

WICHITA FALLS TRANSIT STUDY

FINDINGS REPORT

2005

Prepared for

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

AND

TRANSPORTATION POLICY COMMITTEE

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WICHITA FALLS URBAN TRANSPORTATION STUDY

WICHITA FALLS METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

The following report is a preliminary overview on the state of the Wichita Falls Transit System.

The last time the City of Wichita Falls completed an in-depth study of the Wichita Falls Transit System (WFTS) was in 1995 by LKC Consulting Services. That was a thorough and well researched study. It looked at a number of areas that included market analysis, transit service alternatives, strategic planning, and implementation, along with a list of recommendations.

Due to the large cost of developing a comprehensive study like the 1995 LKC study, and the resources needed to manage such a large undertaking, this preliminary report is intended as a cost effective measure to ensure a large undertaking with a consulting firm is warranted. Given the level of Federal subsidization for the system and the number of agencies that work with the WFTS, using cost effective measures and documented justification is prudent.

The scope of the 1995 LKC study was much broader than this preliminary study carried out by the Wichita Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization. The costs involved are also decidedly different in scale. From the outset it was decided that generating a “snap shot” of the current system “was and is” the main purpose of this report. While reading this report keep in mind that determining the condition of the WFTS and whether public comments and feedback received during the last few years warrants a new comprehensive study is of the utmost importance.

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WICHITA FALLS TRANSIT SYSTEM

Route Deviation

The Wichita Falls Transit System is a public transit service provider. The system serves the City of Wichita Falls, within the city limits, providing a Route Deviation/Demand Response system (RD/DR). The Route Deviation/Demand Response system (RD/DR) is available to the general-public. In a RD/DR system, the service has a series of routes. These are default routes; however, buses can deviate up to 2 blocks from the routes when called for next day service. The Wichita Falls Transit System will pick up and drop off all passengers anywhere along a route; passengers simply flag the driver and board the bus.

Funding

The Wichita Falls Transit System is funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the City of Wichita Falls (CWF).

Capital and planning expenses are FTA driven (80/20).

Capital & Planning 80% = FTA
 20% = CWF

Operating expenses for Transit are split 50/50.

Operating 50% = FTA
 50% = TxDOT & CWF

Because local transit is subsidized in this manner, the process to expand the system is a complex multi-tiered undertaking that involves many levels of government. Adding additional routes requires consultation with the appropriate agencies and/or governing bodies. Proper protocol must be strictly adhered to, and justifications for change must be clearly shown to governing bodies.

Fleet

The Transit Fleet consists of:

- 12 buses
- 30 feet in average length
- Wheelchair lift equipped
- Secure locations for two wheelchairs

Routes

The six routes of the Wichita Falls Transit System are color-coded and named according to the areas they serve. There are five routes and one dedicated route for Sheppard AFB.

Route 1 (Blue)	Eastside / Midwestern Parkway
Route 2 (Red)	Kemp / Seymour
Route 3 (Green)	Taft / Holliday
Route 4 (Yellow)	Maurine / Sheppard
Route 5 (Brown)	Southwest / Fairway
Route 6 (Orange)	Sheppard Express (SAFB to Sikes Senter Mall service)

Current information on the transit system indicates that routes have nearly reached their limit as far as system route timing is concerned. They have been gradually stretched (added to) over the years and, as a result, the system has become overly stressed. It would be difficult to simply add more streets and stops to the current system without severely hindering the entire system and all route scheduling.

Fares

Passengers can purchase bulk tickets from the bus driver, or the transit office at Central Services.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Required</u>
○ ADULT:	\$0.75		
○ CHILD:	\$0.35	5 – 11	
○ STUDENTS:	\$0.35	5 – 18	Student ID Required
○ PRE-SCHOOL:	Free	0 – 4	
○ SENIORS:	\$0.35	65+	Transit ID Required
○ DISABLED:	\$0.35		Transit ID Required
○ TRANSFERS:	\$0.25		
○ MEDICARE CARD	\$0.35		
○ Sheppard Express:	\$1.00		With identification indicating a handicap, disabled persons can ride the Sheppard Express for 50 cents.

Wichita Falls Transit fares have not changed since 1982. Therefore, any significant changes to the system would inevitably lead to an increase in rider fares to help offset additional costs

and growth. Given the fact that it has been over 2 decades since the last increase in fares this should not be unexpected. Local transit fares are below national and state averages. A comparable Texas' city like Abilene charges \$1.00 for standard fares.

A fixed route system with traditional Paratransit might serve the community better, but at a substantial increase in fare costs. The average cost for an adult fare, in a city of comparable size, is \$1.00 for fixed route transportation and \$2.00 to \$3.00 for round-trip Paratransit transportation, depending on whether a trip is within or outside of the primary service area.

The ADA Para transit service is for persons whose physical or mental disability prevents them from using the accessible fixed-route bus service. Determination of eligibility requires evaluations of the individuals' functional ability relative to all segments of a trip. Trips are usually scheduled at least a day in advance, but no more than two weeks in advance.

STUDY OVERVIEW

GOAL

Our goal is to present to the Wichita Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization Technical Advisory Committee and Transportation Policy Board a brief overview of the current state of the WFTS. Recommendations in this study are based on the planning analysis and findings of WF MPO staff and are not binding or intended as fact.

ON-GOING ISSUES

A number of pertinent issues were raised during the last 3-4 years concerning the Wichita Falls Transit System (WFTS). Either through first person contact and/or telephone calls received. Here is a list outlining those issues:

- Route expansion and the addition of new routes
- Expanded operating hours
- Access to developing areas of Wichita Falls
- Improved service for senior citizens and the handicapped
- Reducing interval times between bus trips
- Improving overall mass transit (i.e. bike racks on buses)

TRANSIT STUDY

The Wichita Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization (WF MPO) developed a means to rate the current state of WFTS and gauge the quality of service being provided. Time and cost were significant factors. We developed a Preliminary Transit Study based on information from a new Transit Questionnaire (in English and Spanish). The first opportunity to begin the process was a set of Environmental Justice Meetings during the summer of 2005.

MEETINGS

The 2005 Transit Questionnaire was created by the Wichita Falls MPO and handed-out at a number of public meetings. Here is a list of meetings that included discussion of WFTS and where questionnaires were handed out:

- Environmental Justice Meetings (June 21, 23, 28) – 3 meetings
- Public Transit Meetings at Sikes Senter Mall (November 3) – 2 separate afternoon meetings
- Meeting with the Director of the Red Door Senior Citizens Center (November 4)

Wichita Falls Transit assisted the MPO with distributing 200 of these questionnaires on City buses during the summer and fall. Around 100 questionnaires were distributed at the June, 2005 public meetings. The MPO also delivered 500 copies to the Executive Director of the Red Door Senior Citizens Center at their request. An electronic copy of the questionnaire was made available on the City's main web page - www.cwftx.net.

FACTORS

Many factors affect a mass transit system. Economic growth and development, natural disasters, and population fluctuations are obvious. Two main factors affecting Wichita Falls are growth (residential, commercial, and industrial) and improvements to the transportation infrastructure. These two areas have seen dramatic improvement over the last 10 years.

Significant development in Wichita Falls since 1995 (10 years ago):

- Residential, commercial, and industrial:
 - New subdivisions in the south and southwest areas of Wichita Falls
 - Castaway Cove Water Park
 - MPEC and the KY Coliseum
 - Commercial development along the Kell Freeway corridor
 - New Industrial Park
 - On-going rehabilitation of downtown (i.e. Holt Hotel and the new Historic District)
 - Development of Tax Increment Finance Districts (downtown and Lawrence Rd. area)

- Transportation infrastructure:
 - US 82/281/277/287 overhead freeways completed in 2001 (at Holliday and Broad)
 - Phase 3 of US 82/Kell Fwy. extension completed in 2002/2003
 - Widening of Kemp Blvd. (formerly Lake Rd.) from FM 369 to Archer City Hwy.
 - Falls Flyover to be completed in 2007
 - Loop 11 extension (completion date still TBD)

This is an overview of changes that have greatly affected the current system and local area.

There are also negative impacts that must be considered. For example the restructuring of medical training at SAFB in 2008 is estimated to affect around 3000-5000 residents in the local area. Trying to weigh these positive and negative factors is necessary in accurately analyzing the whole system.

RESULTS

Based on the data collected from the Transit Questionnaires here is a bulleted list of key points. (See Appendix A for Questionnaire data)

RESPONDENTS

Respondents are those people who filled out a completed Questionnaire

- 76% are physically disabled
- 50/50 split of male and female
- 7% are students
- 45% had access to vehicles
- 12% were informed about Transit via the media
- 2% were informed about Transit via advertising
- 49% had to inquire to find out information about WFTS
- 58% felt that WFTS should be expanded

RIDERS

Riders are considered those respondents that indicated they use the system

- 80% use Transit at least once/week
- 50% have to walk at least 2 blocks to get to a bus stop
- 88% have average trips longer than 20 minutes
- 1% use the Sheppard Express
- 4% use transit to travel to school (Middle/High School/MSU)

A number of general conclusions followed.

- WFTS needs to develop better advertising - targeting the students demographic is an obvious area needing improvement
- A better system for transferring from one route to another should be developed
- More should be done to improve the overall image of WFTS
- Analyze all route changes and modifications to account for new development (past, present, and future)
- Study the route deviation system and its level of effectiveness

Trying to project where the WFTS needs improvement, from this Preliminary Study, is problematic. This study is intended to provide readers with a status report, but it is clear there are many areas that need further research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MPO staff, and the Technical Advisory Committee, recommends the City of Wichita Falls and the Wichita Falls MPO work together to develop a Request for Proposal and initiate a new comprehensive study of the WFTS for 2006.

This report shows the current system has clearly defined deficiencies that need to be addressed. Given the amount of manpower and the resources needed to complete a comprehensive study, the Wichita Falls MPO and City of Wichita Falls lack the necessary experience, training, and staff to carry out this task in-house. Hiring an outside consultant would best serve the purposes of the study and also provide better long-term solutions for the system, which is the ultimate goal of better serving the needs of local citizens who depend on Transit.

Information and data collected during the LKC 1995 study would be of great benefit to the new study by providing a vital set of comparison data for analysis. The LKC study has been very valuable in producing this report you are now reading. And, although the results from that study are somewhat dated, we recommend using a similar questionnaire format to help analyze change, reveal deficiencies, and identify areas in need of improvement.

A number of recommendations were made in the LKC 1995 study. Some were implemented, but most were not. This was due, in large part, to the costs involved and also to the fundamental changes the entire transit system would have had to make. If a new study is approved by TPC, the consultant will be required to review the LKC report, establish a baseline of what has been accomplished since 1995, and then use those findings as the point of origin for their study. Other areas we will ask the consultant to analyze for redesign, implementation or consideration are:

- Additional transfer points to relieve pressure from the Sikes Senter transfer station
- Redesigning of all existing routes
- Recommendation of new routes
- Alternative transit system types, such as: Complementary Paratransit, Demand-Response (also called point-to-point), Fixed Route, Jitney, etc.
- Section 15 funding and personnel requirements if we need to run more than 10 buses at a time
- Contract services/privatization of transit
- Timeline for the implementation of any recommendations
- Cost reductions where possible

Quality, on-time service is our goal, but we must exercise care not to alienate the existing ridership. Many of our riders live near the existing transit routes for no other reason than to have access to our transit system. We must keep them in mind throughout this whole process while making every effort to serve the entire community.