KFH GROUP, INC.

THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION PLAN

Developed for:
Lower Rio Grande Valley Regional Transportation Coordination Plan Committee

By:
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For presentation to the:

Texas Department of Transportation
Public Transit Division

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LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION PLAN

BACKGROUND

The three-county Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) area (Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron Counties) is a geographically and culturally unique and diverse area of Texas. There are a variety of transit needs based on this diversity: specifically from the colonias scattered throughout the service area, needs in the towns, from across the border, winter residents, and tourists. Coupled with this, there are a wide range of human service needs that are currently only partially coordinated.

The myriad of public transit and intercity operators throughout the three-county area complicates service coordination. Specifically, public transit in the three-county service area is provided by three small urban transit systems – Brownsville (BUS), McAllen (McAllen Express), both operated by the respective cities and Hidalgo County (Rio Metro) operated by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC). There are two rural systems in the region – South Padre Island (The Wave) and Rio Transit (operated by LRGVDC). In addition, there is a private for profit operator – Valley Transit that operates intercity service as well as a transit type service between Harlingen and McAllen and McAllen and Reynosa, Mexico. Physically, the area has a long urbanized corridor along US Highway 83 which links the three largest cities – McAllen, Brownsville, and Harlingen – with the urbanized portion of Hidalgo County. The vast majority of the population resides in this corridor.

A Legislative Mandate

In 2003, enactment of House Bill 3588 in the 78th Texas Legislature substantially altered the way human service transportation is administered. The Texas Department of Transportation

(TxDOT) was given the added responsibility for direct funding, management, and oversight of selected client transportation services delivered under the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) programs. The intent of HB 3588 is: "1. To eliminate waste in the provision of public transportation; 2. To generate efficiencies that will permit increased levels of service; and 3. To further the state's efforts to reduce air pollution" *(HB3588, Article 13, Chapter 461, Section 461.001)*.

In 2005, the TxDOT Draft Strategic Plan called for the development of regional public transportation coordination plans. Texas Transportation Commissioner Andrade then led the efforts to implement a strategy to develop regional public transportation plans. This study is in response to that planning strategy.

Broadly, the project examined ways to more effectively "manage mobility" for the region. A major area of emphasis for this study was the coordination of services at the local level. The project included an evaluation of coordinated transit and human service transportation on a regional scale throughout the LRGV. Through this planning process there will be consideration of the use of New Freedom federal funds, as well as Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), as well as Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 funding.

PLAN PROCESS

The plan was completed through the conduct of five major tasks over a seven-month period. Each major task generated a technical memorandum, each of which are contained in the appendix to this plan (Technical Memoranda Nos. 1-5). The technical memoranda are:

- Technical Memorandum #1: Goals and Objectives and Outreach Efforts
- Technical Memorandum #2: Transit Provider Inventory and Review of Resources
- Technical Memorandum #3: Determine Current and Future Transportation Needs
- Technical Memorandum #4: Evaluation Criteria for Recommended Regional Public Transportation Services
- Technical Memorandum #5: Alternatives for the Regional Public Transportation Plan

A summary of the key findings documented in each technical memorandum and their implications for subsequent phases of the analysis is presented below.

Goals and Objectives

The first major task of the project was the development of goals and objectives for the plan and the planning process in the LRGV (Technical Memorandum #1). In conjunction with LRGVDC staff and the members of the Regional Public Transportation Plan Committee, the following vision was developed.

> *Residents (including the general public and human service clientele) and visitors (including residents of Mexico) to the three-county Lower Rio Grande Valley will be able to move throughout the region safely, reliably, efficiently, and affordably by using a seamless network of public and private facilities and services that are easy to comprehend, responsive to individual travel needs and easy to access.*

This was followed by the development of goals and corresponding objectives. Specifically, what outcomes are expected/anticipated?

- Enhance the quality of the customer's travel experience.
- Expand the availability of services to those who are unserved.
- Increase the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.
- Establish and sustain communications and decision-making mechanisms among sponsors and stakeholders to guide Plan implementation effectively.
- Improve the image of transit across the region.
- Develop a transit traveler information system.

Outreach Efforts

Community outreach is a key element in: discerning needs, potential opportunities, and challenges. In order to facilitate this consensus building process, the Outreach Plan identified key stakeholders in each of the three counties.

I. Identify Appropriate Partners/Agencies

The first step in the process was to identify the key stakeholders within each county. This effort began in May, 2006 and continued through mid June, 2006. The list of contacts that were targeted included:

- County Judges and other elected officials
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), county planning departments
- Human service agency representatives
- Veterans groups
- All transportation operators
- Hospitals/medical centers
- Transit user representatives from each county
- Representatives of colonias
- Intercity carriers
- Others identified as appropriate

II. Receipt of Input

The second step included contacting the key stakeholders and setting up on-site community outreach sessions. In addition, where possible, we piggybacked on pre-existing meetings to avoid duplication of effort. Information for this project was acquired through one of the following appropriate methods depending upon the stakeholders involved:

- One-on-one meetings/interviews
- Public meetings – One meeting in each county during the initial presentation phase, and meetings to review the draft documents
- Phone interviews
- E-mail input

Transit Provider Inventory

The next major task of the project was documentation of existing resources for providing regional public transportation (Technical Memorandum #2). This entailed both a review of each provider, followed by coordination efforts.

Survey Analysis and Results

A total of 45 providers were asked to participate by completing a survey (based on the tool provided by the Texas Transportation Institute). The main goals of the survey were to provide a comprehensive review of transit provider characteristics:

- A description of the client base, including qualification criteria, trip purpose limitations, client market size, and geographical distribution.
- For service providers – a list of services provided, method of service delivery, quantity of service, fleet size and age, ridership, fare structure, and any limitations.
- The agency's sources of income, expenditure levels, and any restrictions associated with how financial resources are spent.
- A description of current coordination activities – the agencies with which they partner, the contents of the coordination, the mechanism for the arrangement, the financial and customer benefits accrued through the partnership, and any limitations placed upon the partnership.
- A listing of customer needs that are currently not being met and the causes for this gap in service, as well as a listing of met needs that are perceived by the agency as requiring excessive resources.
- A listing of opportunities that the agency views as activities that would improve the efficiency or effectiveness of services to their customers and the restraints to implementing these improvements.

The survey disclosed that the five transit systems in the LRGV interact on a regular basis. Operationally, these systems coordinate service through inter-modal and other transfer stations. The systems are also coordinating planning efforts by working together on grant applications and by meeting regularly to ensure that duplication is minimal. Inevitably, there is some duplication

and potential duplication of effort. Specifically, duplication is occurring on paratransit service, and with technology issues (different paratransit software that cannot speak to each other).

Current and Future Transportation Needs

Technical Memorandum No. 3 reviewed and assessed transit needs in the service area; and primarily: 1) introduced the service area; 2) reviewed demographics and land use providing an understanding of where transit riders reside and where they need to go, 3) reviewed travel patters and identified major travel corridors, and 4) estimated future demand/needs for service.

Service Area

The LRGV service area encompasses three linked counties (Hidalgo, Willacy and Cameron) and five cities with populations greater than 50,000. The service area is diverse with the U.S. Highway 83 urban corridors, very rural remote areas, and a number of small towns and cities throughout the rural areas. The largest of these towns include Port Isabel, South Padre Island, and Raymondville. Populations of cities of at least 2,000 people in the region are listed in Table 1.

Demographics

The analysis in this study provided a review of transit needs of those population segments that are potentially transit dependent (Figure 1) as well as the overall population distribution in the Lower Rio Grande Valley Study Area (Table 2) by county. Potentially transit dependent population segments are those segments of the population that, because of demographic characteristics (age, disability, income, or automobile availability), may potentially require transit services to meet mobility needs.

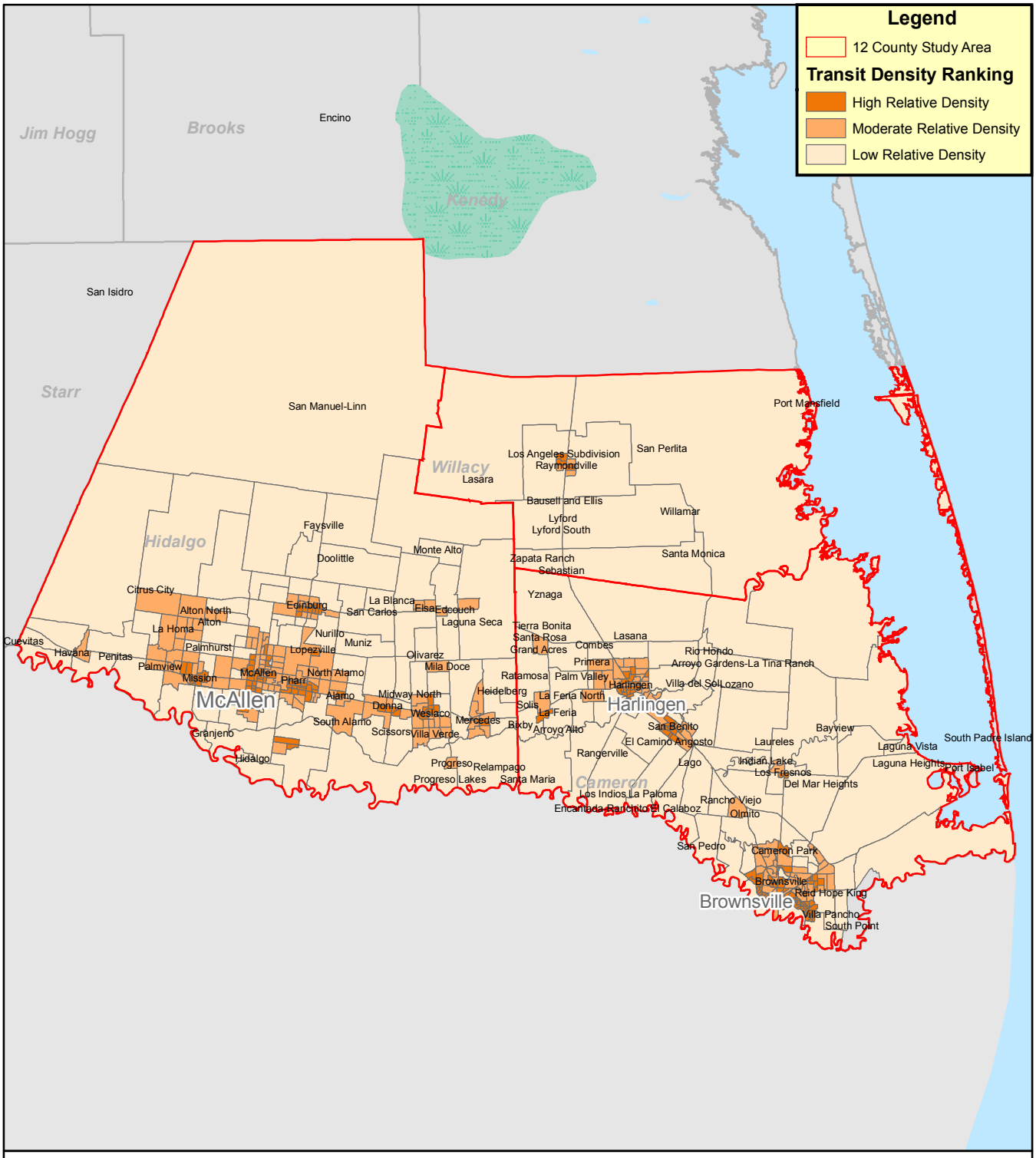

Figure 1: BLOCK GROUPS RANKED BY THE DENSITY OF TRANSIT-DEPENDENT PERSONS

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Table 1: CITIES WITH POPULATIONS OF AT LEAST 2,000

Name	1990 Population	2000 Population	2005 Population
Brownsville	98,962	139,722	167,493
McAllen	84,021	106,414	123,622
Harlingen	48,735	57,564	62,318
Edinburg	29,885	48,465	62,735
Mission	28,653	45,408	60,146
Weslaco	21,877	26,935	31,442
San Juan	10,815	26,229	30,773
San Benito	20,125	23,444	24,699
Donna	12,652	14,768	15,846
Mercedes	12,694	13,649	14,185
Raymondville	8,880	9,733	9,483
La Feria	4,360	6,115	6,815
Elsa	5,242	5,549	6,458
North Alton	-	5,051	-
Palmhurst	362	4,872	4,991
Port Isabel	4,467	4,865	5,373
Los Fresnos	2,473	4,512	5,192
Lopezville	2,827	4,476	-
Alton	3,069	4,384	7,057
Palmview	1,818	4,107	4,421
Edcouch	2,878	3,342	4,426

Table 2: POPULATION BY COUNTY

	1990 US Census	2000 US Census	2005 US Census
Cameron	260,120	335,227	387,311
Hidalgo	383,545	569,463	678,275
Willacy	17,705	20,082	20,382

The demographic analysis revealed that there are urban, suburban, and rural areas (some very isolated) scattered throughout the three counties that have high relative needs, based on transit trip origins. In Willacy County, the block groups are West of Raymondville and Lyford. In Cameron County, the Cities of Brownsville and San Benito have high needs, as do areas along the western border of the county. In McAllen, high relative needs for transit services are located along the US 83 corridor, as well as in Elsa, northeast of McAllen. Smaller towns that have moderate percentages of potentially transit dependent persons may be good candidates for demand-responsive service.

Major Destinations

Another component of the transit planning process is identifying major trip destinations within the study area, including major employers (Figure 2), shopping centers, schools, and medical facilities (Figure 3). The analysis of land uses in the LRGV displayed that:

- More than half of the major employers in the three-county study area are located in McAllen (37 employers or 35.5%) and Brownsville (20 employers or 19%).
- Predominantly, major trip destinations for region are located in the McAllen, Harlingen, Brownsville, and Edinburg vicinities, and along the US-83 corridor.

Travel Patterns

Work trip patterns were derived from Journey to Work data from the 2000 U.S. Census. Specifically, summaries were generated for the three-county region by place of residence, by place of work, and for worker flows between home and work. Then at the county level, Census data was supplemented by the use of three separate MPOs' travel demand models, the Statewide Analysis Model (SAM), and the insight gained during public/agency outreach. The analysis of commute patterns indicates that:

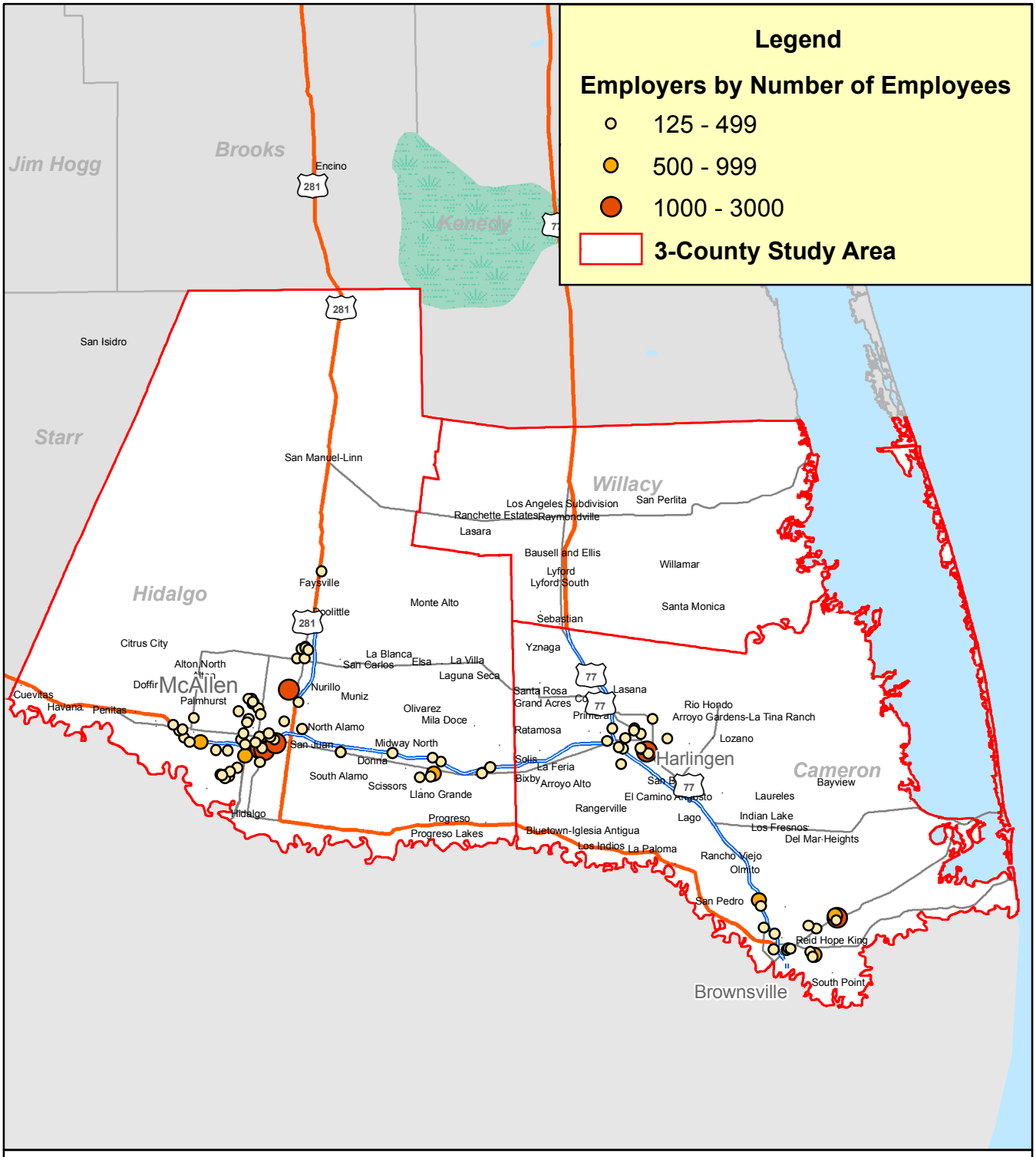

Figure 2: MAJOR EMPLOYERS

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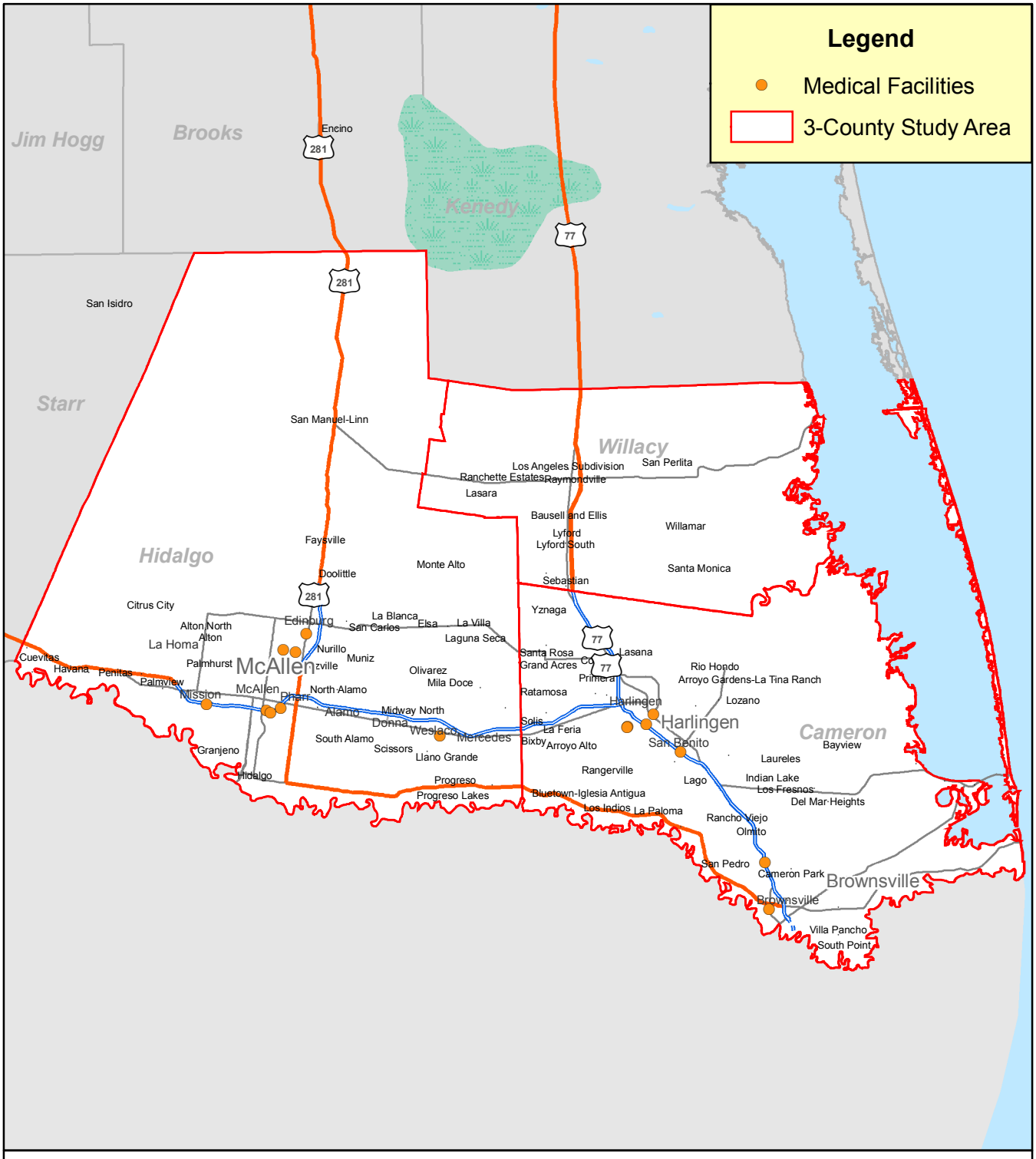

Figure 3: MEDICAL FACILITIES

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- Based upon information from travel demand models, transit ridership in the LRGV region will grow at a pace of two percent over the next three years, three percent in five years, five percent in ten years, and six percent in 20 years.

- For the foreseeable future, the top transit market in the region will be the suburban-downtown travel sheds of downtown McAllen and Brownsville. Second to develop will be travel between communities, especially between Edinburg and McAllen, Harlingen and Brownsville, and generally east-west along US 83 and BUS 83.

- These future commute patterns further illustrate the strong commuting interchange between Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy.

Needs of the Service Area

After reviewing the travel patterns and the survey responses for the LRGV Region, the following findings and implications emerged:

- LRGV Region has a lesser share of commuters that use transit than the State of Texas as a whole.

- The LRGV Region has three of the poorest counties in terms of average household income. Related to the point above, vehicle ownership in the LRGV Region is well below that of the State and National averages.

- Population in the region and in Mexico will continue to grow at a rapid pace.

- The culmination of the above three facts revealed an unmet transit need in the LRGV Region and a significant opportunity for expansion of transit.

- The LRGV Region does have significantly less commuters driving alone to work – illustrating favorability to ridesharing and supporting the need for a regional vanpool and carpool program.

- Measured by the absolute number of commuters, Hidalgo County is by far the top destination county for workers in the region, primarily due to the size of its own population and employment centers.

- While much of the data describes work trip patterns, the importance of non-work related trips in the region cannot be understated, particularly for certain stakeholder groups such as veterans groups, lower income workers, and the elderly whose needs were discussed and examined during the outreach process.

Reviewing the regional needs within Technical Memorandum #3 indicated that the general population is growing at a rapid rate. Coupling this with the low incomes in the area should produce a considerable need for service. The use of transit can equal approximately two percent of all trips if regular service were available. This is all supported by the fact that a private carrier can recover their costs from the farebox. Listed below are the greatest needs for the region:

- The greatest needs continue to be in the Colonias spread all over Hidalgo County, with many in Willacy and Cameron Counties as well (depicted in Figure 4). These areas need regular fixed schedule service throughout the day to meet a variety of needs including commuter, medical, and shopping.

- The continued growth in Mexico will contribute high levels of ridership in the urban systems for Brownsville and McAllen.

- Harlingen – San Benito and Edinburg – Mission each has the potential demand and need for more fixed-route service within their cities. Cities of 60,000 population in Texas can sustain a 5 – 6 bus fixed-route system.

- Pan American University should be part of the solution to transit issues in Edinburg. Transit can reduce the need for parking lots and can help channel development as has been seen in other cities with university transit service.

- Willacy County has additional needs for both local service and service to Harlingen.

- Increases in connectivity throughout the region will grow in importance as people spread farther out seeking employment.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation criteria were developed in Technical Memorandum #4 to help identify the alternatives that best met the needs of the region. The criteria were derived from the study goals and objectives identified in this study (Technical Memorandum #1). The criteria also include specific measures that contribute to the overall determination of the likely success of each proposed strategy.

Each proposed strategy will receive a score for each applicable criterion. Every goal is accompanied by a set of *Performance Objectives* that identify the major components of the goal.

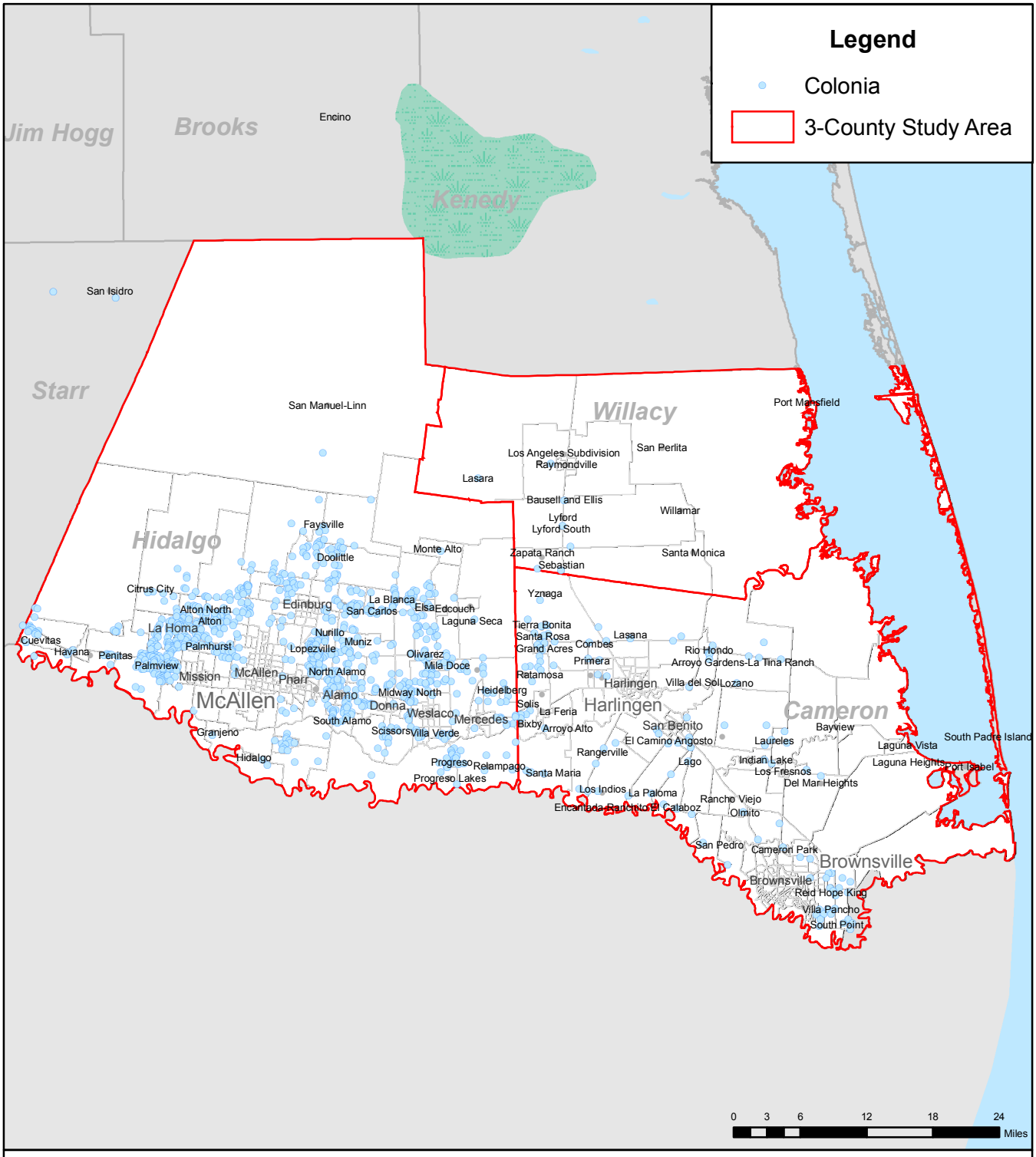

Figure 4: COLONIAS

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The performance objective is accompanied by a set of Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) that will be used to assess the value of a proposed improvement strategy. The measures, which are both quantitative and qualitative, apply only to that objective. Based on the goals and performance objective, each MOE evaluates an aspect of the proposed public transportation improvement that will contribute to the proposal's overall ability to satisfy the goals. The MOE that were applied to this study were:

Service Quality

- ***Frequency of Service*** – measure of headways and capacity of fixed routes.
- ***Hours of Operations*** – hours of operations in light of the needs of the LRGV.
- ***On-Time Performance*** – two methods of calculation depending on the type of service provided: fixed- or deviated/demand-response. This measure assists in identifying the overall timeliness of service to a fixed-route stop or a specialized service stop.
- ***Location and Number of Stops*** – determine the service area and the accessibility of the fixed-route service.

Service Efficiency

- ***Operating Cost Per Passenger*** – uses the annual operating cost divided by the passenger trips for the same period.
- ***Operating Cost Per Revenue Hour*** – calculated by dividing the annual operating cost by the total scheduled hours that revenue vehicles are in revenue service for the same period. A revenue hour is generally defined as the time the vehicle is in service to carry passengers, other than charter passengers. This measure assists in understanding the overall system expenses in light of revenue hours.
- ***Operating Cost Per Revenue Mile*** – calculated by dividing the annual operating cost by the number of miles traveled by authority vehicles while in revenue service for the same period.
- ***One-Way Passenger Trip Per Hour*** – the key indicator of performance. This MOE measures productivity.
- ***Farebox Recovery*** – calculated by dividing the annual revenue provided by passengers by the operating cost of the same period. This measure assists in understanding the market of the service in the region.

Marketing/Image

- ***Brochure/Maps*** – having a supply of this documentation that can be easily disseminated to the public and potential users.

- ***Logo*** – identifying the need for a regional or local system logo that is obvious and can be detected by any member of the public, passenger, and potential passenger.

Barriers and Constraints

As part of the planning process review of potential barriers and constraints was conducted (Table 3). The greatest barriers and constrains include funding – particularly acute for Brownsville, when it goes over 200,000 population in the next census. The other major barrier includes institutional issues relating to coordination of public transit services.

Alternatives

Technical Memorandum #5 developed a range of options/alternatives for improving public transit services in the LRGV. Needs were compared with existing services to formulate pertinent alternatives. The foundation for the development of service options was based on the results from the outreach process, the review of demographics, and the analysis of other data. The options were built on existing LRGV transportation arrangements and services. The Project Advisory Committee carefully reviewed the alternatives and then gave the consultants the guidance to develop the plan.

The consultants determined that due to the success (high ridership) of the urban systems and Valley Transit's service, the current fixed-route structure should remain intact, or be expanded where necessary. Accordingly, changes were focused on underserved areas rather than areas with high ridership.

Organizational/Coordination

The principal issue related to coordination is the need to coordinate the existing five transit systems (operated by four entities), a large Medicaid Transportation Program (MTP)

Table 3: BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS TO COORDINATED AND IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Priority	BARRIERS	Impact	Solutions
FUNDING BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS			
1	There are considerably more needs than funds available. Local match - Local level funding is an issue. New service requires proper local funding to match the FTA/State funds available. Matching FTA/state funds calls for new approaches to securing local funds.	The LRGV is the highest needs area in the state with very low income and large numbers of riders from Mexico not calculated in funding formulas. Additionally, the need for local level funding makes it harder for the transit system to match the available federal dollars.	While traditional sources of local funding - local governments, will still be essential, there are other solutions offered from the private sector. This traditionally includes advertising revenue. Sponsorships - an advanced form of revenue generation. In addition to above, Brownsville should pursue a variety of possible solutions. TxDOT should also work to improve the funding
2	Federal statues change for cities with populations that are over 200,000. Brownsville may lose its federal operating funds after the 2010 Census, resulting in a very significant loss of revenue. Hidalgo County reached a population count of 200,000 during the 2000 Census and is no longer eligible for federal operating funds.	The need to generate local funding will only be more difficult as Brownsville transitions from small urban status. Urban areas no longer eligible for federal funds.	See Above
3	Federal and state funding does not account for use by non-citizens (Mexican nationals) (up to 40% of ridership) nor seasonal tourism.	Local transit agencies ability to provide sufficient service is reduced.	The region should continue to attempt to secure a wide variety of funding to meet the unfunded needs of this segment of customers.
4	Due to a separate Medicaid transportation program, use of these funds as local match in rural areas is limited, further exacerbating the local match needs.	Medicaid funds are permitted to be used by rural and small urban transit operators as local match. Without these funds (well in excess of $200,000) the rural system must seek other sources of local funding (scarce) or cutback service.	This is a TxDOT issue with the solution ultimately to be decided by TxDOT. We believe that the decisions regarding Medicaid transportation should be made through this planning process.
1	The desire to coordinate services is dependent on funding being available to support the needed service. Coordination strategies must make business sense – there must be funding to pay for initiatives. Without funding, coordination strategies have no avenue put into place.	Without funds to provide service - there is no coordination.	A major issue with human service agencies is the expense of the trip. Agencies do not feel they should pay for the fully allocated costs because of federal subsidies to transit. However since much of the funding for transit is local dollars, it seems reasonable that agencies pay a "fair share" cost. This could be done at the local level and/or the state level, through TxDOT.

Table 3: BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS TO COORDINATED AND IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Priority	BARRIERS	Impact	Solutions
2	Some Federal funds are turned back because they are not used. When funds lapse for a particular provider in the Valley, the funds are returned to the general pot for redistribution and are not made available to other providers in the Valley.	The LRGV as a region loses money that it needs.	Since the area is one region, it is recommended that TxDOT reallocate the funds within the region, which has some of the very highest needs in the state.
3	Restrictions on the use of some funds/vehicles, often locally based.	Limits service and may be cost inhibitive.	This is a local restriction that can be solved by having local entities contribute funding for service rather than for vehicles.
4	Funding allocations are available on an annual basis only; this makes long-term planning difficult for the transit operators.	Lack of viable planning tools.	TxDOT funding will change bi-annually based on its formula. There is no limit to the increase or decrease.
ORGANIZATION/COORDINATION BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS			
1	Institutional resistance to change/turf protection or lack of understanding of the issues- among both human service agencies and transit systems creates a reluctance to turn over service to another entity.	The cost of inaction in coordinating trips is hard to quantify. Where the human service agency believes they are getting a less expensive price using another contractor, they are in actuality reducing their client's options for travel by weakening the coordinated public transit operator.	This is a local political issue as much as it is a state issue. Coordination requires trust and a proper business arrangement. Much of the breaking down of institutional barriers should happen at the local level. TxDOT, in control of much of the funding in question, should begin to work with the human service agencies to require coordination (where feasible).
1	There are three urban systems, two rural systems and a private provider in one region, as well as a separate Medicaid provider, making coordination/consolidation difficult at best.	This political constraint to coordination impedes quality, efficient service. The duplication of effort with 7 different managers is very costly.	Seek organizational approaches that coordinate or consolidate service, including a single transit planning entity. Most of the solutions are local in nature. TxDOT should improve its attempts at coordinating service as they currently contract with an entity that is not a public provider.

Table 3: BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS TO COORDINATED AND IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Priority	BARRIERS	Impact	Solutions
2	Lack of coordination/communication/education of human service and public transit providers. Communication is the key to successful provision of service. The transportation providers must work closely with human service agencies to understand each other's issues.	This constraint to coordination impedes quality, efficient service.	See above.
3	Recognizing when coordination should and should not occur.	By blindly accepting any coordination as good, service delivery is damaged. This constraint to coordination impedes quality, efficient service.	The systems should be careful not to get into a business arrangement that is not viable. A complete financial review should be conducted for every coordination arrangement.
OPERATIONAL BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS			
1	Multiple public transit operators each representing a separate constituency.	Lack of coordination and efficiency.	A regional planning and operating entity would solve this problem
2	Competition with the private sector: With the presence of viable private for profit providers it is imperative that these services be coordinated and not duplicated.	Duplication of effort has two sets of operators serving the same customers, with little opportunity to coordinate trips. There is also duplication of management. The estimate of lost opportunity includes administrative duplication ($100,000) and lost opportunity to coordinate service ($250,000). Estimated at 15,900 trip opportunities lost.	The private sector should have the first opportunity to serve a route. This planning process will assure that services are coordinated and not competitive.
3	Fragmented ITS Structure – There are three different demand-response software packages in place in the region – none compatible with each other. There is a need for ITS funding to revamp the paratransit infrastructure.	Coordination will be greatly enhanced by technology that can link up the various transit providers.	The region should seek funds to develop and procure one set of technologies for all of the operators, with each operator contributing their fair share.
4	Differing levels of pay. An incompatible wage rate among regional transit operators restricts regional coordination of training, maintenance, fares, and other functions.	The systems compete with each other for drivers. In addition, may cause administrative difficulties during training and maintenance.	Some of this has recently improved. The systems must work together to level the rates to ensure that systems are not competing with each other for experienced drivers.

private provider, and a private transit/intercity provider. Regional connectivity is an essential ingredient in regionalization. Additionally, another crucial component for regionalization is a centralized source of information – one source of information for all regional travel.

Operational

Service options addressed unmet needs and looked at new ways of providing service in the LRGV. Fixed-route service is the most effective approach to transit in the area, and where possible, should replace paratransit service. There are two basic steps to upgrading service across the region. The first is to develop fixed-route service in the larger cities of Harlingen and Edinburg, and link them to the "Main Line" service (Main Line service is defined as the US 83/Business 83 Corridor from Brownsville to McAllen). The second is to develop a system of feeder services throughout urbanized Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, as well as from Raymondville.

Based on the analysis, detailed discussions with the committee, and a second round of public meetings, the plan activities were determined and are described in the Plan Activities below.

COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION: PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY AREA

The Study Committee worked closely with the consultants and the public to develop a plan that will meet a variety of transportation needs for all residents of the three-county LRGV Area. The plan addresses a wide variety of organizational, coordination, and service activities. In addition, the Plan addresses the needs associated with the JARC and New Freedom initiatives, as well as funding for FTA Section 5310 program.

INTRODUCTION

The first part of this section of the Plan reviews the assumptions made through this planning process. The second part of this section reviews the organizational/coordination activities that should be employed, followed by rural service activities and then urban activities.

Again, making sure that JARC and New Freedoms initiatives are being met, as well as FTA Section 5310 funding for elderly and persons with disabilities.

Service Assumptions

1. **Population Growth** – Population continues to grow rapidly within the US 83 corridor. That growth will fuel the need for increased transit ridership. In addition, the growth will push Brownsville into the over 200,000 population by the next Census, making the city ineligible for Federal matching operating funds.

2. **Accounting for Ridership from Mexico –** The urban systems report that about 40 percent of their ridership is derived from Mexican citizens. These persons are not accounted for in funding allocations, so the cost of proving this service is borne by the local residents rather than shared with federal and state governments.

3. **Funding Issues** – There are a number of issues in regard to funding. These include the need for local dollars to match federal funding as well as the need for more Federal funds as well (see previous bullet). These local funds will be secured from local governments, private businesses, and human service agencies that coordinate services. The second issue is that Brownsville may lose its operating assistance after 2010, causing significant cost increases for a city that is also beset with a third funding issue – no funding for the 40 percent of the riders that are from Mexico. The fourth funding issue is that due to the high growth, these communities will have significantly outpaced their formula funding allocations in the end years of this Census horizon (2008 – 2011).

4. **Public/Private Partnership** – Valley Transit, a part of Greyhound has been an active partner in the development of these services and coordinates service with the transit systems. The Plan will only enhance those relationships.

5. **Mobility Management –** Short-range planning, management activities, and projects for improving coordination among public transit and other transportation providers is necessary. The region will designate one entity to coordinate these mobility management activities and combine/coordinate with a variety of entities.

6. **Coordination Efforts –** Coordination requires increased activities to link all of the operators together as well as to focus on additional human service coordination. In addition, paratransit coordination should be considered. Further, it must be understood that in some cases institutional barriers may be difficult to overcome.

7. **Coordination Must Make Business Sense –** It is important to note that coordination must be a mutually beneficial agreement. That is, coordination must make business sense.

8. **Fixed/Flex Route and Other Scheduled Service –** Productivity is a key to success. TxDOT funding is dependent to a large degree on numbers of trips provided. The best way to provide the largest number of trips is to utilize the array of fixed-route and hybrid services that tend to group trips according to a schedule.

9. **Use of Technology** – While coordination does not require technology to be successful, the use of technology can be of significant help in the process if used properly. There are areas where technology can assist in the overall mission of providing more service.

FUNDING PRIORITIES – JARC, NEW FREEDOM, AND SECTION 5310

The JARC funds for access to employment for low income individuals, the New Freedom funding to expand opportunities for persons with disabilities, and the FTA Section 5310 funding for elderly and persons with disabilities all require a plan to coordinate these funds. As part of this plan (which is incorporated in this planning process), the next sections identify the priorities for these funds, as determined by the Study Committee.

PLANNING FOR CHANGE

There are a number of activities that need to be accomplished to ensure continued coordination and improved service. The Study Committee determined that the following course of action should take place:

1. Organizational/Coordination Activities
   -- Coordinate planning of the myriad operators through a Mobility Manager
   -- Establish one regional service entity – ten-year horizon
   -- Continue to coordinate human service transportation
   -- Coordinate paratransit services
   -- Organize and maintain stakeholder's committee and operators subcommittee

2. Service Activities
   -- Urban fixed-route
   -- Feeder service for persons with disabilities
   -- Coordinated "Main Line" service
   -- Fixed schedule service
   -- Rural job access
   -- Additional commuter needs - vanpools
   -- Serving the colonias
   -- Paratransit where necessary

-- Through ticketing and coordinated fares
-- Shopper shuttles

The following sections present a number of activities that the region will consider in each area along with preliminary costs, potential ridership, and vehicle needs.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL/COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

The number one issue related to coordination is the need to coordinate the existing five transit systems (operated by four entities), a large MTP private provider, and a private transit/intercity provider. Regional connectivity is an essential ingredient in meeting the project goals. Further, another essential for regionalization is to have a centralized source of information. Currently to travel from Brownsville to Hidalgo County, one must consult three different timetables/websites/telephone agents. There should be one source of information for all regional travel.

The goals addressed in the coordination activities are as follows:

- Expand the availability of services to those who are unserved.
- Enhance the quality of the customer's travel experience.
- Increase the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.
- Establish and sustain communications and decision-making mechanisms among sponsors and stakeholders to guide Plan implementation effectively.
- Improve the Image of Transit Across the Region.
- Develop a Transit Traveler Information System.

Coordinating Activity No. 1 - Development of a Regional Mobility Manager - Brokerage

The stakeholders will designate an entity to become the Regional Mobility Manager, coordinating a wide variety of public and private transportation service as well as acting as the Regional Rideshare Manager for the three counties.

The Mobility Manager will have a variety of planning and administrative/financial activities to perform. These include, but are not limited to:

- Planning and identifying needs and solutions.
- Continuing efforts to regionalize service – making it easy for customers to travel throughout the region.
- Coordinate and seek public and private funding – including New Freedom, JARC, Section 5310 or 5311(F) funds.
- Coordinating various public operators in the region – including issues related to hiring and training drivers, sharing driver resources as well as other activities.
- Coordinating human service transportation with the Area Agency on Aging and the Workforce Boards.
- Conducting marketing efforts, developing schedules and how to ride guides.
- Serving as One Stop Shopping center.
- Organizing and staffing various committees in urban and rural areas.
- Functioning as the rideshare coordinator.

The Mobility Manager can also assist in the distribution of vehicles retired by a transit operator (but still quite serviceable) to local volunteer and human service organizations. This can be done in a lease arrangement with the agencies receiving the vehicle (see Service Activities).

These Mobility Manager efforts will be funded through *JARC and New Freedom Funding* as well as Section 5311 and Section 5310 funds.

Ridesharing

Currently in the LRGV Area there is no mechanism to aid in the formation of vanpools or carpools. Analysis of the commute patterns revealed a great opportunity for ridesharing in each of the major corridors. Ridesharing is typically composed of a central database for matching

individuals with similar commute trips into carpools or vanpools. These successful vanpools can grow into fixed routes over time.

Carpools include informal or formal arrangements by individuals to share a ride to work or on other regular trips. Vanpools are typically a formal arrangement by a group of 7 to 15 individuals that share a similar commute trip. Often these arrangements are facilitated by a governmental authority. In this case the Mobility Manager would be responsible for developing the ridesharing and commuter program (designed to attract as many persons with disabilities and low income individuals as possible). Many vanpools pay for themselves as well, while others receive some subsidy.

Some issues that need to be further studied to implement an LRGV Area region-wide rideshare program include:

A. The issues and cost savings surrounding the use of lease operated passenger vans verses public owned passenger vans. Again however, if the vans are full, they can pay for themselves.

B. The best subsidy and cost structure to optimize reporting and increase customer utility.

C. The level of safety associated with 15 passenger vans and the impact of driver training courses for mitigating accident rates.

D. A mechanism to add part-time riders to the vanpools for training and other needs.

E. Accessible vehicles should be available as needed.

"One Stop Shopping"

An important focus on regionalizing service is one stop shopping -- a single source of general and specific information for all transit services available. This will greatly enhance customer service and communication. This can include a single website, telephone support, and the centralized ticket purchasing. In the rural areas this can include intercity bus and transit, while in urban areas it can be the myriad of paratransit operators, fixed-route, and intercity bus.

Time Frame

The Mobility Manager effort should be implemented in Year 1 as one of the first activities in the planning process. This effort should be completed by the end of Year 1. Vanpools should be initiated in Year 2 – 3 and the one stop shopping should be in place by Year 4. Consideration of one consolidated transit system for the region should begin in Year 6 and if desired can be implemented in Year 10.

Coordination Activity No. 2 - Coordinating Paratransit Service in the LRGV

As identified in the alternatives phase of this planning effort, there is a need to enhance paratransit coordination in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties to maximize productivity and safety. The plan calls for a phased in approach where the first step will be to formalize the coordination work group. This will be followed by a variety of coordination opportunities up to and including linking of technologies to enhance productivity and service capabilities.

Coordination Activity No. 2.1 - Formalize Coordination Work Group

The key participants in the LRGV area should continue to work together in a formalized setting allowing all participants and other interested parties to participate. A committee should be formed to include: all major operators, funding agencies, private sector transit providers, other agencies, and consumers. Having political or business leaders on the committee is advisable as well.

Coordination Activity No. 2.2 - Coordinate Paratransit Operations

Paratransit is the most expensive service to operate on a per trip basis. Productivity is the key to controlling paratransit trip costs. The higher the productivity, the lower the per trip cost. Therefore a key objective of the plan is to find ways to improve productivity in the region's paratransit services. Currently, McAllen and Brownsville both operate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit. In addition, Rio Transit also operates paratransit in Hidalgo

County and the rural areas of all three counties. Lefleur also provides paratransit service throughout the service area. With four paratransit providers (using three different software packages), all serving the same or similar customers, there are opportunities to coordinate service in order to maximize ridership and service levels.

Coordinated Scheduling/Dispatching – Currently the four paratransit systems have different software packages, most of which are not compatible with the other products. Lefleur has the most powerful software. This task requires each system to have the same software platform. Each system will be able to place trips on the other's vehicle where appropriate, e.g. when System A receives a trip request that it cannot fulfill, but knows System C has a vehicle in the area based on a search performed through the technology by the reservation staff. Through agreements, each system can book on the other based on the ground rules established prior to implementation of the program. A cost allocation formula can be worked out for payment to each other for trips provided. This would allow each system to retain control, while each system becomes more productive, lowering the cost per trip for all systems.

Cost for this technology will be between $300,000 and $.5M, for a ten year investment (plus annual warranty and upgrade costs). This approach has the potential to improve regional paratransit productivity by as much as 20 percent, through improved performance. The improved and expanded service will benefit persons with disabilities the most. This alone would pay for the technology within the first five years. It may also be possible to receive a grant for the technology through New Freedom or FTA's Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) initiatives.

Time Frame

The work group (with health and human service and workforce representatives) should be formed immediately with an objective securing funding and further coordinating services in Year 2, procuring technology in Year 3, and installing and initiating coordinated service in the beginning of Year 5.

Coordination Activity No. 3 – Human Service Coordination Opportunities – A Mentoring Program

While a large number of Section 5310, volunteer, adult day centers, and other agencies with small scale operations will not get involved in a large scale coordination effort; there are areas where these agencies can benefit from coordination. A mentoring program can include support from the larger systems in: driver training, maintenance, insurance, and vehicle replacement programs, for example. These efforts can pay immediate dividends to those small one or two vehicle services. A vehicle replacement program will allow the larger systems to lease vehicles ready to be retired (but well maintained) to these small providers and requiring the agency to participate in training and maintenance programs. Minimal funding is required to initiate these activities through the Mobility Manager. The Workforce Boards and Area Agency on Aging shall participate in these efforts.

Time Frame

This task can begin immediately, and since funding will be minimal, it will be on-going.

Coordination Activity No. 4 – Continue Stakeholders Committee

The stakeholders that have formed the Study Committee should ensure that the committee is on-going to review coordination efforts to work together to implement activities and to look for new opportunities as well.

Coordination Activity No. 4.1 - Organize Operators into a Working Group

The operators should work together to coordinate as many activities as possible where mutually beneficial. This work group will review operating practices, training opportunities, and other operational needs. Reporting and recordkeeping efforts should also be coordinated so that all providers are reporting the same things. The objective of this effort is to bring all of the operators to the same high level of service and safety. A need expressed by the operators

regarding hiring and training of drivers, and sharing these driver resources would be pursued by this group.

Time Frame Activity No. 4

This task can be initiated in Year 1 and will both be ongoing.

II. SERVICE ACTIVITIES

The service activities are detailed below and should be assigned to an entity or individual in order to ensure implementation. The activities are designed as a family of services to increase mobility for all residents and visitors. The services are designed to be:

- Regional in design – All services will be connected to one another allowing for ease of regional travel.
- Easy to use – One stop shopping, timed connections and one set of policies.
- Safer – each service can gain through combining/coordinating training and safety efforts.
- Improvements in access to jobs – getting people to work and training.
- Improved access for persons with disabilities to all services.

Study Goals – Service Related

The Study Committee stated that three of the primary goals of the plan should be to:

- Enhance the Quality of the Customer's Travel Experience
- Expand the Availability of Services to Those Who are Unserved
- Increase the Cost-Effectiveness and Efficiency of Service Delivery

These goals guide the service activities presented below.

There are two basic considerations in designing effective and efficient transit services in areas not yet served. **Effectiveness is doing the right things, while efficiency is doing things right.** The system is *effective* if it meets the travel needs of the residents. This means identifying the markets for transit and determining if those markets are served. A system is *efficient* if it meets those needs in a manner that maximizes travel while minimizing resources expended. This means providing a mix of services that are appropriate to the need. The most challenging aspect of being efficient is to use less expensive fixed-route services in areas which can sustain those services, and then fill in with more expensive demand-responsive services in areas without sufficient densities or for persons unable to use fixed-route services -- to provide a mix of services that do not compete and result in the most rides and service for the dollars expended.

The consultants determined that due to the success (high ridership) of the urban systems and Valley Transit's service, the current fixed-route structure should remain intact, or be expanded where necessary. The high ridership should not be subject to change for change's sake. Therefore, changes are focused on underserved areas rather than areas with high ridership.

The service activities presented below are conceptual in nature, and are subject to modification, as necessary. Not all of the options are appropriate for implementation in Fiscal Year 2007; some (if selected) can be phased in over the ten year span of the plan.

Job Access Reverse Commute

Access to jobs is of primary importance. This plan calls for a variety of approaches to meeting this important need and seeking JARC funding. Fixed-route services are the best options for JARC clients – they go where most need to go, schedules are dependable, and it is inexpensive. In rural areas, the feeders will fill that role as will the ridesharing/vanpool program (which can meet needs in urban and rural areas). The Workforce Boards should continue to purchase service rather than trips. Purchasing service – contributing to coordinated services can give the Board the biggest transportation "bang for the buck."

Serving Persons with Disabilities

There are a significant amount of persons with disabilities in the rural areas of the region as well as in the Colonias. The new services proposed here – scheduled/regular service will be able to mainstream many of these individuals. The new fixed routes and complementary paratransit as well as the flex route feeders will bring a new mobility to the persons in these communities. New Freedom funding will be requested for a number of services.

Service Activity No. 1 – Fixed-Route Service

Basic fixed-route concepts are essential rules that should be followed in the creation of a fixed-route local bus service plan in the LRGV Region include:

- **Minimum Density** – Fixed-route service should be available in communities of at least 1,000 persons per square mile, as well as areas with major destinations. Tourist areas can have a lower density.

- **Service Days and Hours** – It is recommended that service operate at a minimum, 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., seven days a week.

- **Maximize Use of Fixed-Route** – Accessible fixed-route local bus service has proven capable of transporting most persons with disabilities. Indeed, mainstreaming is the intent of the ADA legislation. Incentives and training should be provided for persons with disabilities to ride fixed-route.

- **Late Night and Weekend Service** – It may be feasible to reduce or eliminate fixed-route service in the cities after 7:00 p.m. and replace it with dial-a-ride service (using ADA vehicles). This can reduce costs while still providing service for persons coming home from work. This approach may also be feasible on Sundays.

- **ADA Complementary Paratransit** – For the two communities, it is recommended that accessible fixed-route service with complementary paratransit service rather than route deviation service (where the vehicle will deviate off of the route as requested) be used. While the fixed-route approach is slightly more expensive, it provides far superior service for both fixed-route riders and persons who cannot ride fixed-route, due to a disability as defined by the ADA. In addition, LRGV will still continue to operate general public paratransit in much of the service area.

- **Serve Public School Students** – Student transportation for children who live less than two miles from a school is an important part of a fixed-route system where this

two mile rule applies. Each route should be designed to generate maximum ridership for students. Routes can change during peak school hours to accommodate student needs.

- **Serving Colonias** – Where possible buses will be routed to maximize usage by persons residing in Colonias and that these routes receive JARC and New Freedoms funding. The urban systems will receive assistance to meet those expanding needs in the urban area.

- **Timed Transfer and Interlining** – Fixed routes will meet at designated transfer points and then become a second route (interlining). This reduces the need for transfers. These services will also be timed to meet inter- and intra-county service, where possible.

- **Out and Back** – This is the traditional form of fixed-route transit, where as a general rule, a bus goes in two directions down each street it traverses. Large loop style routes where the vehicle goes one-way down each street are generally ineffective due to long travel times, circuitous routings, and difficulties in comprehending schedules. Two way loop style routes can work.

- **Modest Goals** – Initially modest goals should be set, allowing the service time to build a customer base, like any other business.

- **Marketing Funds** – As with any new start-up business, transit needs to be professionally marketed and promoted, with a reasonable budget.

ADA Needs and Requirements

ADA requires that service be available for persons with disabilities who *cannot* get to a bus stop or effectively ride the bus. There are two approaches that are generally used. The first is through a complementary but separate curb-to-curb service for qualifying individuals. In this plan, that service would be provided through LRGVDC's existing network of paratransit services. The second approach would be to provide a "Flex" route that would operate as a fixed route, but time would be built in for the bus to go off route to pick up a rider that requested the service. This plan calls for a fixed-route service that will flex off route when a passenger calls with a special need. Please note that this service will be available for anyone that wants this service (as required in regulation), however persons who do not have a disability limiting their access to a bus will be required to pay a premium fare of $3.

This service for persons with disabilities will be advertised on all literature – all buses are accessible and curb-to-curb service is available, with a telephone number to call. In addition, all bus shelters and benches must meet the ADA requirements for accessibility.

It should be noted that each of these proposed services below require local funds to implement. These funds should come from human service agencies, local towns and counties, and private sponsors. The fixed-route services will be funded through *New Freedom, Section 5311, and the local funds*. It is anticipated that low income persons with disabilities will benefit the most from these new services. Further, with the growth witnessed and documented in this study process, the demand for fixed-route service will only grow.

The study process revealed that fixed-route or flex route service has potential in the following communities:

1. **Harlingen – San Benito** – These communities can be served as one transit system as they are contiguous. The population of these communities warrants at least four buses. The demographics include: low income of the population, low availability of autos, and the reasonable densities in these cities. It is expected that this system if operated appropriately, can generate eight one-way trips per vehicle hour within the first year of implementation.

2. **Edinburg - Mission** – Edinburg can sustain a 3 – 4 bus system as its population/density, University, and proximity to McAllen all can serve to enhance ridership. It would be most advantageous if Edinburg linked up with McAllen to provide a seamless service covering both cities (which are contiguous). This service could also generate eight one-way trips per vehicle hour.

3. **Expansion of Existing Urban Service –** Brownsville and McAllen are growing rapidly. Corresponding growth is occurring in the Colonias ringing these cities. These two cities will be seeking JARC and New Freedom funding to ensure that these communities and other growing areas receive service throughout the ten year horizon of the service plan.

Time Frame

Planning and funding activities for the fixed routes should take place in Years 1 and 2. Procurement of vehicles should take place in Year 3, and service should be implemented in Years 4 and 5. The McAllen and Brownsville service improvements should be done annually as funding is available.

Service Activity No. 2 – Coordinated Main Line Service – A Public Private Partnership

The Main Line includes the service provided on U.S. 83 from Brownsville to McAllen. This service is currently provided by Valley Transit as express service – operating on the highway, with limited stops; and local service from Harlingen to McAllen operating on Business 83 with stops throughout the corridor. Valley Transit will continue to operate these services; however, LRGVDC will operate this route in a number of time slots when Valley Transit is not operating. It should be noted that the parties have entered into negotiations during this study.

The service will be of a very similar nature with the same fares, ticketing and accessibility. Both LRGVDC and Valley Transit will advertise the other's schedules in their own schedule material. This service will also initiate some of the runs from Raymondville with direct connections to Harlingen and McAllen. LRGVDC with Valley Transit should seek *Section 5311(F)* intercity bus subsidies to pay for a portion of this service.

Time Frame

The Main Line portion of the service will begin as this plan is being completed. The Raymondville portion should be implemented in Year 3 (perhaps started as a vanpool).

Service Activity No. 3 – Develop and Implement Feeder Network

This very important activity will bring scheduled dependable service to the rural communities outside the U.S 83 urban corridor. This service is designed to provide the highest level of service possible and to ensure regional connectivity by opening the regional "main line" to persons not living along that corridor (Figure 5). This would be accomplished by operating feeder buses to outlying communities such as Progreso, Edcouch, and Raymondville. These buses would provide a timed meet service with the local and express (where possible) main line service to ensure a timely trip throughout the region – or connecting to Valley Transit/Greyhound's network across the country. The feeders will bring employees to their jobs. This will be particularly useful for workers going to low income jobs on South Padre Island.

Figure 5: FEEDER NETWORK AND MAIN LINE ROUTES

Prepared By:

KFH GROUP

LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The feeders could operate at varying headways, depending on demand, but all should be operated at least 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. five days per week for basic work and school needs. Service should connect to the Valley Transit stations where feasible and provide service to the supermarkets and other big box stores which are on US 83, typically .5 to 1 mile from Business 83. Service will be designed to enhance service for commuters and students (where appropriate).

This service will bring new access to low income residents with disabilities. The vehicles will be lift equipped and will be able to flex off of the route as needed. It will be funded with *JARC funds as well as local funds and/or Section 5311(F).*

Time Frame

This activity will bring new mobility to a wide range of Valley residents. It is believed that it should be implemented as soon as vehicles and funding becomes available. The planning will take place in Year 1. Vehicles should be procured by the middle of Year 2 with implementation to follow. Service should be staggered with some routes starting first, followed monthly by the others.

Service Activity No. 4 – Fixed Schedule Service

The need for dependable scheduled service became evident in the outreach phase. Fixed scheduled service is to replace one-on-one paratransit throughout the service area. The paratransit service is very expensive and cannot possibly reach as many persons as a scheduled service that can group trips.

Fixed schedule service operates in designated rural areas according to a posted schedule. The bus will be in a specific area at a specific time. Passengers can be picked up at their door or at designated stops in the area. The vehicle then proceeds to the designated destination area (typically the largest town in the county). Service is limited to specific days and times. The level of service would be dependent on the need. Fixed schedule service allows the transit system to group more trips and eliminate the one-on-one trips typical of rural demand response service. This type of service would operate in the rural portions of each county in the service

area. Some areas may receive five days a week service, while others may receive one day per week service. *Section 5311 and New Freedom* funding should be sought.

Time Frame

The vehicles for this service are available currently, as they are used in paratransit. Some of these vehicles can be switched to the fixed schedule service. This service, because it has the potential to provide more service for the same funds, should be implemented as soon as possible in the latter part of Year 1 or early Year 2.

Service Activity No. 5 - Paratransit Service

Because of its expense, paratransit service will only be available for MTP trips that are not coordinated according to the bus schedule and persons that cannot use the other modes due to a disability will be provided paratransit. *New Freedom and Section 5311* funding will be requested for this high level of service. This service must not compete with small town dial-a-ride, fixed schedule, or fixed-route service. The fare for paratransit should be considerably higher than other services.

Time Frame

This service is already in operation. The level of service will be lowered as the fixed schedule services are implemented.

Service Activity No. 6 – Shopper Shuttle Services

With peak hour vehicles available for other services during mid-day, it may be possible to offer shopper shuttle services to sponsors willing to support the transit system. The shopper shuttle targets neighborhoods with high numbers of transit dependent populations (Colonias), typically elderly and persons with disabilities and frequent destinations (e.g. Wal-Mart, HEB, and medical centers), and can be very effective during off peak hours. Often these arrangements

pay for themselves through funding from the retailers, who in return, receive the business, advertising/promotion, and they get involved in a positive way with their communities.

There are numerous examples (in Texas and across the country) of this type of service being successful with supermarkets and discount "big boxes." Typically, shuttles target transit dependent persons (elderly, disabled, and low-income persons) in their neighborhoods. Service is usually for shopping and medical.

Time Frame

Since no additional vehicles are needed and costs are borne by the retailers, this activity can be implemented as soon as funding becomes available. In Year 1 the Mobility Manager or the transit system(s) involved should approach large retailers in a united manner.

Service Activity No. 7 - Through Ticketing and Coordinated Fares

In order to make service easier for the customer fares and ticketing should be coordinated so that customers do not have to pay a variety of fares for a regional trip. Passengers should be able to purchase tickets to ride the regional system, local bus service and intercity service at each of the major transfer points. Customers should be able to purchase one ticket at their origin depot and ride throughout the region – or out of the region on Valley Transit.

Fare Structures

Fares can be a valuable tool in guiding customer choice. Local fixed-route service should be encouraged through the lowest fares. Paratransit service should have the highest fare reflecting it's higher per trip cost. The higher the fare, the lower the ridership – paratransit as a last choice. The fares should be compatible across the system, for example:

- Commuter service – Should cost no more than $3 - $5 each way
- Local Service – Local fixed-route or flex route service or fixed schedule service should have a fare of $.50 to $1.00

- Paratransit fares should be double fixed-route

Service Activity No. 8 - Develop Sponsorship Program

Transit has a long history of providing advertising on and in buses for additional revenue for the system. Some rural systems have engaged in advertising over the years, but a sponsorship program is more than simply advertising. Instead of the usual selling of just one form of advertising, the system should sell sponsorship packages. Since sponsorship and advertising funds are an important source of local funding, this program should be implemented first, in order to determine the level of funding that can be attained.

The local operators will work together to develop a sponsorship program designed to interest private businesses in sponsoring service and purchasing advertising on buses, websites and written materials. The sponsorship program will allow for varying levels of service.

Time Frame

This program should be designed in Year 2 and implemented in Year 3.

ACTION PLAN FOR REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

The activities developed in this plan are to be implemented in a manner that maximizes ridership and funding. That is, the services with the most ability to increase ridership, coupled with the areas with the greatest need will be implemented first. It should be noted that TxDOT's funding formula stresses ridership increases which necessitates serving the high ridership areas over isolated areas. In addition, funding will drive implementation. Those areas that receive funding first will gain priority status as well. As with all plans, these timelines are subject to change.

Year 1

In the first year, the Mobility Manager activities will take priority because so many future activities will depend on the Mobility Manager. Other activities will center on planning in support of the future services to be implemented. All stakeholder and operator committees will be formed as well.

- Mobility Manager – The stakeholders will organize work groups, seek funding, and determine the Mobility Manager structure.
- Paratransit Coordination – Form work group to address this coordination.
- Fixed-Route Service – Conduct planning and funding activities.
- Main Line – Implement service.
- Feeder Service – Initiate planning and funding activities.

Year 2

In the second year, the Mobility Manager will be implemented slowly. Planning and funding activities will continue and vehicle procurement will be initiated. This year will require careful planning and working with the local community leaders.

- Mobility Manager – Implement Mobility Manager initial functions of applying for funding, developing the vanpool program, as well as marketing materials.
- Paratransit Coordination – The next step in this process is to secure funding for technology.
- Human Service Coordination – Initiate activities of training, maintenance, and vehicle utilization.
- Fixed-Route – Continue planning and funding efforts and secure arrangements for operators and commitments from leaders.
- Feeder Service – Procure vehicles.
- Fixed Schedule Service – Implement in selected areas in place of paratransit vehicle.

- Shopper shuttle – If funding is available, initiate one shopper shuttle.
- Sponsorship Program – the program should be designed and marketed in Year 2.

Year 3

In the third year the Mobility Manager will continue to grow and expand his/her activities. Feeder service will be started (about half the service). Vehicles and technology will be procured for future years. Where appropriate, planning activities will continue – much of the energy should be focused on implementation.

- Mobility Manager – Expand services to include One Stop Shop, and additional planning functions. Also develop uniform fare structure.
- Paratransit Coordination – Initiate procurement of technologies.
- Fixed-Route – Procure vehicles, initiate new JARC and New Freedom service in Brownsville and McAllen.
- Main Line – Implement Raymondville service.
- Feeder Service – Initiate half of the feeder service.
- Fixed Schedule Service – Implement all other areas outside of fixed-route and feeder areas.
- Sponsorship Program – This program should be implemented in Year 3.

Year 4

In this year the operators will prepare for fixed-route service in the two sets of cities. The rest of the feeders will be implemented. The Mobility Manager will implement the through ticketing services.

- Mobility Manager – Implement the through Ticketing program.
- Paratransit Coordination – Install technology and prepare to implement the coordinated service.

- Fixed-Route –Implement the fixed-route services.
- Shopper Shuttle – Seek additional opportunities for service.
- Fixed-Route – Continue expanding in urban areas as needed with JARC and New Freedom funds.

Year 5

In this year, expansion will be limited to the new coordinated paratransit program, as the new system is completely open. This year should focus on measuring changes and planning for new services over the next five years.

- Mobility Manager – Implement new planning initiative for the next five years – using the new Census data.
- Paratransit Coordination – Implement new paratransit program.
- Fixed-Route – identify new JARC and New Freedom opportunities.

Years 6 - 10

In Year 6, planning activities will be completed for the next five year plan. Activities will be prioritized and will include expanded urban service, new feeder/commuter routes, and upgraded technology for fixed-route as well as paratransit. The system will also be fine-tuned at least twice a year. The possibility of consolidating all of the public operators should be explored in this time frame.