

CHAPTER 04



DENTON COUNTY



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Access North Texas is to document the public transportation needs for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. These populations can have difficulty finding public transportation options that connect them to doctor's appointments, work opportunities and education or job training. This plan identifies where these transportation connections do not exist or could be improved within Denton County. This chapter will give an overview of existing services, research conducted and collected, the public outreach meetings, the transportation poll used to collect individualized input on public transit needs, and the prioritized strategies for Denton County.

EXISTING TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

Denton County has two public transportation providers which work together to offer services to both the urban and rural portions of the county: Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) in the more urban areas and Span, Inc. which connects the rural areas of the county. DCTA provides transportation services within and between the City of Denton, Highland Village, and Lewisville and operates a multimodal system including A-train rail service, Connect Bus and University fixed-route services, regional North Texas Xpress commuter bus service, a commuter vanpool program, and GoZone on-demand services. DCTA provides transportation for the general public with service times varying by mode. DCTA bus, rail, and on-demand service availability ranges from 5:00am to 10:00pm Monday – Friday, and between 8:00am to 8:00pm on Saturday. DCTA GoZone provides Sunday hours, operating from 8:00am to 6:00pm in Denton and Lewisville/Highland Village GoZones. Service costs can also vary by mode. A-Train fixed-route rail service and Xpress Bus services cost \$1.50 for a local morning or afternoon pass and \$3.00 for a day

pass. Reduced morning or afternoon passes are also available for \$0.75 for qualifying riders. DCTA GoZone Rides are currently \$0.75 per trip.

In addition to other transportation options and services, the Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) operates a commuter vanpool program within the North Central Texas region. As of May 2022, DCTA operated up to 29 vanpools with origins in Denton County and up to 20 vanpools with destinations in Denton County. The number of vanpools may change month to month as the regional program expands shared commuter transportations opportunities.

Denton County is also serviced by Span, Inc., which operates primarily in the areas of Denton County not served by DCTA, including Flower Mound, Little Elm, Northlake, and surrounding areas. Span operates demand-response and curb-to-curb services. Additionally, Span is the designated rural provider in Denton County, serving primarily seniors, veterans, and individuals with disabilities, though rides are open to the general public. Services are generally available from 7:00am to 6:00pm Monday through Friday and riders must book rides at least one day in advance. Transit services cost \$6.00 per trip, though seniors and individuals with disabilities rides are discounted at \$3.00 per trip.

Finally, see Appendix B for a list of private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These private providers are an additional transportation option that individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective). Organizations can also contract with them to provide specific services for clients.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The demographic composition of Denton County reflects a rapidly growing population that may have high need for public transportation. According to the American Community Survey's 2019 5-year estimates, Denton County's

population has experienced a significant amount of growth, increasing by 13.9% since 2015. Denton County’s total population is made up of more than 833,000 individuals and more than 290,000 households according to the same estimates. Of this total population amount, over 82,000 individuals are 65 years of age and older, making up 9.9% of the population. Over 66,000 individuals within Denton County have a disability, making up 7.9% of the population, and over 83,000 individuals are considered low-income, making up 10.1% of the population. Denton County also hosts relatively low percentage of zero-car households at just 2.6% of households.

Denton County’s racial composition includes a majority White population, making up 74.3% of the total population, followed by 9.8% Black, 8.7% Asian, 0.5% total American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.08% total Native Hawaiian or Pacific

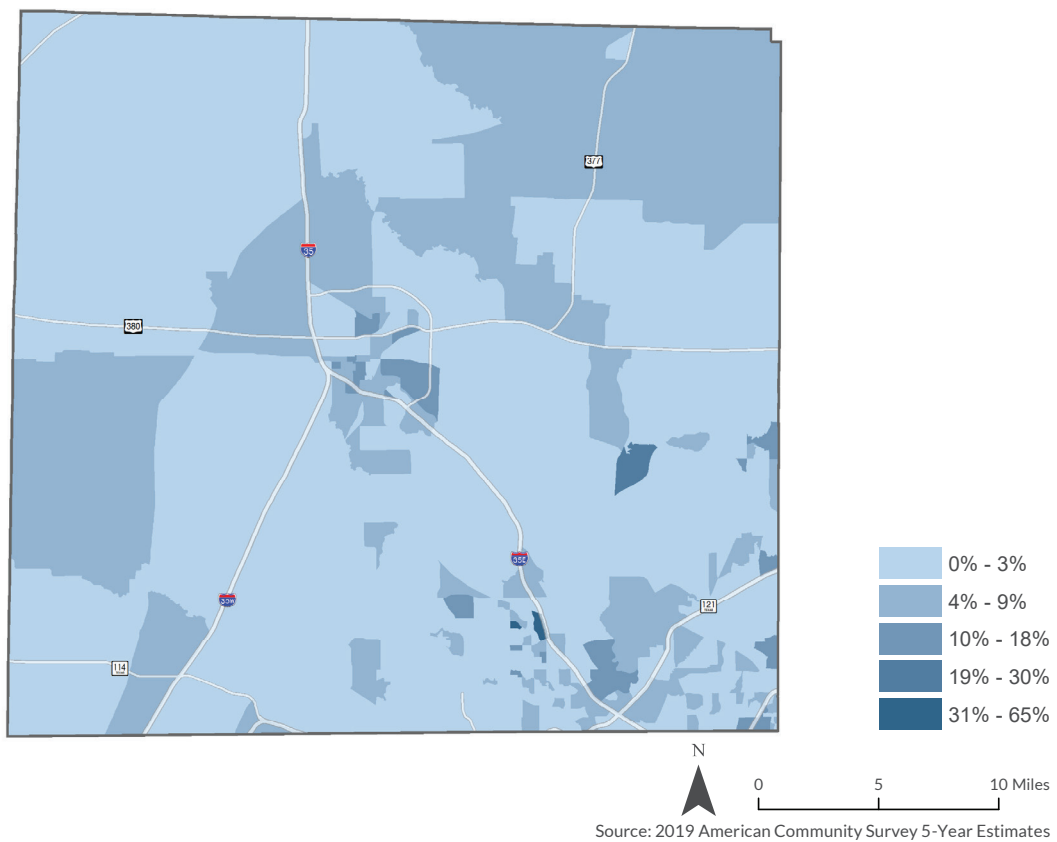
Islander, 3% Other Race, and 3.6% total Two or More Races. Denton County has a more heavily White population at 74.3% compared to the aggregate population of the 16-county North Central Texas Region, in which 68.8% of the total population is White. Denton County is comprised of 19.30% Hispanic or Latino individuals and contains a portion of the population with limited English proficiency, making up 7.79% of the total population. Efforts to promote existing or new transit services should include strategies to reach this population.

PROCESS

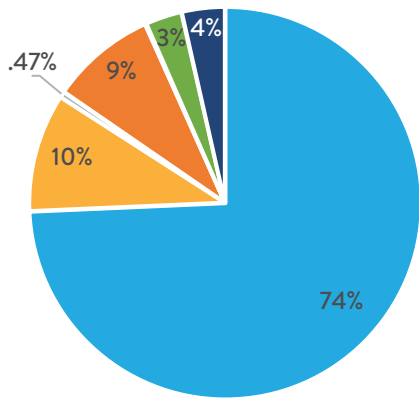
Outreach

Public outreach for Denton County was conducted through a series of virtual public meetings, one-on-one meetings with county stakeholders, surveys, and public mapping data. Outreach efforts were

Denton County Zero-Car Households



Denton County Racial Composition



- White
- Asian
- Black
- Some Other Race
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Two or More Races

advertised through our Access North Texas website and Local Motion publication.

Staff sent out 356 emails inviting Denton stakeholders and contacts to participate in public outreach efforts. Virtual public meetings saw 10 attendees including members of the public and representatives from county non-profits and transit providers. The virtual public survey received 25 responses from Denton County residents and the agency survey received 47 responses from Denton County stakeholders and organizations. An additional 11 one-on-one meetings were hosted with stakeholders from non-profits and municipalities throughout Denton County.

Another form of receiving data from Denton County residents and stakeholders was a transportation survey; made available online and translated into English and Spanish. Due to COVID-19 limitations, paper copies were available upon request or through transportation partners. The survey helped NCTCOG staff to collect first-hand data about public transportation in the region from riders and organizations that work with transit-dependent populations.

Data Sources

The planning process for Access North Texas involved North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) staff, community stakeholders, transportation providers, and community members. Through virtual meetings, members from each county prioritized its main concerns about transit access in their area.

Discussions with Denton County residents included opinions surrounding a local shift in modes of public transportation. DCTA shifted to offering less fixed-route bus service and focusing more on their new on-demand rideshare service called GoZone. DCTA's new GoZone rideshare program launched September 7, 2021. While some favored local transitions to on-demand public transportation services, others noted concerns with affordability, reliability, and sustainability. Virtual outreach meetings revealed that Denton County residents and stakeholders look forward to increased accessibility and mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities with the introduction of on-demand transit services by the local transit authority. Still others mentioned they anticipated barriers related to the dependence upon smart-phone technology and the potential complications that may bring for seniors and low-income populations.

One common theme among discussions with Denton County residents and stakeholders was the need for a more comprehensive public education campaign in which local transportation providers provide increased access to information about riding public transit. Participants mentioned the need to implement educational efforts especially among seniors and students, printing materials rather than relying heavily on digital resources.

Staff received 72 survey responses from Denton County including 25 responses from the public surveys and 47 responses from the agency survey. The survey revealed that among barriers to public

transportation experienced in Denton County, respondents noted that public transportation is not available at the days or times and in the locations that they need to go. Many stated that public transportation does not meet their needs or that public transportation in their area is not sufficiently reliable.

When prompted to note the kinds of missed trips individuals were experiencing, a large portion of respondents stated they were not missing trips. However, those who were missing trips or delayed in their trips noted that they were primarily missing work and medical trips. Light rail service was the most desired form of public transportation according to Denton County respondents. This was followed by demand-response or on-demand transportation and fixed-route bus service. Enhancements respondents would like to see in Denton's public transportation include expanded service areas, expanded service times, increased frequency, and increased reliability in transit services. Some additional items addressed through virtual outreach meetings and one-one-one meetings included driver shortages and interest in increased efforts toward affordable fares.

All information gained through outreach meetings and transportation survey was gathered to develop the prioritized strategies for Denton County.

TAIT Tool and Environmental Justice

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) identifies communities who face transportation disadvantages and may have greater potential need for public transit. This tool is updated by the North Central Texas Council of Governments and is based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Based on information from TAIT, in Denton County there are relatively few census block groups where populations of individuals age 65 and over, below poverty, and with disabilities are above the regional percentages.

Analysis

The Denton County TAIT map reveals that Denton County contains relatively few Census blocks wherein the proportion of populations of seniors, individuals with disabilities, and people below the poverty line is above the regional average. The populations which fit this description are located just outside the loop on the west side of the city of Denton, on the southeast side of the city of Denton, in the northeast corner of the county along I-377, and in Lake Dallas on the east side of I-35E. Denton County does host a number of Census block groups in which two variables are above the regional average, most of which are located in the northwest corner of the county and inside the city of Denton.

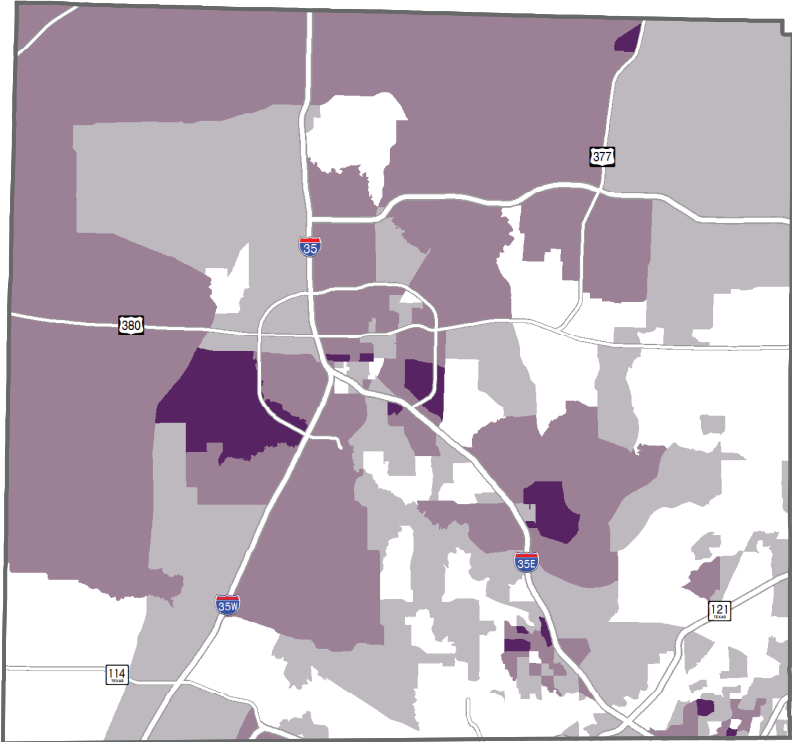
Development of Strategies

The prioritized strategies were developed once information from outreach meetings, the transportation poll, and research data was compiled and analyzed for patterns and gaps of service. Observations and recommendations were coded into five (5) main categories to identify themes across the 16-county region and inform regional goals. Those goals provide a framework for the Access North Texas and individual strategies were identified for Denton County to further those goals and provide a plan for transit providers and organizations in future implementation of services. Drafted goals and strategies were provided to the stakeholders for additional feedback and review prior to the finalization of the plan.

FINDINGS

Outreach efforts within Denton County revealed that the county's recent changes have prompted discussion of preferred mode with many Denton residents hoping to see increased light rail and on-demand or demand-response service as public transportation options increase in Denton County. Accessibility and affordability concerns continue

Denton County Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT)



Legend

- All Variables At or Below Regional Percentage
- One Variable Above Regional Percentage
- Two Variables Above Regional Percentage
- All Variables Above Regional Percentage

0 7 14 Miles



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool (TAIT) is a preliminary screening areas that may need additional analysis when considering transportation-disadvantaged groups in a plan, project, or program. The TAIT displays Census block groups above the regional percentage for three variables: Age 65 and Over, Below Poverty, and Persons with Disabilities.

to be a concern surrounding the implementation of on-demand services, though many are excited about the changes in public transportation in Denton County. Outreach also revealed that many individuals and organizations would like to see increased access to information about how to use and ride public transportation.

Of the 72 individuals who completed the Access North Texas public survey, 57% of responses indicated that individuals could get to where they need to go, while others noted several barriers to reaching their destinations with transit service areas and service times chief among them. Many noted a desire for better connectivity in and to Lewisville, Flower Mound, Corinth, and the Colony or indicated complications with traveling across county and municipal lines, desiring to travel from the city of Denton into the rural parts of the county.

Outreach efforts revealed that 30 respondents indicated concerns with transit reliability in Denton County and 30 respondents also indicated concerns with transit frequency in the county. Health and safety were also listed as important concerns by 10 and 11 respondents respectively. Also, 17 respondents noted a desire for fewer transfers and better regional connectivity. Finally, 26 respondents indicated a need for better information about how to use transit and available transit resources.

Overall, Denton County residents and stakeholders are interested in seeing a more reliable, frequent, transit service that operates for longer hours in expanded service areas throughout the county. Respondents would like to have better access to destinations outside of county and municipal boundaries through the expansion of light rail, on-demand and demand-response solutions, and fixed-route bus services. Denton County residents would like better access to work, medical appointments, and other destinations

and easier access to information about the public transit options available for them to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The goals and strategies below identify ways to address the most important public transportation needs stakeholders identified as needing to be implemented over the next few years. The strategies build upon the progress and feedback that has been provided since the 2018 Access North Texas plan and should be referenced when state and federal funds for public transportation become available.

Implementing the Plan

Denton County transit providers are already taking strides to implement some of these strategies including the growth of on-demand transit options through the DCTA GoZone implementation and expansion of 2021, which has likely prompted much of the discussion of transportation modes identified through public outreach. Similarly, DCTA has created online resources and have ongoing public education efforts such as Operation Lifesaver and DCTA Rail Ready curriculum to provide transit-related informational activities, videos and links to increase public knowledge on rail safety. DCTA also offers a free travel training program by providing personal, step-by-step instructions to seniors and those with disabilities on how to effectively use the DCTA system and build the skills, confidence, and independence to use public transportation.

In early 2022, NCTCOG initiated the Denton County Transit Study to develop a comprehensive approach to planning and implementing transit services outside of transit authority service areas in Denton County. The study will consider internal and regional connections and focus on strategic near-term implementation, increased transportation options, limited long-range investment opportunities including fixed guideway

REGIONAL GOAL

DENTON COUNTY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Plan and Develop Transportation Options by Assessing Community Need and Challenges

- A) Conduct planning activities to further identify public transportation needs of residents outside of existing transportation authorities and define additional coordination opportunities for existing providers
- B) Invest in programs to assist with filling gaps in public transportation and facilitate service for work-related trips
- C) Launch a mobility toolbox to educate on and promote public transportation options such as fixed route, demand-respond, on-demand services, etc.

Implement Services by Enhancing Transportation Options and Expanding Where Service Gaps Exist

- A) Expand service hours to support needs of low-income individuals in the service industry and outside traditional 9am-5pm jobs
- B) Expand public transportation services to key destinations throughout the region without comprehensive service and support regional integration of new services.

Coordinate with Transportation Providers, Public Agencies, and Stakeholders to Increase Efficiencies

- A) Improve coordination among public transit providers and cities that lack public transportation
- B) Work with regional and local organizations to increase ease of travel across municipal and county boundaries
- C) Foster cooperation between public transit providers within counties to allow better connectivity and simplify regional trips
- D) Create and support partnerships between public transit providers and local organizations to increase opportunities to make fares more affordable for those in need

Support Public Transportation Recovery and Growth

- A) Promote safe and healthy practices on public transportation services
- B) Establish driver recruitment and retention programs for public transportation services to address difficulties in retaining drivers

Promote Access and Information about Available Transportation Options

- A) Enhance communication and outreach programs to improve awareness of existing or new transportation options
- B) Partner with agencies, recreation centers, senior residencies, housing assisted living centers, and other organizations to publicize information

alternatives, funding options, and private-sector involvement. A Transit Vision, along with specific goals and objectives, will be developed that guide the transit planning process, recommendations, and implementation. The study is anticipated to be completed by Summer 2023.

Agencies and organizations looking to develop transit projects aligned with these strategies may find support through NCTCOG's Transit Strategic Partnerships Program or the TxDOT Call for Projects. Competitive proposals will demonstrate innovative solutions, strategic value, sustainability, implementation capacity, and evidence of collaboration. Most importantly, the proposal's needs assessment will need to be supported directly by county specific strategies identified in this plan. The most competitive proposals will demonstrate how the proposed project or service will utilize one or more strategies to enhance transit accessibility for transit-dependent populations. More information on the Transit Strategic Partnerships Program can be found at www.nctcog.org/strategicpartnerships-transit. More information on the TxDOT Call for Projects can be found at www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/division/public-transportation/local-assistance.html.

REFERENCE TO THE APPENDIX

For more detailed information about Denton County, please see Appendices A-E, available online at www.accessnorthtexas.org.

See Appendix A, Summary & Status of 2018 to review previously adopted goals and strategies that were included in the 2018 Access North Texas plan.

See Appendix B, Get-A-Ride Guide, for a list of public and private transportation providers operating in the 16-county region. These providers are an additional transportation resource that individuals can use for personal trips (if cost-effective), or organizations can contract with to provide specific service for clients.

See Appendix C, Transit Accessibility Improvement Tool, for additional information on how the tool was developed and how to use it.

See Appendix D, Data & Analysis, for copies of the transportation surveys, statistics, and affiliated county-based maps.

See Appendix E, Outreach Meeting and Supplemental Information, for a list of previously held virtual meetings by county with a copy of the presentations.