

# RTCC Meeting Notes

07-27-23

Attendees:

Aaron Torres (Hill County)  
Alisha Alvarez (TxDOT)  
April Cook (Hill County Indigent Healthcare)  
Carey Amthor (HOT BHN/MHMR)  
Debbie King (Executive Director Meals on Wheels Waco)  
Donnis Cowan (HOTCOG)  
Heather Travers (McLennan County)  
James Jarmon (Meals on Wheels Waco)  
Jana Svacina-Waldrop (Waco Transit)  
Julie Talbert (HOT Workforce Solutions)  
Judge Jay Elliott (Falls County)  
Kari Banta (TxDOT)  
Melinda Bonds (HOTRMHMR)  
Meredith Stephens (TWS-VRS)  
Misty Hendon (HOTCOG)  
Mukesh Kumar (WMP)  
Neeta Braker (HOCTIL)  
Rep Pledger (HOTCOG)  
Serena Stevenson (Waco Transit)

Judge Elliott: Call to order at 11:16 am.

Misty: Proof of posting

Rep: Referencing the RPTCP Application instructions (handout attached). On July 11<sup>th</sup> we met with TxDOT for funding the 2024 RPTCP Continuation Grant, which will start on September 1, 2023. All agencies currently receive \$40k. If it's not spent, we lose it. The new maximum for meals has increased to \$16 per person. Really important that we receive letters from individual stakeholders stating their commitment to the coordination effort. Letters need to come from a person, not just the organization.

Judge Elliott: Can you send us a guideline of what TxDOT would like us to include?

Rep: From our QPI plan that was done in 2022, there are projects in there and things that need to be done. We need to take a hard look as a group and figure out how we're going to complete those things. We're required to do a minimum of 4 scheduled meetings per year. We're going to have one per month and on the days that there is a board meeting, we'll have our meeting after that.

Eligible expenses are listed on the handout.

Throughout the year we need at least one or two public meetings.

Coordinator calls coming up. Every two years TxDOT puts out some funds for different projects, so if there is a project out there that we want to look at, we can put that

together and turn the application in and see if we can come away with some money to start a new pilot project or if there's something else out there that needs help.

Kari: Referencing our current QPI. TxDOT sets this up so you can track your progress. All of these can be amended and updated, as can your whole plan. So, if things change in your plan, they'll be reflected in your QPI.

Different ways you can spend the funding. You can get somebody to update the plan. Doing studies to prepare for things you need to move ahead with your project. Funding is not just for meetings. It's been noticed that we haven't made full use of the funds that are available. More public meetings, more public involvement. Other agencies have done some successful workshops.

We can also extend your stakeholder group. This funding can go towards what it takes to recruit them. Maybe that could be a subcommittee for recruiting and their activities. Any materials you put together for the meeting can be used as deliverables.

I recommend evaluating your QPI every meeting.

I noticed the implementation lead is listed as the whole committee; you need one person that can be the lead. That lead can be the one presenting on that particular project. That can be anybody on the stakeholder committee. Whoever would be most relevant, whoever has the time and resources related to what the project is.

Rep: Kari, can you define "time and resources"?

Kari: Resources could be access to other meetings, copy machine, volunteer time, facilities to hold an event. Also getting volunteers for the tasks. A meeting could be formed for setting action items. And looking for and planning activities that go beyond working with other transit providers.

The plan really focuses on services for seniors and individuals with disabilities. There are lots of other folks like workforce, nutrition, veterans. We should see if we could get a representative for the veterans here. Their funding is different so they might not be able to bring money to the table, but they might provide ideas on ways you can coordinate. It might be a way to look for efficiencies in the way the services are delivered.

The focus is how to make the best of your time here together. How to push that out so you're making use of the funds that we give for products that are going to help you. I would love to see an application for the coordinated COG. There are planning grants, which can be used for doing a larger study, or something specific to what's in the plan. You can do a pilot. I know another agency has done a microtransit as a pilot. I know y'all have that on here.

There's also the rural discretionary for larger projects, and RTAP which is for rural technical assistance. That can be for technology, working with peers, training, all sorts of stuff.

There are instructions for the coordinated call. The latest instructions haven't come out yet. You can look at the ones from last year. The requirements aren't really going to

change, the content of the application and the advice for each question will be what changes.

In terms of peers, you've got CTCOG nearby and you share a lot of common interests. It might make sense to observe their meetings or have some interaction to see where you have the same issue, just crossing the boundaries.

The funds can pay for coordination outside the region.

Carey: How do we apply cost to meetings?

Rep: In August, when the application is open, I wanted to get the group together for two days here at the COG and work on the application as a group. Historically it's been HOTCOG that works on it. I've got to get the group totally involved in this.

Kari, if I have the group here for two days doing this, can the funds be used to pay for the hours of them being here or is that something that's expected to fall into the resource category that they supply.

Kari: That's a resource. Unfortunately, this grant can't pay for stakeholder's time. It can pay for HOTCOG time, food, supplies, renting out another location.

Carey: How much of the minutiae can you apply so that we can expend the funds that we get. So, when you talk about recruiting, is that printing out a flyer? Is that time spent on phone calls, Misty's time in emailing, putting together lists and things like that.

Kari: Updating the website is a good one. Posting these meetings on social media. Shooting a short video, each agency talking about what they do and posting that to social media. If you want to go in a different direction, there are 23 other lead agencies that are doing things at different levels. If you have an interest, I can probably pair you with or give you an example of another lead agency that's tried something similar.

Alisha: I also have another planning agency and one of the main things they do is they send out newsletters, not just to the people on the committee, but to the other companies and public service entities out in the region. They get feedback from those people to see if there's anything that they need to include in their newsletters. It's a great resource.

Carey: Is the time spent putting that newsletter together considered a resource?

Alisha: Yes.

Heather: What about software program fees to create the newsletter.

Kari: If that's what they're being used for, yes. But if it's something the COG wants the newsletter is just a side thing, then no.

Rep: What if there's an agency that's better suited to use that software, can it be purchased for them?

Kari: That would be a case of them using their resources to support the effort.

Heather: Can you outsource? Can you pay a third party to do it?

Kari: Yes. You can get consultants and then you get into procurement. If you're talking about small enough amounts. You can even start looking for DBEs.

Alisha: Out of curiosity, do y'all ever reference this QPI?

Rep: No. I've got a lot to do. Well just start bringing it to meetings and getting that set up.

Serena: On this QPI, you want there to be a specific implementation lead there?

Kari: Yes, that tends to be more effective.

Serena: If that implementation lead is taking on a project that's specific to the task at hand, can that be an eligible expense if that lead is managing that? If the lead is doing the newsletter? Or would it need to be through the COG?

Kari: It would need to be through the COG? Part of the reason these things don't count towards the grant is because there's no match required. It's 100% federal funded.

Jana: If they hired a 3rd party to hand out flyers or whatever, like a staffing agency, is that an eligible expense? They don't have that many people in their department.

Kari: Yes, that would be an eligible expense. Anything that you need additional staff for, you could get volunteers and you could pay the volunteers for the volunteer's food, you can pay for materials for the volunteers, you can reach out, whatever you need to make something happen.

Heather: What about a part-time intern to manage these things?

Kari: That would be great.

Heather: An intern could take stuff off your plate.

Rep: Absolutely. Just have to put it in the application.

Kari: There are programs at Baylor that require internships that require hours for graduation.

Jana: I know the transit department doesn't have a planner, but does the COG?

Rep: We don't have a planner at the agency.

Kari: You could hire a planner. You could contract the services of a planner and use these funds for that too. If an intern doesn't end up being enough.

We set on the \$40k amount thinking that would be about half time of a staff person's salary, a dedicated planner. That's not necessarily appropriate for every lead agency, but we try to treat everyone equally, independent of what their resources are.

The concept is that all the work that goes into the program is about half of somebody's time.

Heather: Are there any projects that you have found that you could share with us while you're here?

Kari: One regional planner was working with the different providers to get people rides home from the hospital when they've been discharged. This was them getting a dedicated vehicle for that service. That was around \$125k for that project. That was a federal program for innovative mobility projects.

Rep: Do the projects need to be region wide or can they be area specific?

Kari: They can be specific. We would look for something that has an overall regional impact. There's an opportunity to coordinate with Scott & White on when they schedule passengers for folks that are coming in from Falls County so that you can get the efficiency of getting those folks at the same time, so you've got one vehicle to bring everyone back and forth.

Serena: This would be an opportunity to look at food deserts as well. Example we went to specific disabled community housing and then we provided that shuttle on certain days so they can have access to fresh food.

Kari: That's fantastic. Another thing we're trying to get going is summer meal programs. Nutrition is a fantastic thing. There are different ways to get the dialysis providers to work together. You can also accept funding from those dialysis centers toward the service. They made a specific allowance for that in the federal law. Otherwise, you can't take it because it would be like charter. But specifically for dialysis you can take the money.

Rep: It would be charter if it wasn't in your day as it goes along. We book them every day and other people are there to ride along. But the dialysis still pays their two dollars. Unless something has changed and I'm not understanding charter.

Kari: We can look at those separately and see.

Aaron: From an election administrator standpoint, I get a lot of folks calling me during the election timeframe telling me they don't have a ride to the polling location.

Rep: If it's during the day, during our normal working hours, they can call and book a trip just like anybody else. I can't pull aside a vehicle just for election day.

Kari: I'm not if that's charter or not.

Rep: We could do it if you go through the charter process. You have to put it in the clearing house to see if somebody else wants it. If someone else that's an actual charter comes along and wants to do it, then we can't do it.

Aaron: So, you're saying a normal person can schedule it during business hours, but what about extended hours? The state just mandated we have to run for 12-hours on our second week for early voting.

Rep: It can be done, but it would depend on staffing and changing those hours. We'd still have to let regular passengers ride on that bus. Couldn't close it off to just voters.

Serena: Just be proactive on educating those that need to utilize this service. Maybe that's something we can put down on our QPI so when this comes up, we already have on our radar.

Kari: Reaching out to those living in poverty that are transit dependent could be a project.

Serena: We try to send out to the McLennan County Board information so they can pass along to the people in their community. There are some community centers that push that information out, and you work with your board to make sure they get it out.

Jana: Also, organizations that they go present at. Kiwanis clubs, rotaries, faith-based communities, Spanish chamber, African American chamber.

Serena: We've been able to get an increase in the employee base after presenting to the Hispanic Chamber.

Melinda: What needs assessments are currently being completed with regards to transportation?

Rep: We really do it every day. If a new person calls in and it's a need we haven't had before, then we can reach out to others for the same need. That could be one of those projects.

Alisha: That's on a case-by-case basis, it really needs to be more region wide needs assessment.

Melinda: In terms of ridership capacity, what does that look like? Do we need more riders or are we at capacity?

Serena: I'm not at capacity. We welcome any and all people that want to use the service. Our employees are required to know how to operate the buses.

Melinda: So, what we probably need to do is plan some meetings with the Veterans One Stop, because we have some gaps with our veterans and transportation.

Serena: We did work with them and that's why we put that shelter there in front. If there's an unmet need then we just need to know.

Melinda: Where we have the gap is the Veterans Hospital will schedule appointments in Temple and for some reason can't use the Veterans Hospital transportation system to get to Temple for the appointment.

Serena: Yes, Rep and I can work together and figure out how to do that based on the start pick-up location.

Rep: Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, and Limestone Counties are where my service runs. We bring some in from Bosque and drop at Waco. We also take them from Temple to Falls County too. As far as capacity, no I'm not at capacity in those 5 counties with the drivers I have. So, I can take on even more if we find more drivers.

Serena: Rep and I can even coordinate on specific situations and allow each other to run trips we might not usually run.

Our drivers do need a CDL.

Rep: Our program doesn't require a CDL.

Kari: If there is ongoing education that you need for your drivers to accommodate different kinds of passengers that are coming on. If you're focusing on veterans, there are specific needs for veterans to be aware of with transportation and you need that kind of training, that's what the RTAP is for. I would love to see something come out of this area that I can use as an example in other regions.

Rep: There was a calendar of dates for August and the yellow highlighted ones are the dates that are currently available for our meeting on the RPTCP application. The ideal thing is to have it done by the 23rd and turn it in. If it goes past the 23rd then it takes longer for the funding to kick in. Would it be possible to do two consecutive days? Or as many people to meet to get this application taken care of?

Serena: Is there a virtual option as well?

Rep: We could probably do a virtual option as well.

Julie: I'm not available.

Judge Elliott: Everyone should email Rep to let him know which days work best. That way we can box those days in.

Rep: If we do a virtual meeting, do I cut back the hours and do more days?

Jana: No.

Serena: I think it's more engaging if it's in person.

Jana: I say just knock it out in the minimum number of days that you can.

Rep: What about one day?

Serena: What is the deadline for the letters of support?

Rep: August 18th.

For the meeting, is splitting the dates up better or consecutive better?

Group: Consecutive.

Melinda: What is the goal here?

Rep: There are handouts with the questions on them so everyone can look through them. Main thing is to look at the question and answer what would benefit your agency. Then in the meeting we can decide on how we want to put it in there and how we want to run it. Does Julie's idea work with someone else. It might cross over. Having just the COG completing the application does not benefit the group.

Alisha: It's also a perfect opportunity to update the QPI. This is an important tool because it's basically your deliverables that are allowed to be billed for.

Rep: We'll send everyone a copy so it's easier to read.

Serena: One of our QPI's could be about promotion of services. Maybe there's a clear expectation that if we create a newsletter or something so the QPI can make sure that when we do meet, we provide that information to our stakeholders for that quarter to keep it fresh in their mind.

A newsletter is an eligible expense, it's something we know all of our consumers could use, and it's something we could easily manage. We've discussed in every meeting that the lack of knowing about what we do and how we do it is a barrier.

Heather: Educating our community on how to use it and educating our community on what's available.

Serena: Travel training and promotion.

Rep: This grant is a continuation of what we update every five years for our Regional Transportation Coordination Plan. That was done in 2022. In 2023 we had \$35k to apply for. 2024 we have this \$40k to apply for.

Kari: 2025 is another continuation year. In 2025 is when we start looking at performance. We start looking at that QPI and seeing how much work is done toward completing your projects and meeting your objectives. Not necessarily how much you achieved, but how much work you've put into it, how much outreach have you done. We're not comparing to other agencies or regions, we're looking individually at what the progress is and that will determine the amount of funding for 2025.

In 2026 it would be another five year plan update.

If you want to make changes to your QPI, you have to amend your plan. The QPI is grown from what you have listed in the plan. If you get together and approve it, then your plan is amended.

Rep: We'll send out copies of the blank and completed application to everyone.

Heather: These two dates, are we wanting the people we invited today?

Rep: We want anyone and everyone to attend. The more people that see it, the more ideas we get.

Melinda: We could use examples of support letters.

Jana: Or just some key words so we know what's needed.

Heather: If we have people that aren't able to attend, do we still want them to email us their key points?

Rep: Yes. Or any other agencies that you work with in the different counties. I'm sure there are counterparts for the voting side of things in other counties. The one big thing we don't have at the table is someone representing veterans. The invite has been put out, and we might have Brad Orban in here. We have to think regional. Some projects can be local but we're talking about all six counties.

Judge Elliott: Motion to adjourn.

Rep: Concur.