



PlanWorks Case Study

Addressing Challenges through the Texas Innovation Alliance Bryan-College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization



The Texas Transportation Alliance used highly collaborative stakeholder involvement to establish consensus on statewide initiatives to address transportation mobility. The Bryan-College Station MPO (BCSMPO) then linked their regional needs and priorities to the statewide effort using a stakeholder driven regional consensus building process. While BCSMPO did not use PlanWorks to support the development of their regional initiative, the PlanWorks Stakeholder Collaboration Application will be very useful in helping other agencies interested in this approach.

Executive Summary

As Texas experiences rapid population growth, there is an interest in positioning itself to take advantage of new technologies and broad collaboration. Individual transportation agencies are challenged to meet the future mobility needs of these growing communities. The Texas Transportation Alliance has sponsored a series of Summits since 2016 to advance mobility based on ongoing collaboration across regions. By establishing cross-cutting initiatives and individual focus areas, the Alliance provides a platform for innovation to leverage expertise, resources, and solutions for a transportation system that works for all users.

The Bryan-College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (BCSMPO) is among the Texas Innovation Alliance recognized “forward-thinking cities” supporting the Alliance. College Station is home to Texas A&M University main campus with more than 62,500 students. Brazos County is experiencing significant population growth in addition to the growing University population. BCSMPO is using the Alliance as a tool to advance regional initiatives as well as to gain information and insights from other areas of the State. The MPO has identified three specific challenges that interface with the Alliance initiatives and focus areas. Ongoing planning activities in the region tailor the broader Alliance goals to the specific needs of the region.

Overview

Bryan-College Station MPO has identified three Challenges that support the statewide Texas Innovation Alliance as well as address the Region’s transportation needs.

- Challenge #1. Regional Mobility Summit
- Challenge #2. Regional Coordination of HHS Transportation Services
- Challenge #3. Make Every Day a Gameday

Each of these challenges require stakeholder and decision maker collaboration in ongoing planning activities.



Background on the Texas Innovation Alliance

The state of Texas is experiencing rapid population growth along with technological advancement and aging infrastructure that will challenge the ability of transportation agencies to meet the future mobility needs of these growing communities. In 2016 the Texas Mobility Summit 1.0 launched the Texas Innovation Alliance (Alliance) - an action network of public agencies and research institutions to advance mobility based on ongoing collaboration across regions. The Alliance has a commitment to address community mobility challenges by supporting innovation to leverage expertise, resources, and solutions for a “safe, reliable, and seamless transportation experience for all.”

The initial focus for the Texas Innovation Alliance was based on five initiatives. In the 2017 Texas Mobility Summit 2.0, these initiatives were supported with additional detail by providing the “Texas Twelve” which are specific focus areas for each platform that were identified as the state’s most urgent transportation challenges. These focus areas draw attention to important population groups, technologies, system operations, infrastructure needs, and freight movement.

The Alliance is structured in regional teams to advance deployment of pilot projects that are regionally important as well as advance the overall Alliance mission and goals. Urban areas represented include Houston-Galveston, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, Austin, Bryan-College Station, and Corpus Christi. Several of the teams have metropolitan planning organization (MPO) representation. Other teams

Cross Cutting Initiatives

The 2017-2018 year initiatives are ongoing programs to support individual problem statements.

- Texas Proving Grounds
- Data Challenge
- Communications & Community Engagement
- Funding, Policy, & Procurement
- Cooperative Research Agenda

are formed around local city governments, research institutions, and private sector innovators. Each team has a unique set of challenges to address.

In February 2018, transportation leaders launched the Mobility Innovation Challenge to develop solutions in five Mobility Domains. The combination of initiatives, domains, and focus areas provides a wide array of options for individual agencies to participate and support the Alliance partnership as well as their individual communities. The two-person Alliance staff is now funded through Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT); providing a data clearinghouse as well as facilitating communication across partnership agencies on common interests.

The Bryan-College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (BCSMPO) is among the “forward-thinking cities” supporting the Alliance. BCSMPO is using the ongoing transportation planning process to meet the mobility needs of the region’s growing population.

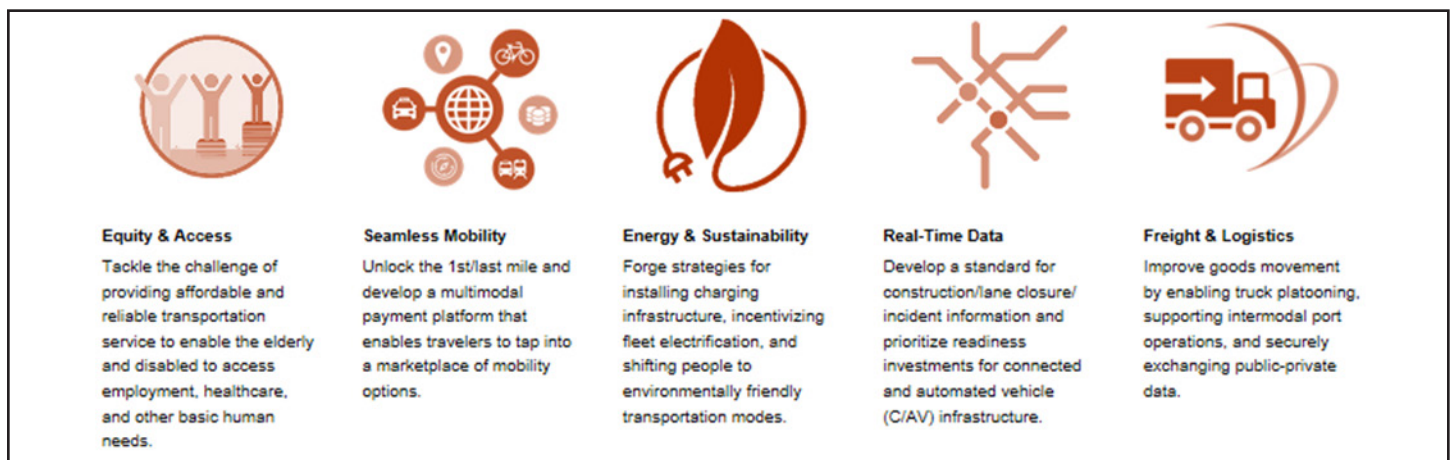


Figure 1: 20 Forward-Thinking Cities, 5 Mobility Domains

Agency's Challenge

The Bryan-College Station MPO (BCSMPO) is located in Brazos County in the heart of the Houston-Dallas-Austin triangle in central Texas. The County had an estimated population of 203,164 in 2013, as reported in the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). College Station is home to Texas A&M University's main campus with more than 62,500 students. The University continues to expand, impacting the existing and future transportation system¹.

In addition to the 2040 MTP, BCSMPO has also produced a 2050 Thoroughfare Concept. The concept maps anticipated highway needs in response to growth and change within the region. The most significant factors supporting the concept are population growth, expected to double by 2050, and a new Interstate 14, to be routed through Bryan/College Station. Freight traffic is also expected to increase. By adopting the Thoroughfare Concept map, land developers are alerted to system expansion and therefore may be asked to support right of way needs for roadway expansion.² The economy in the county is similarly expected to grow in the coming years. The area has been nationally noted for jobs, recession recovery, and military retirement, among other benefits.

Long-Range Transportation Planning

BCSMPO is using the Alliance as a tool to advance regional initiatives as well as to gain information and insights from other areas of the State. The MPO has identified three Challenges that interface with the Alliance initiatives and the Texas Twelve. Ongoing planning activities in the region tailor the broader Alliance goals to the specific needs of the region.

Challenge #1, Regional Mobility Summit. The Summit will be a large-scale public outreach effort, (anticipating up to 20,000 responses) with a view towards answering, from the citizens' perspective, the question: "How much congestion are you willing to tolerate?" Using a questionnaire approach to solicit input, the MPO will collect data on what is acceptable congestion and how much additional funding the region is willing to add to the federal and state dollars

1 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. <https://bcsmpo.org/DocumentCenter/View/76>.

2 Thoroughfare Plan Concept FAQs. <https://bcsmpo.org/Faq.aspx?QID=80>.

typically available in order to make improvements. The Regional Mobility Summit is a visioning exercise to strengthen development of the next Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). Data collected will inform the selection of goals and objectives and the need for additional funding to meet regional priorities.

This type of community input also provides an opportunity to educate the public and decision makers about the tradeoffs in funding decisions and the limitations of what Federal and State funding can accomplish in the region. The high-level discussion can quickly become more concrete when selecting individual projects by identifying the intended purpose of each. In this way the Challenge ties the MTP to the programming process through project selection and prioritization for advancing individual projects into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The region will be well-positioned to advance adopted goals into target setting required in performance-based planning.

Challenge #2, Regional Coordination of HHS Transportation Services.

The Alliance Equity & Access focus on paratransit seeks partners to provide paratransit as part of a "wellness network". In the BCSMPO region the goal is to provide support for agencies which offer essential services to the elderly and disabled while coordinating the transportation of their clients in a way that is sustainable, innovative, and generates efficiencies through improved collaboration. The MPO Regional Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan documents paratransit system needs and informs related transportation system deficiencies. In the Bryan-College Station region, this plan was developed by the Brazos Valley Council of Governments with the participation of the MPO. The Challenge represents one strategy for meeting the transportation needs of this specific population.

Brazos County has several human service agencies and FTA Section 5310 providers of paratransit that offer similar services. One goal of the Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan is to reduce or eliminate duplication of services across these providers. Working with the Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living, BCSMPO has plans to implement a software system called SimpliTRANSPORTTM. This online application enables transportation providers to plan, manage, deliver, and monitor demand-response transit services.

Decision Guide Connections

The Challenges interface with MPO planning activities as shown below.

- **LRP-2 Vision and Goals.** Survey input from the Regional Mobility Summit will inform the goals and objectives for the next MTP update.
- **LRP-4 Transportation Deficiencies.** The Coordinated Human Services Plan documents the needs of those that rely on paratransit. Challenge #2 will help address the needs of a specific population.
- **LRP-5 Financial Assumptions.** Comparing Regional Mobility Summit data to available revenue sources will support fiscal constraint for the MTP.
- **LRP-6 Approve Strategies.** The Challenges represent several possible strategies for the region including coordinated paratransit services (#2) and technology support for congestion (#3).
- **PRO-3 and PRO-4.** As a result of the Regional Mobility Summit decision makers and the public have a better understanding of project funding priorities.

Although the software system is a potential solution, the support of individual providers will ultimately be necessary to achieve the goal of getting people where they need to be in the most efficient way possible.

The MPO hosted a workshop with stakeholders in January 2018 to discuss the needs and challenges as well as introduce this tool as a potential support. The workshop outcomes included gaps in both the system and the service provided, as well as funding issues and volunteer support. As part of the identified next steps, the MPO will work with Brazos Transit District and Texas A&M Transportation Services to identify gaps in their systems. Staff will develop a comprehensive database of available services, identify all potential partners, work towards a universal fare system, and get everyone comfortable with using the software.

In the future, BSCMPO plans to educate potential clients and the general public on the services that are

offered and how to access available services. There will be a focused effort on reaching out to the local medical service community to ensure they are aware of the services and that transportation should not be a barrier to health care. The MPO will subsequently reconvene the providers along with the medical service community to identify potential solutions to the identified problems and deficiencies. Over the long-term, the MPO plans to begin coordination of trips that is client-focused, including greater clarity on client costs.

Challenge #3, Make Every Day a Gameday. For approximately eight Saturdays every fall, the Bryan-College Station area is inundated with gameday traffic associated with Texas A&M University home football games. The University, working in partnership with the City of College Station has developed a sophisticated network of ITS, traffic management, and control devices. These systems support a mobile application, Destination Aggieland, operated year-round by Texas A&M Transportation Services. The app allows users to identify congested traffic locations and available parking lots. The success of Destination Aggieland has been a motivation for this Challenge. The MPO believes it is possible to apply the strategies used for special events to normal and non-recurring congestion in the region in a more ongoing way.

Although there is no traffic management center supporting the region, “Make Every Day a Gameday” is an effort to adapt the available traffic control technology through cameras at signal locations and police support coordination. As with the other regional challenges, this will require coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders in order to apply the Gameday lessons learned to daily commutes from Texas A&M University, the cities of Bryan and College Station, and Brazos County. This Challenge will help determine to what extent the MPO uses technology innovations to inform the MTP process, with particular emphasis on the project selection process. The Challenge represents a potential strategy for addressing congestion using technology solutions in conjunction with capacity-adding projects.

Stakeholder Collaboration

The Texas Innovation Alliance as represented in the BCSMPO region illustrates two layers of stakeholder

collaboration. At the statewide level, the Alliance brings together a variety of partners interested in addressing challenges to improve mobility, equity, and quality of life in individual regions. Through participation in the yearly Summits and ongoing information sharing, lessons learned and shared experiences across regions will likely result in a better outcome for the entire State.

In the BCSMPO region specifically transportation plans, programs, and strategies will see improved public and decision maker awareness and understanding of the real-world choices that must be made to support transportation investment. The MPO staff anticipate stronger public involvement for development of the next MTP update.

Key Outcomes

These three challenges represent ways that BCSMPO can engage the community, stakeholders, and partners in identifying potential solutions to the transportation needs and problems in the region. These individual approaches show that strategies can be highly diverse, but work together to improve traditional problems of

access, mobility, and congestion for all system users. The Texas Innovation Alliance provides a flexible and adaptive venue to make improvements locally that are easily transferable to other regions across the State.

Initiatives, Focus Areas, and Challenges

Bryan-College Station MPO aligns each Challenge with the initiatives and focus areas established by the Alliance as shown below. Collaboration is both local and statewide.

- Regional Mobility Summit
 - Communications & Community Engagement Initiative
 - Funding, Policy, & Procurement Initiative
- Regional Coordination of HHS Transportation Services
 - Equity and Access (Paratransit) Focus Area
- Make Every Day a Gameday
 - New Mobility Focus Area
 - Operations and Infrastructure Focus Area

For more information

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Resources

Texas Innovation Alliance

<http://txinnovationalliance.org>

2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan

<https://bcsmppo.org/DocumentCenter/View/76>

Thoroughfare Plan Concept FAQs

<https://bcsmppo.org/Faq.aspx?QID=80>