI's Regional Transportation Data Warehouse.

**Driver Training (Region)**

In an effort to standardize driver skills and competencies, the first coordination action item selected by the Stakeholder Committee for the Regional Service Plan was the implementation of a single driver-training program that meets the driver specifications across all transit operators. Because the region suffers from a shortage of adequately trained and experienced drivers, a partnership of transportation operators has worked cooperatively on this customized training with El Paso Community College (EPCC). Using the Sun Metro coach operator training materials as the foundation of the course, EPCC will establish a course advisory body, composed of representatives from the transportation operators, to oversee the course implementation. Planning also includes locating resources to pay for this training aimed at increasing the pool of skilled drivers.

**Bulk Purchase (Region)**

Joint purchasing of transit related commodities presents an opportunity to reduce operating costs across the system of transit operators. Common expendable commodities such as tires, fuel, parts and cleaning services can be obtained in greater volume lowering unit costs when operators coordinate their procurement. Pursuit of this coordination strategy involves the identification of the most commonly purchased commodities, the volume of projected need, range of specifications across the system and organizational procurement requirements. Joint RFPs/RFQs will be prepared and issued in anticipation of these large volume purchases. Among the rural providers the volume of needed supplies or distances between providers negates the advantages of creating a joint purchasing

pool. However, the Texas Building and Procurement Commission Purchasing Co-op and related programs offer the opportunity to benefit from large volume prices without undertaking the procurement process. This option is being researched for the urban area as well and where necessary, barriers resulting from Co-op eligibility restrictions and vendor location will be noted below with recommendations for legislative and regulatory action to allow fuller participation.

**Website ([gobusgo.org](http://gobusgo.org)) (Region)**

El Paso County Transit contracted with Cognent, Inc., an El Paso based website developer on September 14, 2006, to design, develop and deploy a website for the Stakeholders of the Regional Coordinated Public Transportation Plan for the six county region of far west Texas. The website will be designed and implemented using industry standard HTML, Coldfusion 7 and graphics standards. The website will be designed/built to represent 20 agencies with 25 user licenses and a Content Management System and Message Board. The contract will also include training for 25 individuals and one-year of service fees including website hosting. The website will eventually become a valuable asset in sharing information between the Stakeholders throughout the six county region in addition to providing the general public a consolidated package of available transportation resources in their area of residence. After considerable discussion the domain name chosen for the website by the majority of Stakeholders voting was [gobusgo.org](http://gobusgo.org).

**Regional Transportation Forum (Region)**

A regional transportation summit, coordinated by the Rio Grande Council of Governments was held on November 1, 2006. The event was designed to build awareness of the Regional Coordinated Transportation Plan and the issues that have come from this first cycle of planning. Further, it served as a public forum whereby riders and potential riders can provide input on service gaps and suggestions for service improvement. Finally, the event expanded public commitment to develop and implement transportation solutions on a regional basis. The event provided for “mirror” meetings in both El Paso and Alpine, to allow for rural participation and the agendas allowed for each site to work on additional local transportation issues separately after the general sessions. Using focus groups the two sites developed local action plans to improve the noted deficiencies and gaps. Each site had a panel of elected officials to discuss and commit to regional transportation coordination. As a wrap-up, the two sites reconvened separately at the end to make recommendations for the regional coordination plan. The forum drew 168 participants, to hear “best practices” presentations on transportation coordination, produce additional recommendations to increase coordination across the different systems and gather more community-based commitment to planning and implementation of coordination actions. While initiated as an essential component of public involvement, the event also served as a marketing tool for the planning process and a means of soliciting sustained community inclusion in the implementation of and future amendments to the plan. A report of the event will be forthcoming in December 2006. The RGCOG has also made a commitment to use funds to produce a handbook of

public transit services (using the information gathered in the plan development) for use by riders, agencies and transit providers. This information could be inserted in the website and be the foundation for a user travel information site (virtual and telephone).

### **Section 5310 Vehicle Funding Selections (Region)**

TxDOT released the procurement guidelines for Section 5310 (Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities) funds in the summer of 2006. The TxDOT El Paso district office set up an advisory committee of transportation providers, agencies and advocates for these targeted segments of the population. The advisory committee met during September of 2006 and made recommendations concerning the distribution of the \$245,187 that was available. The advisory committee recommended that the funds for this region be split equally among the four agencies that had requested funding: Nazareth Hall Nursing Center, Lutheran Social Services of the South, Inc. (Buena Vida Adult Day Care Centers), White Acres Good Samaritan Retirement Village and LULAC Project Amistad. LULAC Project Amistad will be buying all the vehicles for all the recipients using bulk purchase; this achieves a measure of program efficiency across the providers by securing a single discounted price for all vehicles.

### **Implementation of Vanpools (El Paso County)**

El Paso County Transit will receive \$1,000,000 in Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funds over a three-year period beginning in 2007 to implement a Vanpool Program in El Paso County. The county intends to utilize an experienced private vanpool provider, which will be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the program. The majority of the marketing for the Vanpool Program will take place with major employers and with displaced factory workers enrolled in area vocational training centers. A portion of the funding will be available to subsidize the cost to consumers. Under this scenario, during the second and third years of the program, the initial organization of the program will be completed and funding will be adequate to support up to thirty-five vanpools throughout the county.

### **County Mass Transit Authority (El Paso County)**

The MPO initiated research and deliberations on establishing a countywide transit authority, to fill the public transit gaps in areas outside the city limits of El Paso. Legislation to allow the creation of a County Mass Transit Authority CMTA passed in the Texas State Legislature in 1995 (Chapter 457 of the Texas Transportation Code). The process of creating a CMTA involves several steps, similar to those followed by other Texas metropolitan areas in creating Metropolitan Transit Authorities. These involve the El Paso City Council passing a resolution in favor of creating a CMTA, appointing a board, establishing an initial service plan and tax rate, and conducting a confirmation election in the County of El Paso (excluding the City of El Paso). Once the City and the County approve the CMTA, the City Transit District (Sun Metro) would be dissolved and the County Mass Transit Authority would take its place.

The El Paso MPO is preparing a report on the feasibility of creating a CMTA for El Paso County. Barriers to the creation of a CMTA include the fact that all but one of the municipalities in the county have reached the maximum allowable sales and use tax rate. Unless these municipalities find a way to reduce their existing sales and use taxes, the current legislation will not permit the creation of a CMTA.

**Driver Recognition (Rural Counties)**

Driver retention is a persistent operational challenge for all the region's providers. Funding and distance related costs limit driver pay and the pay-per-trip funding mechanism means some drivers, who are also paid only when they drive, have no guaranteed income. Compounded by long hours and the stress of driving passengers; driver turnover is high. In the rural counties where the available labor pool is very limited, the providers agreed to cooperate on a driver recognition effort as a non-monetary but high value form of compensation. With small communities where most everyone else hears of one's accomplishments, a plan is being developed to hold driver ceremonies in the respective commissioners' courts and city councils to recognize the difficult work, importance to the community and public appreciation of both paid and volunteer drivers with individual resolutions and plaques.

**THE ROAD MAP  
FOR  
REGIONAL COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**  
*West Texas/El Paso Region*



**Section III:**

**COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

## **REGIONAL COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

The West Texas El Paso Regional Coordinated Transportation Planning Coalition became part of this history of regional transportation coordination and, as part of the RSP process, identified and began implementing several coordination strategies it felt would yield immediate benefits. Nevertheless, the Coalition's central focus was the development of a plan that would guide long term regional transportation policy, target funding requests and system investment and promote the creation of a truly coordinated system of transportation services responsive to a growing and challenging marketplace.

Consistent with our commitment to regional coordination, noted in the Plan Framework and both resulting from and guiding the extensive planning process and work plan outlined above, the West Texas El Paso Regional Coordinated Transportation Planning Coalition adopted the following Vision, Mission, Goals, Objectives and Coordination Actions for this plan.

### **VISION**

Customer-centered, attractive, dependable, convenient and safe transportation choices for persons in the region.

### **MISSION**

We will coordinate the many transportation resources to provide a customer-centered, accountable, effective and efficient transit system for the general public of the six-county West Texas region.

### **GOALS**

#### **Mobility**

The system will provide personal mobility.

#### **Accessibility**

The system will improve accessibility of people to major activity centers in the region.

#### **Efficiency**

The system will maximize current and future transportation resources and eliminate waste.

#### **Reliability**

The system will improve the reliability and safety of existing and future transportation services.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

The system will minimize negative environmental impacts.

### **Equity**

The system will distribute services equitably based on geographic, demographic and economic factors.

### **Livability**

The system will support quality of life in the service areas.

### **Accountability**

The system will be accountable to the taxpayers and the customers in its use of resources and the service it provides.

### **Action**

The system will maintain the capacity to and successfully implement agreed upon Coordination strategies.

### **Flexibility**

The system will maintain an on-going self-assessment process and adopt a philosophy of continuous improvement.

### **Advocacy**

The system will endeavor to discover and commit to fill all unacceptable gaps in service through expanded financial support to achieve universal mobility.

### **Compliance**

The system will honor its Regional Services Plan so as to minimally maintain and possibly expand those sources of transit funding dependent on plan requirements and local priorities.

### **Communications**

The system will maintain a central providers and users clearinghouse for the on-going discussion and realization of coordination opportunities and system improvements.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Ensure the provision of reliable public transit services to meet mobility needs at the lowest reasonable price

Encourage the development of coordinated transportation information through a region wide communication and marketing plan

Continue to review efforts made by providers to implement coordination strategies and demonstrate effectiveness of those efforts for the customers and the system providers

Provide technical assistance (resource information; grants assistance, including non-traditional sources; coordination; support) to public and private sector organizations providing general or specialized transportation services

Encourage cooperation and linkages between local bus transit, intercity bus services and other modes at multi-modal centers (physical and/or virtual) to improve inter-county and regional travel and encourage public agencies and human/ social services to locate at, or provide connections to, these multi-modal facilities

Consider service alternatives to improve efficiency and effectiveness, such as coordination with human/social services transportation programs, provision of non-traditional services and other innovative service

Ensure that all equipment, passenger amenities and websites for fixed route and demand-response systems are designed and operated in full compliance with ADA

Develop an action plan to provide transportation throughout the region that would connect to fixed route services and provide access to essential services

Support and maintain a formal mechanism for human/social service and other affected agencies' input into the public transit planning process

Encourage private sector and other organizations to support convenient and reasonably priced alternative options with existing providers

Set performance standards for all coordination strategies and measure the implementation of each to determine how they meet the Regional Service Plan goals

Continue educational effort on use of public transportation among the transportation disadvantaged

Continue to gather public involvement in the identification of changing transit needs of the transportation disadvantaged, particularly the elderly, the disabled and individuals with low incomes and use the information to develop effective solutions

Expand fixed-route services into developing areas when sufficient population density and funding exist to make service cost effective and link service with existing activity centers in the region

## **REGIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

With a guiding vision and specific system goals and objectives in place, RSP and stakeholder staff, with assistance from the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), undertook an extensive survey of all the transit resources in the region. The survey generated a valuable inventory of rolling stock detailed to the level of model, age, mileage, passenger capacity, features and fuel source. The survey also outlined transit provider details such as ridership, hours of operation, specific routes, passenger profiles and eligibility. A staff analysis of this data resulted in a list of overlaps when viewed from the perspective of a system although necessary when seen in isolation as independent transportation providers operating within their categorical silos. Overlaps include redundant service areas, dispatching and reservation systems, vehicle maintenance, driver training, purchasing and procurement processes, and planning and administrative structures.

An analysis of the same data and the use of both provider and user surveys also revealed other problems areas within the current system. Results of these surveys are outlined in Appendix D. Urban system concerns included more modern and reliable vehicles with functioning wheelchair-lifts and air-conditioning with a greater emphasis on preventative maintenance and the training of alternative fuel mechanics. The analysis identified a need for more service including more express and circulator routes, feeder services, evening and weekend services as well as service to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and Las Cruces, New Mexico. The data suggested improved sidewalk and curb cut access to bus stops, simplified access to trip planning and price information, universal inter-provider transfers and a guaranteed ride-home service.

The rural data revealed extensive unmet needs in all five counties. The five rural counties of Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio are presently the only counties in the state of Texas not receiving Section 5311 funds from TxDOT for the operation of fixed-route service (see *Appendix F*). The research also identified very limited inter-city bus service and stops in the rural counties, leaving a majority of the region without any public transit option. The Medical Transportation Program coordinated by TxDOT is severely strained due mainly to the long distances required in traveling to medical facilities. In addition, noon hour senior nutrition services are only provided in three cities. Finally, while most critical in the rural areas because of the great distances involved, urban and rural transit providers experience problems in accessing fueling stations for their alternative fueled transit vehicles which they are required by TxDOT to purchase if TxDOT funds are utilized to assist with the purchase. The rural counties may consider the creation of a rural transit district, or joining another rural transit district to provide essential services to residents. State law pertinent to Rural Transit District is found in Texas Transportation Code, Chapter 458 (see *Appendix G*).

## COORDINATION ACTION PLAN

The regional service planning process resulted in a Coordination Action Plan. This core element of the regional plan attempts to respond to the most pressing needs of the transit infrastructure as it exists now in a way that reduces redundancies and moves toward the highly coordinated, seamless system envisioned in our vision, goals and objectives. Specific actions are outlined that address the areas of 1) Adequate Maintenance – to first fix our existing resources, 2) System Efficiency - to improve the operation of existing transit resources and 3) Strategic Expansion - to more effectively address significant service gaps and growing customer demand.

### Action Items/ Service Descriptions/Prioritization/Implementation/Evaluation

The Provider Work Group, Steering and Stakeholder Committees, over the course of the planning period, reviewed resources and needs in the region to develop action items for regional coordinated transportation. Action steps are grouped according to their geographic relevance to differentiate applicability in our highly diverse region. Implementation steps and metrics of success were also developed. The RSP stakeholders will develop benchmarks for these metrics at a later date.

Stakeholders will be implementing these items during the course of the plan period based on the prioritization specified in the chart. Group I action items were launched during the course of the Regional Service Planning and will continue over the plan period. Items in Priority Groups II and III will be researched and implemented, as resources and time permit.

**PRIORITY GROUP I:** Immediate/continuing action items. These have been developed, researched and initiated before submittal of the plan.

<b>ACTION PRIORITY</b>	<b>ACTION DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>METRICS OF SUCCESS</b>
I.A <i>El Paso County</i>	Driver Training	Driver curriculum adopted Training program scheduled and publicized Training program graduates class, providers recruit/hire graduates	% of program graduates hired by local providers
I.B <i>Region</i>	Website	Website content is built, reviewed, approved and published to web Website is broadly publicized Website is current	% of providers report site accuracy % of public is aware of web site in random survey % of site users report site ease of use and utility in on-site evaluation
I.C <i>Region</i>	Access to TxDOT alternative fueling stations	Obtain agreement from TxDOT for provider access to alternative fueling stations Establish billing mechanism	% of providers granted access to % of appropriate TxDOT fueling stations
I.D	Vanpools (especially	Establish capacity to identify and	X new employers or employment

<i>El Paso County</i>	with workforce clients)	contact employers, provide funding information and technical assistance to establish vanpools	centers establish vanpools each year
<i>I.E Region</i>	Intelligent Transportation Systems Development Project	ITS specifications are completed, reviewed and adopted	% of providers adopt and report satisfaction with ITS enhancements
<i>I.F Region</i>	Bulk Purchasing	Common commodities/services identified Specifications completed Bid packages and schedule developed and publicized Join State Purchasing Co-op	% of provider supplies, equipment and services are procured jointly % reduction in commodity cost is incurred
<i>I.G Region</i>	Pursue funds to sustain planning effort	Research possible funding sources Apply for funds	Funds secured to maintain current coordinated planning effort
<i>I.H Region</i>	Mechanics training for vehicles using alternative fuel	Regular schedule of alternative fuel training is developed and publicized in advance	% of providers and local vendors attend
<i>I.I Rural Counties</i>	Driver Recognition	Prepare and distribute sample resolutions, certificates and press releases to providers for use by city and county governments and boards of directors	% of city councils and/or commissioners' courts that adopt resolutions honoring work of paid and volunteer drivers % of resolutions adopted covered by local press
<i>I.J Region</i>	Community Transportation Forum	Forum(s) agenda, content and logistics are adopted Forum is broadly publicized Forum occurs	% of attendance goal is achieved % of attendees expectations are met and learn more about local transit system Forum generates important insight and comment on regional transportation coordination plan
<i>I. K. Rural Counties</i>	Volunteer Driver Support	Provide joint technical assistance and training support to provider organizations using volunteers	% of organizations provided volunteer driver technical assistance

**PRIORITY GROUP II:** These action items require additional research, technical assistance and planning.

<b>ACTION PRIORITY</b>	<b>ACTION DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>METRICS OF SUCCESS</b>
<i>II.A Region</i>	Community Guide of Transportation Services	Information on all rural transportation providers collected, formatted and printed in bilingual guide and website Guide publicized and available widely	% of providers listed in guide % of guide information accurate % of public places maintain supply of guide
<i>II.B</i>	Pursue additional funding to increase services to targeted groups (e.g., JARC grant)	Establish standing capacity to research regional transit needs, monitor funding opportunities, and prepare grant applications	% of appropriate funding opportunities are pursued with a quality application % of applications are funded at

<i>Region</i>	for more <i>colonias</i> , Tiguas community and rural counties; New Freedom grant for service to individuals with disabilities)	consistent with regional coordination plan and priorities	the full request
<i>II.C</i>  <i>Rural Counties</i>	Linking the public transit services with volunteer and faith-based services	Develop standing capacity to direct/assist individuals and groups in volunteering rides, donating vehicles or serving as escorts Publicize volunteer transit opportunities and benefits (could be part of transit one stop)	X volunteer drivers, vehicles and escorts deployed as a result of the intermediary program
<i>II. D</i>  <i>Rural Counties</i>	Establish deviated fixed route, inter-city transit system linking cities, towns and villages in Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties currently unserved by any public transit system	Compile data documenting unmet need and ridership potential Propose routes and schedules responsive to need and demand Seek public input and support for system proposal  Assess existing transit resources (MTP, schools, HHSC, AAA) for inclusion of resources in system Create Rural Transit District Prepare 5311 application	System designed, funded and operating % of area provided transit services % of public using transit system % of riders reporting greater mobility and increased quality of life resulting from access to transit services
<i>II.E</i> <i>El Paso County</i>	Establish El Paso Countywide transit authority	Research applicable state laws Research state certification steps Write concept paper for decision makers Develop resolution for interested communities to sign Draw up boundary map Have all interested communities sign intergovernmental contract Submit certification materials to TxDOT	Creation of county transit authority

**PRIORITY GROUP III:** These action items require more time and additional resources. In some cases, they require more technical assistance and the elimination of barriers and constraints.

<b>ACTION PRIORITY</b>	<b>ACTION DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>METRICS OF SUCCESS</b>
III.A	One stop trip planner and information (virtual and telephone)	One stop transit information and trip planner scope, function, budget and implementation plan adopted One stop operating entity identified and funded One stop operator adds/assigns/trains staff One stop develops/acquires support mechanisms and protocols One stop operator populates	% of public aware of and know how to access one stop as measured by random survey % of one stop users report expectations met as measured by customer satisfaction survey

<i>Region</i>		provider data base One stop is widely publicized One stop goes live	
III.B <i>El Paso County</i>	Carpools	Establish capacity to identify and contact individuals and employers, provide funding information and technical assistance to establish carpools	X new carpools are initiated each year
III.C <i>Region</i>	Establishment of system for cost sharing (supports vehicle sharing) and sharing vehicles for multi-purpose trips	Identify opportunities for system improvement/expansion through vehicle sharing Develop individual vehicle sharing plans, agreements, protocols and cost sharing mechanisms Establish process to explore vehicle sharing alternative to new vehicle purchases with savings directed to operating costs	% of system vehicles available for sharing Vehicles operate at % capacity as a result of vehicle sharing Operating costs are reduced by % as a result of cost sharing Operating revenues increase by % by diverting capital expenditures
III.D <i>Region</i>	Lower insurance costs (particularly in the case of vehicle sharing)	Establish multi-agency shared risk pools or other approaches to lowered insurance costs or Pursue legislative action to indemnify providers of public transportation	Providers experience a % reduction in insurance costs
III.E <i>Region</i>	Incentives for paratransit riders to use the fixed routes (e.g., Medical Transportation clients)	Research and adopt paratransit incentives Publicize and implement incentive system	% of paratransit riders use fixed route system when available
III.F <i>Region</i>	Community Based Transit Planning	Secure commitments from representatives from community to participate in planning (especially from target groups of elderly, low income and individuals with disabilities) Develop and implement a community outreach plan Convene representatives to establish community needs, gaps and deficiencies, to make recommendations for solutions and to prioritize the actions to be taken to solve the problems	# of community representative meetings # of neighborhoods participating in the planning process # of representatives from community attending the planning meetings # of solutions recommended # of community based solutions implemented
III.G	Eliminate eligibility criteria and obtain revenue sources to allow all transit providers to transport all special needs populations under a real-time dispatch system thereby eliminating all duplication, maximizing use of system capacity		

<i>Region</i>	and minimizing vehicle miles traveled while providing greater mobility for more users		
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**BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS**

*(See Appendix H)*

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**Inter-regional Coordination**

On its Eastern boundary, the far West Texas region borders the Permian Basin planning region that contains the cities of Midland and Odessa. While distant, this region and those cities play an important role for many of the citizens of far west Texas and the rural counties in particular. With very limited medical services beyond basic primary health care services in Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Presidio counties, the closest services are located in the Midland/Odessa metropolitan area. Indeed, the most frequent destination of the MTP provider for these counties is Odessa for dialysis services. The Big Bend Regional Health Center likewise makes monthly trips to Midland for the closest mammography service. Since this region is the nearest location for a whole range of primary and almost all specialty medical and social services, establishing a cooperative relationship between the two regions is of critical importance. The most desired outcome would be the provision of all needed services in the far west Texas region itself. However, given the extremely high cost of advanced medical technology, the skilled labor need for its operation, and the lack of sufficient population to justify it in the region, providing adequate transportation to those services seems the only reasonable alternative for the foreseeable future.

The planning regions have agreed to work together to improve access to these essential services. However, the great distances involved and the fact that few if any Permian Basin residents travel to the Big Bend region for services render shuttle/passenger exchange services useless. Nevertheless, a rural fixed-route system (Section 5311) appears to offer much promise and other options continue to be explored to address the mobility needs of one of the most remote and poorest regions of the nation.

The Las Cruces, New Mexico Metropolitan Planning Organization recently concluded a process to create the South Central (New Mexico) Regional Transportation District (RTD). This transit region will include Alamogordo, Chaparral, Las Cruces, Mesilla, Sunland Park and other smaller communities within its boundaries. This RTD will provide services up to the western and northern El Paso County borders (see *Appendix I*). Because many people from New Mexico and Texas travel throughout this region for work, medical appointments, shopping

and recreation, it will be beneficial that the concepts guiding regional coordinated transportation include this New Mexico public transit project. The documents necessary for certification have been submitted to the New Mexico Department of Transportation with certification anticipated by the end of 2006. West Texas/El Paso Regional Coordinated Transportation Planning will be working closely with this New Mexico regional transit district to ensure that these new services improve mobility for all people in this region. Operational matters that will be explored include a multi-modal border terminal, addition of the RTD services in the one stop travel information mechanism and transfer policies between the involved transit providers from both states.

### **System Efficiency**

Today, regional transportation demand far exceeds capacity, delaying results and impeding efficiency requiring us to make skilled and well-informed decisions about the resources that we have today and plan to secure in the future. Our biggest obstacle is the institutional tangle of multiple funding and oversight by agencies, operators and providers of transportation services. They must come together and commit to the unifying mission of this plan, not just the piece they individually happen to own. Without this collective resolve and dedication to the enterprise of partnership and collaboration, this plan will have been developed in vain; the partners will fall back into their respective and separate agendas and methods of operations, and thereby miss this opportunity to achieve comprehensive transportation improvements.

### **Adequate Maintenance**

The entities responsible for implementing this plan must be dedicated to maintaining the current and future transportation resources in our region. Too many of the vehicles, facilities and maintenance and operations functions are inadequate to meet the demands of today's passenger, much less any planned or envisioned rider increase. The repair and replacement shortfall far exceeds all the revenues that can be expected now or in the near term. A proactive, preventative maintenance approach will need to be maintained along with the dedication of resources to RSP implementation for this plan and the system it envisions to realize its potential.

### **Strategic Expansion**

The current research and preliminary discussions about a Regional Mobility Authority for the City of El Paso and Regional Transit Authority for El Paso County provide us the occasion to build solutions to regional transportation needs as a part of these initiatives. A regional rail service may not immediately be an economically or politically viable option today, but more rapid or express bus service and additional rural transit service can go a long way to improving access of

many of our citizens to critical basic community resources and centers. Our regional planning must consider and develop transportation solutions to our unique situation, namely the low population density and vast geographic distances of this region for accessing work, medical services, shopping or recreation. We must incorporate the principals of Smart Growth in our land use planning, especially concerning residential and commercial development, to make use of existing and planned transit hubs.

### **Plan Update Cycle/Process**

RSP must be iterative and institutionalized, requiring regular updates or updates as required by any procurement of new funds from the federal, state or local governmental entities to support the goals of this plan. Many of the coordination action items will take several years and significant investments of funding, research and technical assistance to implement. As with the Annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) of the MPO, this plan will have updates to clarify roles, responsibilities, funding sources and levels and performance metrics for each coordination action. At a minimum, the stakeholders envision annual updates of relevant parts of this plan.

### **Continuing/Sustaining the Coordination Plan**

Maintaining the necessary capacity to implement this plan is of critical concern. Recognizing this need early in the RSP process, the Steering Committee and Stakeholders voted to adopt a sustainability plan to ensure the continuation of the planning structure and the support of a central planning staff to coordinate Action Priorities listed above. While numerous coordination strategies have already begun as a result of this process, most require further planning and extensive coordination across multiple organizations, jurisdictions and constituent groups.

The RSP Stakeholders, in their action to support an on-going centralized coordination effort authorized the current lead agency, El Paso County, to seek adequate funds that will allow the continued employment of the planning staff that presently exists. Funding for the planning staff was originally provided through a TxDOT grant. Even if outside funding were available, it is not likely to produce the needed funding in the timeframe and amount to support the most orderly and efficient implementation of the action plan. Therefore, it is the overwhelming opinion of the stakeholders that only through continuation funding from TxDOT, will we be able to implement the plan and realize our vision and its benefits.

THE ROAD MAP  
FOR  
REGIONAL COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION  
*West Texas/El Paso Region*



**Appendices**

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: West Texas/El Paso Regional Maps (2)**

**Appendix B: Provider Inventory Summary**

**Appendix C: Regional Service Plan Work Plan**

**Appendix D: Public Involvement**

**Appendix E: Framework for Action (Self Assessment of Coordination)**

**Appendix F: Texas Rural Transit System Coverage Map**

**Appendix G: Texas Transportation Code for Rural Transit District**

**Appendix H: Coordination Barriers and Constraints**

**Appendix I: Map of South Central (New Mexico) Regional Transit**

**Appendix J: Resolution Tabled by the Rio Grande Council of Governments on November 17, 2006**