

**Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization**  
**Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan 2020**

**Executive Summary**

**DRAFT**

The Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan (HSTCP) focuses on the transportation needs of seniors, people with disabilities, and people with low-incomes. Projects funded with Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 grants must be derived from a locally developed HSTCP that: (1) identifies transportation needs; (2) assesses current transit providers; (3) identifies gaps in services; (4) and outlines strategies for meeting identified gaps. The Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) is the designated recipient of Section 5310 funds for the Knoxville urban area. As the designated recipient, the TPO is charged with conducting a call-for-projects and must ensure that projects selected are in-keeping with the strategies listed in the HSTCP.

The TPO serves a planning area that consists of the Knoxville urbanized area, plus an area that is expected to be urbanized over the next twenty years. For the TPO this includes all of Knox County and portions of Anderson, Blount, Loudon, Sevier, and Roane counties. These six counties are also part of the East Tennessee Human Resource Agency (ETHRA) 16-county service area.

Within the TPO planning area, there are a range of public transportation options. Those include traditional transit services, volunteer driver programs, human service transportation, and non-profit and private transportation options. These services offer fixed-route bus and trolley services, demand response transit vans and mini-buses, programs where volunteer drive passengers in cars, non-profits that transport their own clients in vans, and private providers like taxis, Uber, and Lyft.

In the TPO-6 county area there are 151,513 persons age 65 and older and this age group is expected to grow 20% by the year 2030. The rapid increase in senior population has communities scrambling to prepare for their social and health care needs, and availability of accessible transportation is crucial. When senior service providers were asked what are the most common unmet needs in the State of Tennessee, transportation was the top issue identified. Transportation hurdles for seniors include insufficient transit options, a lack of safe pedestrian walkways, and living in low-density suburban and rural areas where accessing resources is difficult without a car. It is important to note that people who are disabled face many of these same issues. In the TPO-6 county area there are 124,318 persons who are disabled.

The Knoxville region has a rich history of undertaking communitywide planning efforts, and this Plan draws on reports ranging from 2013 to present and includes regional planning studies, transit assessments, and plans specific to the populations addressed in the HSTCP. The need for more transit services, adequate funding for it, and prioritization of projects that include multi-modal access were common themes in the reports reviewed. Whether providing access to jobs, encouraging greater density, promoting healthy lifestyles, improving the environment, reducing transportation congestion, or planning for an aging population, transit has an important role in the region's future.

The HSTCP was also informed by public input. The Plan was discussed at a variety of meetings and an online survey and personal interviews were conducted. The most common needs identified included expanding the transit system, improving volunteer driver programs, improving coordination among transit providers, providing quicker return trips on demand response systems, accommodating additional shifts in job center transportation, expanding the sidewalk network, and creating education programs. Almost all of the input received, especially from those who are transit dependent, supports some form of increase to transit services. Even where current services exist, additional capacity is needed so people can make trips other than just those that are medical in nature, to make same day service available, and to enable quicker return pick-up times for demand response services.

Providing public transportation is very expensive and it is important to educate local, state, and federal representatives about these services and the need to provide additional funding for them. Many assume that public transportation is paid for by federal funds, but federal grants only represent approximately 19% of the what is spent on transit operations in the urban area. The largest source of funding comes from local resources (47%), and most of this is provided by the City of Knoxville's funding for KAT. To expand transit services in the region, additional funding will have to come from local governments.

It is equally important that infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks and bike lanes, which allow greater access to transit, continue throughout the region. The TPO's long-range transportation plan calls for both increased funding for transit and enhancing connections through access to transit and pedestrian and bicycle facilities. A majority of respondents to a TPO online survey want to be sure roadways are designed to account for all potential users, including pedestrians, persons in wheelchairs, bike riders, and transit riders. The same survey found that 35.6% of respondents said the lack of pedestrian facilities prevented them from using public transportation.

Informed by prior planning efforts and public input, the HSTCP determines strategies to address identified needs and/or gaps in services as outlined below. However, these strategies do not represent an agreed upon list of projects or services to be funded by local government. It is hoped that additional ideas surface as the coordination and collaboration processes continue.

### **Provide additional, affordable, and accessible service.**

- Expand CAC, KAT, and ETHRA services.
- Utilize a mix of transit services and vehicle types that can provide more efficient transportation services.
- Provide enough demand response transit services so a variety of trip types, other than medical, can occur.
- Make sure services are affordable to the passenger.
- Provide shorter wait times for return trips on demand response transportation.
- Provide same day service reservations for demand response trips.
- Examine ways to coordinate transfers between the demand response services and the KAT fixed route system.
- Provide transportation to many of the industrial parks where more skilled and higher paying jobs are located.
- Provide later and very early morning service so workers can take a variety of shifts.
- Provide additional transportation services targeting employment opportunities to areas where higher concentrations of low-income or subsidized housing is located.
- Provide a twenty-four-hour emergency transportation service to accommodate persons who have an unexpected disruption in their usual mode of travel.
- Provide capital funding to human services transportation providers and non-profits to help purchase vehicles (mini-buses and vans) to support transporting their clients.
- Provide operating funding to human service transportation agencies or non-profits to create and support volunteer assisted driver programs.
- Provide operating funding to human service transportation agencies or non-profits that develop specialized services targeting the needs of seniors, people who are disabled, and people of low-incomes.
- Explore ways to develop public/private sector partnerships that could fill the gaps in accessible transportation services, complement existing services, and assist in the development of new forms/designs of mobility options.
- Explore ways to expand the use of private transportation options. This could include, but is not limited to, subsidy vouchers or contracts to help provide first mile-last miles transportation to connect with public transit.
- Explore ways to introduce wheelchair accessible taxis, Ubers, Lyfts, or other private transportation options.

### **Educate citizens about the availability of transit services.**

- Create a centralized source of information that can be accessed by one phone number.
- Create Transportation Services in Knoxville Urban Area website.
- Help transit agencies implement new technology including smartphone apps to help make accessing information or rides easier.

- Help prepare more standard information, including a variety of print information, in accessible formats since not all seniors, people with disabilities, and people of low-income have access to smartphones or the internet.
- Expand on KAT's Ride to Wellness program or use it as a model to create educational programs for riders, medical staff, and counselors about the availability of transit services.
- Establish a regional program that would help educate new riders about area transit options, policies, and the intricacies of riding them.
- Have case managers who would work one-on-one with passengers to help them arrange or understand how to use transit services.
- Have escorts or travel trainers who, for a limited time, will personally accompany a passenger to help them better understand how to use transit services.

**Create greater access to transit by providing infrastructure and amenities such as sidewalks, shelters, signs, and bike facilities.**

- Inform local, state, and federal representatives about the need to provide additional infrastructure such as, sidewalks, bike lanes, shelters, and signs to allow more access to transit.
- Advocate stronger development requirements to include sidewalks and, if appropriate, transit amenities and bike lanes along new roads and developments to promote pedestrian and bike travel and easier connections to transit.

**Coordinate and increase efficiency.**

- Add or share technology to help create a more conducive coordination environment.
- Increase efficiency of transportation agencies staff through training and technology to better handle passenger needs.
- Examine ways to improve coordination among the region's transit services.
- Encourage additional training to transit providers to assist with a better understanding and to be more sensitive of passengers – especially seniors and people with disabilities. This could include creating a regional training program.

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To review the entire draft HSTCP visit [www.knoxtpo.org](http://www.knoxtpo.org). The draft HSTCP is available for public comment through Friday, November 6, 2020. The HSTCP will be on the November 25, 2020 TPO Executive Board agenda as an action item for approval. To make comments on the draft HSTCP or to request any special accommodations please contact Doug Burton at Knoxville Regional TPO – 400 Main Street, Suite 403 Knoxville, TN 37902 – 865-215-3824 – [doug.burton@knoxtpo.org](mailto:doug.burton@knoxtpo.org).