DUAL-PURPOSE RURAL TRANSIT FLEX ROUTES: GREYHOUND FEEDER SERVICE COMBINED WITH EMPLOYMENT TRANSPORTATION
Ark-Tex Council of Governments Rural Transit District (TRAX), Texarkana, Texas

SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY:
TRAX is implementing flex route service that connects rural residents to both a Greyhound station (in Sulphur Springs), major employers (in Sulphur Spring) and other destinations such as Paris (38 miles to the north) and Mount Pleasant. The service is timed to provide connections to Greyhound service as well as to bring people to and from work shifts at major employers, and is part of the national Greyhound ticket system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:
The planned service will include two new flex routes that have been designed to provide transportation access to employment for residents in Delta, Hopkins, Franklin, and Lamar Counties. Flex route transit service was selected to provide the most effective and productive approach that can be used to meet the needs, to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. Once the planned routes have been implemented, ATCOG TRAX will have completed the regional network of commuter services for the western part of its region.

The service will operate early in the morning and return in the evening from Franklin and Delta Counties and will serve residents and employment centers in Sulphur Springs (See Figure 1). The first route will start in Mt. Vernon in Franklin County and make various stops on its way to Sulphur Springs as well as areas off route such as Tira and Como as needed. The bus dedicated to this route will begin by traveling westbound on US Rt. 67 and then on I-30 as it approaches Sulphur Springs. The key employment centers in Sulphur Springs that will be serviced by this route include Ocean Spray, Owens, Morningstar, Lowe’s, America’s Factory Outlet Mall, and

AGENCY PROFILE
Organization Type: Rural Transit District that is a program of a Regional Council of Governments
Service Area: Nine rural counties in Northeast Texas
Resources:
- Fleet size: Approx. 65 vehicles
- Staff size: Approx. 18 FTE (4 management); human resources and accounting staff are shared with the parent organization (Ark-Tex COG)
- FY 2012 Operating Budget: approx. $3.28 million

Service Summary:
- Modes Operated: demand-response, deviated fixed-route
- Days and Hours of Service: Monday-Friday 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- General Public Cash Fare: $1.00 for the first 10 miles of the trip, 10 cents for every mile after
- Passenger Trips/Year: 429,999 in FY 2011

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GSC, Inc. This Mt. Vernon to Sulphur Springs flex-route will operate on two round trips initially with an arrival in Sulphur Springs before 8:00 a.m. and return after 5:00 p.m.

The second route will start in Delta County and end in Sulphur Springs. This route is designed to meet the growing employment-related transportation needs of Delta County residents. This flex-route will begin in Delta County with stops in Cooper, Ben Franklin, and other communities in this very small county. Other towns that can be served include Pecan Gap, Roxton, and Toco. In addition, this route will provide employment-based transportation to major employers in Sulphur Springs. This Delta County to Sulphur Springs flex-route will operate two round trips.

In the second year of operation it is planned to expand this service to Paris on the North-South Route.

CONDITIONS THAT PROMPTED THE STRATEGY:

One of the areas of greatest needs as determined in the Ark-Tex Regional Coordination Plan (ATRCP) was that of commuter and additional public transportation for employment, job training, and job search needs. The flex routes were designed to provide transit services between some of the poorest areas of the region to major employers in Sulphur Springs. In addition, there was need for connecting service to Greyhound service, which stops in Sulphur Springs several times per day in between Dallas and Texarkana.

RESULTS OF THE STRATEGY:

This strategy is being implemented in the summer of 2012.

METHODS USED TO DOCUMENT RESULTS:

- TRAX will track ridership, farebox revenue, operating costs, revenue vehicle hours, and revenue vehicle miles.

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS:

- Timing of Greyhound service connections to coincide with employment shifts
- Proximity of Greyhound station and major employers

CHALLENGES:

- Because the TRAX route will be interlined on the national Greyhound ticketing system, the operation needs to meet minimum Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) insurance requirements for interstate carriers and obtain FMCSA operating authority. TRAX participates in the Texas transit insurance pool which would not meet FMCSA requirements. TRAX initially planned to privately insure just the eight vehicles required for the Greyhound feeder service; however, they discovered that being part of the Greyhound system would mean they would have to insure their entire vehicle fleet through a private insurance company, which would be prohibitively expensive. This problem was solved by contracting with the corporation that operates the T-Line service in Texarkana (the Texarkana Urban Transit District or TUTD). The eight vehicles were re-titled to and insured by TUTD - which already operates an interstate service since Texarkana straddles...
Texas and Arkansas - and TRAX pays TUTD to operate the service.

- Securing the local match to operate the service. TRAX initially applied to TxDOT for JARC funding for the service, and under this program the Workforce Board would have provided the local match. Because of the Greyhound connection, TxDOT awarded TRAX with Section 5311(f) rural intercity bus funding rather than Job Access and Reverse Commute funding. A new local matching source was needed under this scenario. TxDOT provided state funding along with support from TRAX’s in-kind maintenance donation (featured in the TRAX case study in Management Strategies) and human contracts.

**IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE**

**RECOMMENDED FOR:**
- Rural transit services with large service areas

**RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS:**
- Service areas with multiple trip generators (e.g., employment and Greyhound connection) with
  - relatively direct travel corridor between the trip generators
  - compatible activity timing at each location
- High-needs population along the travel corridor and/or timing convenient to connect to other transit routes that serve areas of high need

**METHODS FOR DOCUMENTING RESULTS:**
- Before and after measurements:
  - passenger trips
  - farebox recovery

**IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS:**
- Route map for the planned service
Proposal for Multiple Non-Urbanized Public Transit Projects

Figure 1: PROPOSED JOB ACCESS ROUTES