

RTCC Meeting Notes

01-11-22

Attendees:

Misty Hendon (HOTCOG)
Russell Devorsky (HOTCOG)
Rep Pledger (HOTCOG)
Gary Luft (HOTCOG Health and Human Services)
Dan Dalton KFH Group
Ken Hosen (KFH Group)
Carey Amthor (HOTR – MHMR)
Annette Polk (Waco MPO)
Keith Vandiver (Bosque County Senior Services)
Susan Wilson (Director of Head Start - EOAC Waco)
Debbie King (Executive Director Meals on Wheels for Falls and Hill counties)
Heather Travers (McLennan County)
Julie Talbert (HOT Workforce Board, Childcare Services Program)
Commissioner Will Jones (McLennan County)
Judge Jay Elliott (Falls County)
Judge Justin Lewis (Hill County)
Melissa Ingriola (HOCTILC)
Judge Scott Felton (McLennan County)
Kari Banta (TxDOT)
Alisha Alvarez (Waco Transit)
Mukesh Kumar (Waco Metropolitan Planning)
Tim Jeske (HOTCOG Homeland Security)

This meeting is now being recorded

Call to order @ 01:05 pm

This meeting was posted in accordance with Chapter 551, Texas Government Code, as amended, known as the Texas Open Meetings Act.

Rep: Request for Ken to begin discussing strategies that KFH will put in the plan for us.

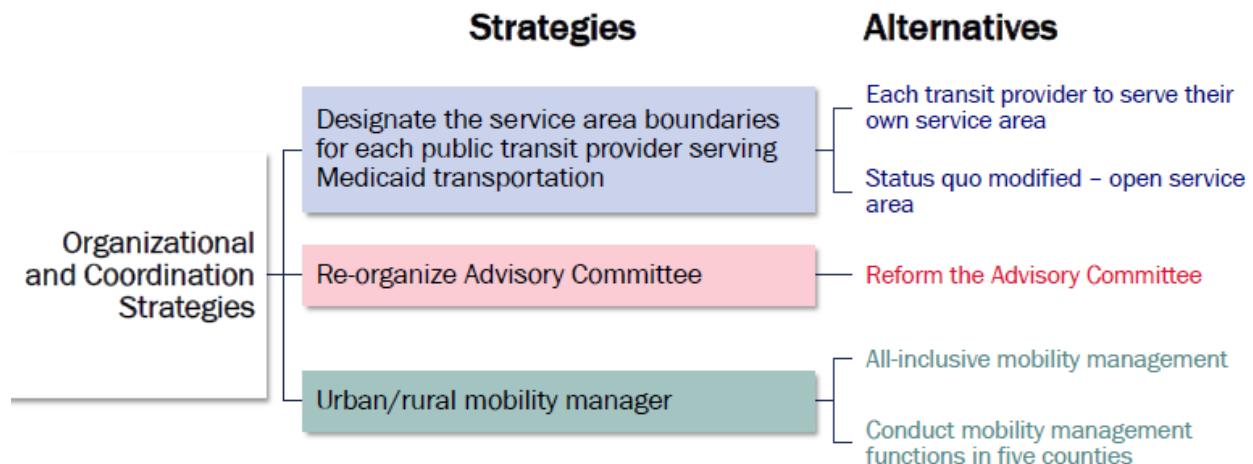
Ken: We've been working on this project for a while. What we're doing today is making decisions on strategies so we can give direction to him for writing the draft plan up. Today is an amended presentation, does not include everything discussed in the previous presentation. This is meeting #2 so we will move quickly to get to decision points so that it's not dragged out. This is not a presentation; this is a discussion guide.

Today's discussion includes: determine strategies and priorities, organizational and coordination strategies, operating strategies for the future, and sustainability and financial strategies.

We've talked before about productivity and importance of productivity, coming up with solutions that don't cost any more money other than perhaps capital money and should have federal money but more or less cost neutral. The next step is the advisory committee, and we should select and prioritize strategies for the future and then the consultant all together and set up as draft for us to review and approve.

Reminder that in addition to productivity, we need to coordinate. Takes trust between coordinating entities, leadership, appropriate political environment, business arrangement, and a plan that works for all.

Discussing organizational strategies designed for the five-county service areas: focus on designated service areas, advisory committee, and mobility management.



Strategy is to designate the service area boundaries for each public transit provider serving medicaid transportation in the region: Waco Transit, McLennan County Rural Transit, and HOTRTD. The alternative is that each provider service all 6 counties.

Russell: For HOTCOG we would oppose any encroachment into our service areas. The laws are specific and clear that each provider service the area they are in.

Alisha: Waco Transit will continue to provide service in areas that they are already providing service in. Encouraged us to get credentialed and also reminder that there are other mom/pop organizations that are providing medicaid trips in their area as well as ours. Would like to coordinate with HOTCOG in any way they can.

Russell: I'm not talking about medicaid, I'm talking about regular service.

Rep: We're on medicaid right now.

Judge Lewis: We need to be servicing our own areas. A conscious decision was made to split away from the rural transportation district and take those dollars and we need those dollars to operator so we should be keeping to our own areas.

Will Jones: With reference to Technical Memo #5, there's a Capital Area Office of Mobility Management. Could we get an explanation and is that a viable strategy in our area?

Ken: What they've done is Capital Metro and CARTS (Capital Area Rural Transportation System) got together and decided to form a mobility management program across both the Capital Metro area and the 9 counties of CARTS. Since Capital Metro has most of the money, it's mostly funded through them and housed in their office, but it is a 50/50 deal. They work with human service agencies and health care providers in finding money and then tailoring services. In many cases it's free bus passes. It's working with the community and setting up transportation options for people whether it's with CARTS area or the Capital Metro area. Specifically in that no transit zone when the greater Waco area through the census expands some more, some of the previously rural areas won't get service through HOTCOG and they may not be in Waco Transit service area either.

Will Jones: That's one of the reasons we set up McLennan County Rural Transportation was because of that no service area. This seems like a pretty interesting idea.

Ken: Would encourage us to make a visit down to the office of mobility management and visit with CARTS folks to see what they did and if we can, read the case study that explains how it works.

Alisha: Serena wanted me to let you know we have a mobility manager at Waco Transit for urban and rural and we could coordinate efforts and utilize their mobility manager. Our end goal is to continue to provide the level of service to the residents in this county and their mobility manager makes that a seamless process. Waco Transit is willing to coordinate and offer a partnership when it comes to mobility management.

Rep: Ken can we go back to the organization part. We agree with the mobility management information, but we want to go in order. As far as medicaid goes, when we get credential and set up, but we need to get to where our two agencies are benefiting all the way around. Since it's contract, the contractor tells the subs where to go. Superior, we believe, has the main contract over this area, so we would become one of their subcontractors in the 6 counties, so we would pick up and drop off where they tell us to, except for the City of Waco, we have to stay out of the city limits of Waco regardless. Judge Lewis with what you were saying regarding the split and staying with your area, we agree but that's a totally different animal than with the medicaid. There's a lot of coordination that can take place between us, Waco Transit, and McLennan County as far as medicaid goes to get all of those trips done. Could they (Waco Transit) put it in their contract that they don't want to service in our areas, maybe so.

Alisha: We would not want to do that because the more you deny trips, the less the region will get. They will start assigning the trips to the mom/pop agencies. Waco Transit doesn't choose their trips every day, they're downloaded into the system. If we're a provider out there they will give us trips. Same goes for us with what we establish in the contract. It's not going to be that they give Waco Transit all the trips.

Ken: Ultimately what's going to happen is as Superior and these other brokers mature, they're going to go out and find as many '98 Hondas as possible. That's how the model works. The less they pay, the more money they make – the money goes directly to them. It's called capitated brokerage. It's not suited to transit; it's suited for healthcare. Every place across the country where they see this happen, ultimately they reduce the service that they pass on to the transit system because they are a lot more money than some guy driving a '98 Honda that's untrained and unscreened. As far as right now it sounds like Waco Transit wants everyone competing with each other for medicaid trips along with everyone else. It's going to be us competing for medicaid trips in the 6 counties. Rep, why wouldn't you be able to serve in the City of Waco for medicaid.

Rep: I understand it's a contract set up by itself but we're still using TxDOT equipment, then we'd have to stay out of the urbanized areas because we are strictly rural.

Ken: I think there are ways to work with that. May be some possibilities there. Of course, if McLennan County was doing the same thing with rural vehicles then they might be under the same restriction. If Waco Transit is using urban money in the rural areas there would be that same restriction. We will check into that further. Sounds like the status for modified as far as transit providers are concerned is the more appropriate one where everyone competes again everyone.

Julie: Not necessarily a comment on that, but what we try to do with the workforce board is to serve the customer and provide the best customer service we can. Not sure if everyone competing is the best service for customers. They got into transportation business because their customers could not get to work, could not get to the workforce center, could not get to job interviews.

Ken: Excellent point. There's a lot more to it because if HOTCOG isn't providing service for medicaid in their service areas then they're losing medicaid funding, which is considered local match under the rural program. If they lost that money, then the service they provide cannot be as effective.

Will Jones: Could this all be fixed with one coordinator?

Ken: Well, each operator would have to agree to service their own area or agree to provide service separately.

Will Jones: The option of the independent operators doesn't sound very efficient.

Ken: It's not. It's HHSC call on that. Professionally they took a bad model and made it worse.

Rep: Julie, when you said you got involved in transportation, explain what you mean by that.

Russell: Julie isn't involved in medicaid transit.

Julie: Just saying in our experience serving customers, competition is not always a bad thing. Their bottom line is how can we best serve the customers living in our region. They service all 6 counties, and we want them to have the best transportation possible without worrying about which organization gets the trip.

Judge Lewis: We agree with that. We only serve 5 counties now, it used to be 6 but McLennan went their own way and Waco went their own way. It comes down to local matching dollars and funding for the overall service. In order for us to make and maximize our local matching dollars we have to have the medicaid dollars. That gives us more money on the other side of the house, and we can provide more services for our rural constituents. To us we don't want the competition, at the end of the day we want people to obey what they agreed to do. What I want is a coordinator where we can say hey this is your area and this is our area, within reason. If we have to travel across those then we can have agreements to justify those and guidelines for how those things are going to work. At the end of the day with the COG not going off in the rural transit district, not taking the medicaid, they're leaving a lot of money on the table that would otherwise be used and is a match to help us expand our programs in the rural areas which benefits all of our citizens in the five county areas and frankly with the proper agreements in place it benefits everybody in all six counties.

Ken: Last thing on this topic is that this arrangement where one transit system is operating in another one's district is highly unusual and is unprecedeted in Texas. They have never seen this before.

Ken: Second strategy is to reorganize the advisory committee and reform it and change some of the rules, which a lot of these were discussed previously. We could have voting members be representatives from the five counties, quorum rules might change, and HOTCOG has been working towards those things. Then we have our voting/non-voting members and we would have to decide how members might be appointed. That's worth doing because everyone recognizes that the way the committee was previously formulated, we could never get a quorum and vote on anything. So, this would give the committee a lot more flexibility.

Rep: That's a given, to get it where the organization itself becomes more efficient at getting the plans and the projects done.

Ken: In the terms of the urban/rural mobility management, Waco Transit offered to work together on an all-inclusive mobility management program. That would be the superior way to do it as long as HOTRTD has their say in rural matters. Urges anyone interested to meet with Capital Metro and CARTS if we are interested in this.

Rep: Alisha, would you tell everyone a summary of what the mobility manager does?

Alisha: Our mobility manager is she looks at all of the trips coming in throughout the day and the drivers we have and she will organize the trips in a way that make them most efficient to serve the population of clients for that day. She'll go out and meet with other agencies in the area that we serve to see what assistance they might need with their transportation. She does education on their systems and how to utilize them. Those are the key points that she does. Also, if there are multiple organizations that need their assistance, she will set up a way where they can work with agencies to schedule trips in groups so we can hit the agencies in an efficient manner.

Ken: Discussion of service area strategies.

These strategies are close to cost neutral, it is simply using the existing vehicles more productively.

Local in-county service –

Current model is very expensive and unproductive.

Cities and towns of over 1,500 population –

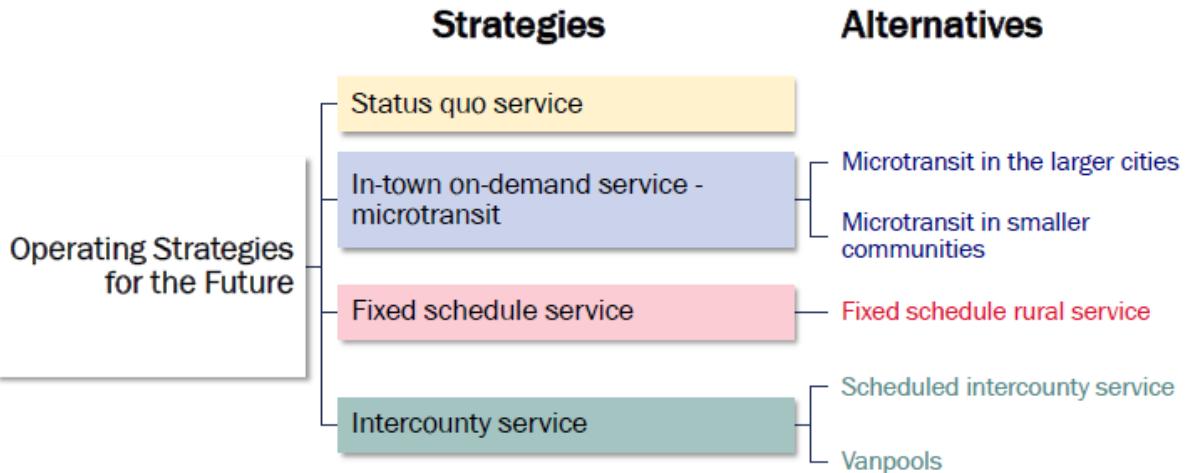
On-demand with 15–30-minute response would greatly enhance the quality of the service, without the need for additional operating revenue.

Out of county service –

Currently 65 percent of the HOTCOG region public ridership has Waco as a destination. The majority of these needs are for dialysis and health care services.

Travel within Waco –

Based on public comments, there is a need for better coordination of service between HOTRTD and WTS in Waco

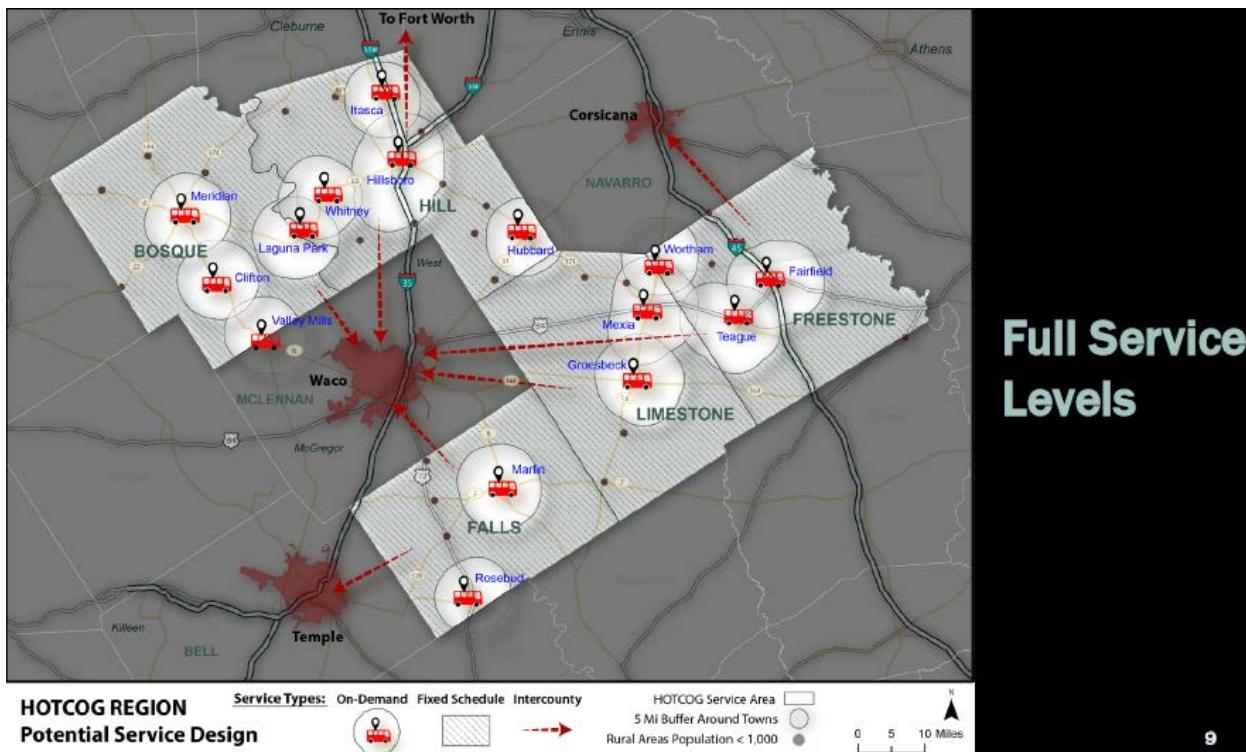


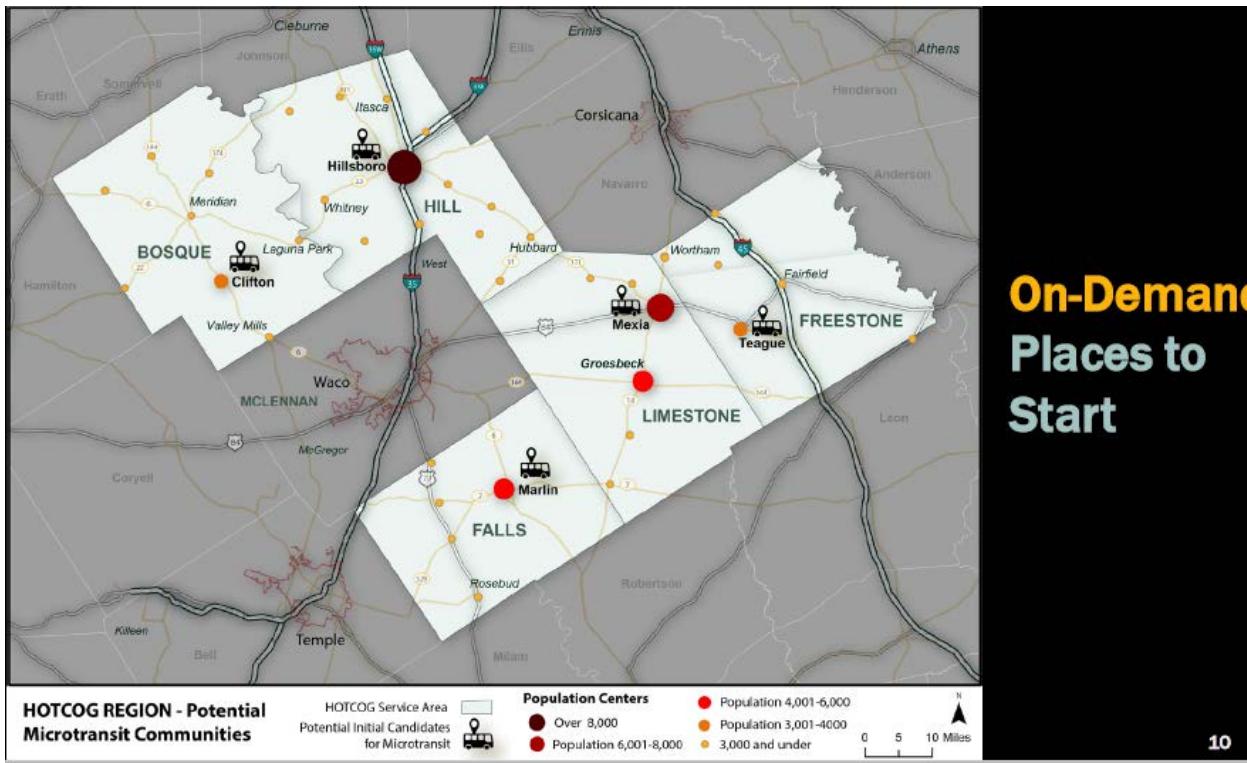
Alisha: So, is this on demand service, is it just one or two vehicles dedicated to that service and then still have the people that schedule in advance, or is everything on demand service?

Ken: On-demand service would be available for communities like Mexia, Hillsboro, or Marlin. Right now, there are typically one or two vehicles floating around picking up people based on a schedule that was put together the day before. What app does is in real time they schedule the trip and slide everybody in and the driver has to drive where the app tells them to, which that can be changing from one minute to the next. It's very popular in suburban areas across the country. We recommend those types of services, perhaps starting in some of the larger ones and growing from there into some of the smaller cities in the community. They're all too small for traditional fixed route. So microtransit can provide that service. The next set of schedules is fixed schedule service and people know when/where they can ride. Large part of this is based on dialysis needs. The next level of service is the intercounty service, which is scheduled service.

Rep: We're interested in the microtransit inside the particular towns. Our transportation scheduling software is putting out an app that will do this for us. Should be ready in April. We're really interested in microtransit and fixed schedule route.

Ken: We could have microtransit in all of these communities and in some of the smaller ones, we might limit it to a few days a week. It's also a good way to promote local businesses so it's easy for people to go shopping so they don't necessarily have to leave their own town.





- Ken: With regards to the sustainability and funding strategies. This is a great opportunity to go in together on some grants, which makes for a stronger grant. Seek funding for additional vehicles, for the technology, and any other new advance technologies, and any other coordination type activities. Maybe go in for additional mobility management funding. HOTCOG could seek NEMT funding. In terms of securing local funding, initiating a private sector sponsorship program, work with human service and healthcare organizations, and then allocating service. Next step would be the draft plan would be written, get it reviewed by advisory committee and HOTCOG, and then once we're happy, as a final draft we'll send to TxDOT. When we receive those comments then we'll put the final plan together.
- Rep: Deadline is end of February. February 28th is when the funds run out. Kari, do you want to see if before the HOTCOG board approves it?
- Kari: That's up to you when you want to show it to them, but if they see things that need to be added, it would be additional work that the consultant would have to do. We would want to have KFH in so they can add in anything that might be missing.
- Ken: We could forward to TxDOT at the same time it's send it to the advisory committee.
- Kari: That works for them.
- Ken: That's it for today's presentation.
- Rep: Open for questions and public comments.

Russell: We look forward to working with all of our partners.

Rep: We will get out a date for our next meeting. We'll also talk about how to proceed, what we want things to look like going forward, quarterly or monthly meetings, and who we want involved.

Meeting adjourned.

**Addition: Next meeting is scheduled for February 15, 2022. Details to follow.