

MY RIDE NORTH TEXAS

My Ride North Texas 2.0 Closeout Report

SEPTEMBER 2022

North Central Texas Council of Governments
Transit Management & Planning



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Executive Summary

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) My Ride North Texas 2.0 project was implemented as a regional mobility management program to improve the coordination of transportation providers and increase access to transportation information. Leveraging partnerships in the North Central Texas 16-county region, the project aimed to support new and current mobility management efforts to identify and address specific populations that lack transportation, especially for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

The project supported collaborative mobility management efforts targeted at assisting individuals who lack transportation access to essential and well-being services. My Ride North Texas 2.0 can be broken down into two major components:

1. **Travel navigation and referrals** through a toll-free 1-800 regional number to be used across all 16 counties. Individuals will be able to access transportation counseling services and referrals to available transit providers.
2. **Partnerships and Collective Impact** as partners share best practices across new and existing mobility management programs in the region.

Overall, the project was able to meet its goals to connect individuals to crucial services and create a space for transportation providers to coordinate regionally, especially as transportation services and policies were changing at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving forward, coordination among agencies will continue and enhancements to the My Ride North Texas project are planned as the next phase seeks to integrate travel navigation information with 511DFW, the region's online traveler information system.

Introduction/ Background

My Ride North Texas 2.0 covered the 16-county region in North Central Texas, including: Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Hood, Hunt, Johnson, Kaufman, Navarro, Palo Pinto, Parker, Rockwall, Somervell, Tarrant, and Wise Counties. According to the American Community Survey's 2019 5-Year Estimates, within these counties there are just over 7.5 million people. Further breaking down the demographics of the region:

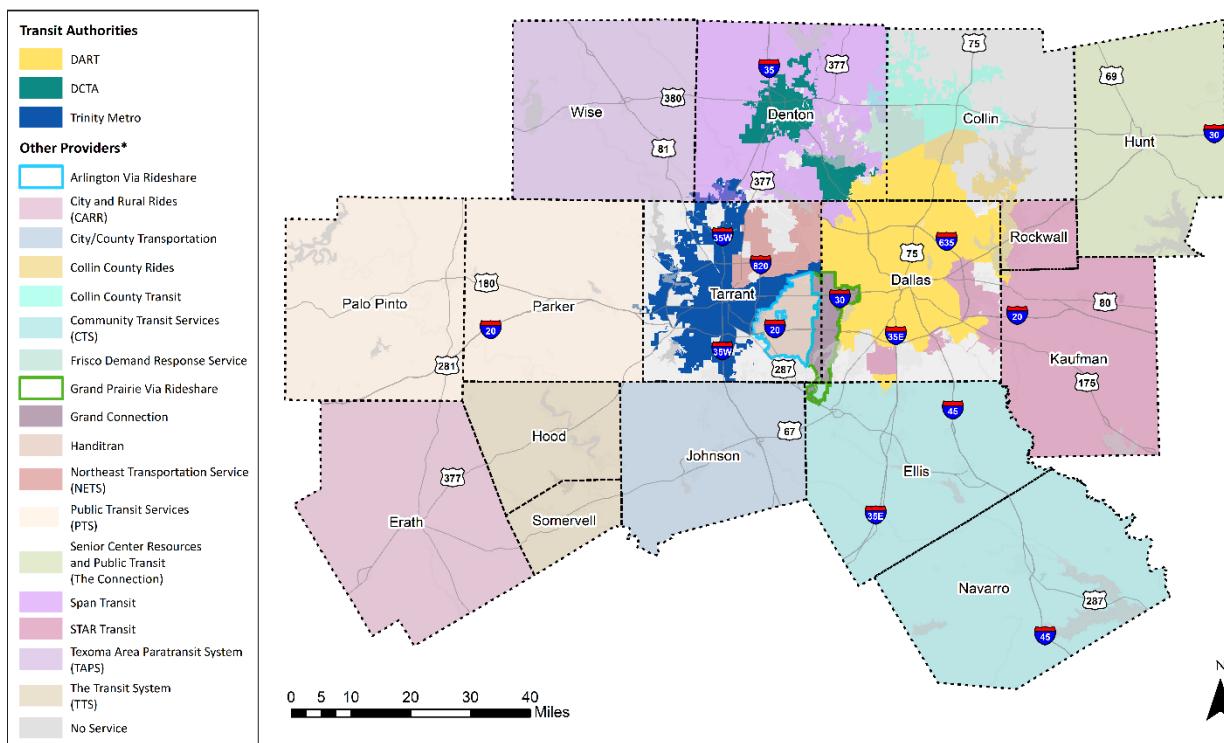
- 836,976 are over the age of 65;
- 715,294 are identified to have a disability; and
- 122,587 households do not own a car

These segments of the population had been identified as the focus of mobility management efforts by the North Central Texas Council of Governments' (NCTCOG) public transportation coordination plan, Access North Texas, and regional partners since public transportation is one of the few travel resources available to seniors and individuals with disabilities that do not have access to a personal vehicle. Access North Texas includes strategies to improve the coordination and availability of public transportation for older adults, people with disabilities, and transit dependent populations in the 16-

county NCTCOG region. While this plan includes information about the transportation gaps within each county, it does not have detailed data about target populations' access to transportation for chronic care appointments. My Ride North Texas 2.0 gave partners the ability to seek targeted solutions for wellness rides and unexpectedly, see if and how those needs changed during a global health crisis.

Navigating through such a large region, many barriers prohibit individuals from accessing public transportation options that connect them to medical appointments, work opportunities, education, and grocery stores. Added complexity exists when 20 transit providers work together to provide regional connections (urban to urban, cross-urban, and rural to urban) for their riders so they may reach their destination. The process a rider must follow to schedule a trip with a transfer from one provider to another can make getting to an appointment an all-day affair and often prevents a rider from taking that trip, which can often lead to failure in seeking routine medical care causing more urgent and expensive care later.

Public Transportation Provider Service Areas



*The types of service(s) rendered by Other Providers range from demand-response, shared-ride, to fixed-route. Some of these services are available only to individuals prequalified based on income, age, or disability.

Updated: May 2022

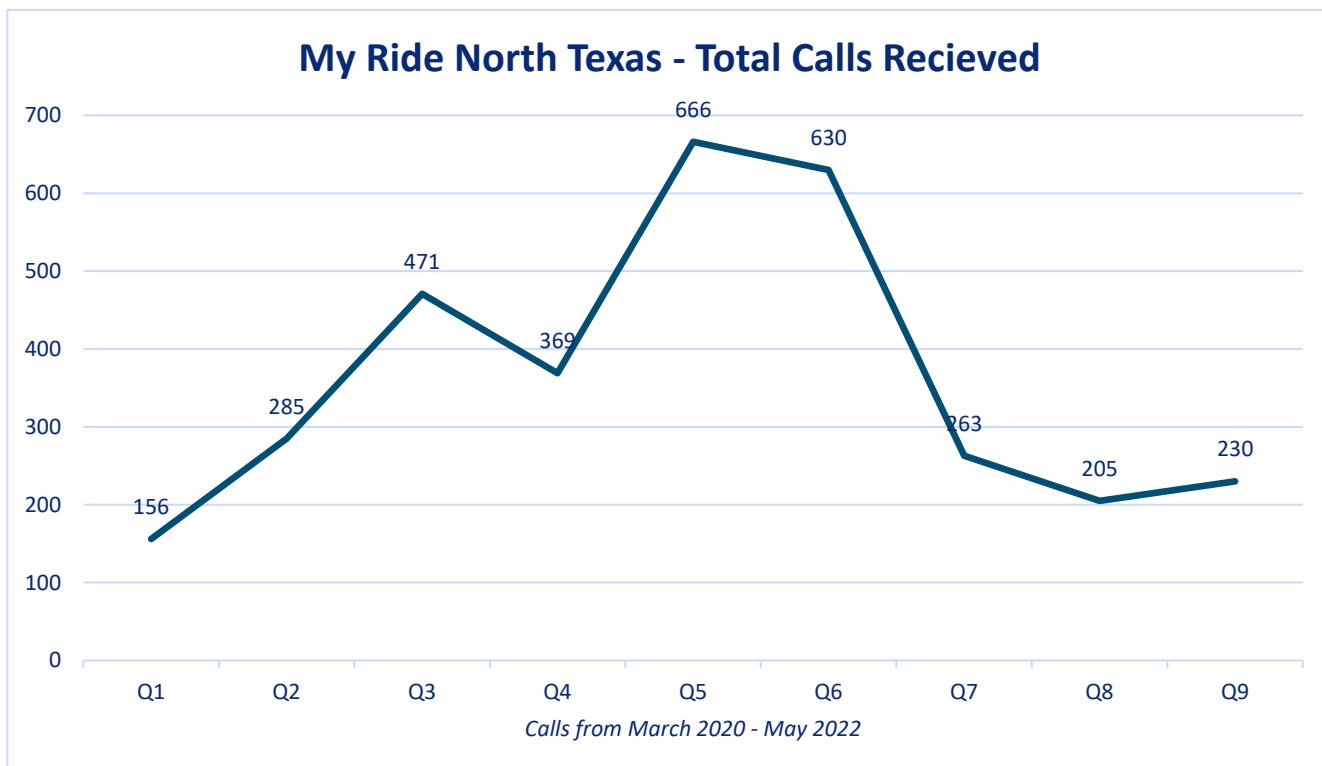
Project Description

Navigating through North Central Texas there are many barriers that may prohibit individuals from accessing available public transportation options that connect them to medical appointments, work opportunities, education, and grocery stores. Initiatives in Dallas and Tarrant counties began to provide residents travel navigation services, however, as the region has grown, and individuals changed the way they travel there has been an increasing demand to provide centralized resources and expand the reach of these services.

The goals for the project included:

- Increasing access to transit navigation services and referrals by 25%
- Improve coordination of transit services and increase regional engagement by 75%

Efforts by NCTCOG and partners focused on educating and providing referrals to mitigate transportation challenges and increase the number of people calling to request available transportation options. The benefits for individuals can be seen in Community Council of Greater Dallas (CCGD) and My Health My Resources (MHMR) Tarrant County's direct efforts in this project. Since March 2020, agencies counseled nearly 3,300 individuals across the 16-county region over the course of two years.



Travel navigators at CCGD and MHMR worked with local social services and clients to provide personalized transportation assistance and develop transportation plans for individuals to reach their

desired destination. By partnering with CCGD and MHMR, NCTCOG expanded previous efforts to cover the entire region.

Concurrently, NCTCOG coordinated with local providers to share resources and develop transit projects with partners to increase mobility across the region. As the project was implemented at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic agencies were able to share travel trends and resources to better serve transit-dependent populations.

Key Partnerships

As key partners in the region, MHMR and CCGD have been dedicated to connecting older adults and people with disabilities to transportation options. In Dallas and Tarrant Counties, the agencies have been working together to establish a coalition of over 150 local partner organizations to work to improve transportation for seniors and people with disabilities. These transportation advocates include local transit providers, nonprofits, medical providers, and human and social service agencies and assist with marketing, outreach, and advocacy for new public transportation services and alternatives. The aim of My Ride North Texas 2.0 was to better connect these existing resource groups to one another as well as local medical centers and traditional transit providers and build upon their success by expanding to all counties in North Central Texas.

NCTCOG has maintained and continues to develop strong, collaborative working relationships with transportation authorities, small and rural transit providers, and non-profit organizations in the community. Over the course of the project, partners met quarterly in Regional Mobility Managers Meetings to discuss and share resources on topics such as driver recruitment & retention, travel training programs, equitable fares initiatives, and equity & environmental justice in transit planning. Initial partners included Denton County Transportation Authority, Dallas Area Rapid Transit, Trinity Metro, Grand Prairie - Grand Connection, Arlington Handitran, SPAN, Inc., Community Transit Services, Senior Center Resources and Public Transit, Catholic Charities of Fort Worth, Tarrant County, City/County Transportation, Public Transit Service, and STAR Transit. Through the My Ride North Texas 2.0 project, additional partnerships were formed with Central Texas Rural Rides (CARR), Easter Seals North Texas, Metrocrest Services, McKinney Avenue Transportation Authority (MATA), MV Transportation, Texoma Area Paratransit System (TAPS).

Implementation

Upon notification of funding, NCTCOG began efforts to coordinate with the regional Federal Transit Administration (FTA) office to receive grant approval and then execute agreements with MHMR and CCGD. Both agencies had informally begun to provide travel navigation services to their clients and local community members but awaited grant funds to incorporate regional elements. While agreements were prepared, NCTCOG staff met with both partner agencies to discuss how best to incorporate their agencies into one regional program and decide activities where NCTCOG as the project manager would take the lead. These activities included:

- Grant management and reporting
- Federal oversight and compliance
- Monthly meetings with subrecipients
- Establishing regional 1-800 phone number
- Coordination of regional mobility meetings
- Creation and printing of regional marketing materials, such as logo and rack cards
- Design of regional Get-A-Ride Guide to include transportation options from all 16 counties

Partner agencies were responsible for travel navigation, promoting the services within local and regional communities, and building relationships with healthcare partners. Travel navigators were intended to interact directly with the target populations to promote the services and the call center provided an additional resource for individuals to connect with available transportation options to get to medical appointments, work opportunities, education, grocery stores, etc. Both CCGD and MHMR submitted monthly reports to NCTCOG that included various metrics including, the number of trips counseled, number of individuals connected to a transit provider, the type of trip, the number of individuals who used the suggested transit provider, and the reason a trip was not taken. Also, agencies reported on their outreach efforts including if events were webinars, in-person presentations, or larger community events.

Direct communication with the target population helped illustrate how transportation affected their access to care and the data collected was incorporated into NCTCOG's efforts to improve transit service and reduce the number of trips not taken by the lack of transportation. Data collected from the agencies assisted staff in creating more prescriptive strategies for the 2022 Access North Texas update, which is the locally developed, regional coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan and is available at www.AccessNorthTexas.org.

For regional coordination, NCTCOG staff used existing partnerships with transportation providers to re-initiate the Regional Mobility Managers meetings. These provided a timely opportunity for providers from various sizes to come together and share resources and ideas during a period where the COVID-19 pandemic was changing how they delivered safe and reliable transportation services. Staff consulted partners for topics and during each session the group discussed how each topic was relevant in their operations and shared how services were being impacted throughout the ongoing pandemic. Staff also worked to promote mobility management trainings but the most immediate need for agencies was addressing their shortage of drivers and transportation staff. NCTCOG will continue to work with transportation agencies to create a program to address these shortages since agencies are unable to provide additional trips or expand services until additional staffing is secured.



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Although no major changes were made to the structure of the project, adjustments were made to the implementation to accommodate the stay-at-home orders from the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest of these was the switch to virtual services and outreach. Initially agencies were planning to travel to different communities to promote services and build relationships with rural agencies but to keep staff and vulnerable populations safe, activities were conducted virtually. Although this increased the number of individuals that potentially could be reached, it was not an ideal approach for populations with limited access to technology such as seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those in more rural areas. Once stay-at-home orders were lifted, agencies began incorporating in-person events and meetings to reach target populations.

Performance Measures

NCTCOG staff from the My Ride North Texas 2.0 project oversaw the results of the navigators providing travel counseling for the entire 16-county region and facilitated the coordination among transit providers through mobility management staff. Major performance measures included:

- Number of trips counseled through the established call center;
- Number of individuals connected to a transit provider;
- Number of outreach events and presentations to promote services;
- Number of regional partner meetings;
- Number of mobility management trainings and presentations; and
- Number of new regional mobility management members

Additional metrics were collected from subrecipients, which included a breakdown of calls by county, trip type, if the trip was taken, and the reason if the trip was not taken. A summary of the collected metrics is provided in **Appendix A – Travel Navigation Call Breakdown**.

Outcomes

Initial targets were established at the start of the project based on historical data but in May 2021 targets were adjusted to account for an increase in calls and a time extension on the project. Based on the updated targets, not all the targets were fully met.

	Performance Measure	Target	Actual	Total Percent
1	Number of Trips Counseled	3500 *1500	3275	93.57%
2	Number of Individuals Connected to a Transit Provider	1750 *250	1563	89.31%
3	Number of Outreach Events and Presentations to Promote Services	240 *45	237	98.75%
4	Number of Regional Partner Meetings	8 *10	8	100%
5	Number of Mobility Management Trainings and Presentations	6	4	66.67%

6	Number of New Regional Mobility Management Members	7 *5	5	71.43%
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*Previous targets were changed in May 2021

For measures concerning travel navigation, there were two agencies operating the call center, but the project was extended to provide more time for one of the subrecipients to expend their project funding. In addition to that transition, the subrecipient had difficulty hiring and retaining staff to manage the additional calls being transferred. However, once the staffing issue was resolved, they were able to manage the additional calls and almost reach the targets for trips counseled, individuals connected to a transit provider, and the number of outreach events and presentations.

Staff transitions also impacted the ability to fully implement the final three targets. During this period, the initial project coordinator departed the agency and responsibilities were reallocated to existing staff to complete the project on-time. Also, through the regional partner meetings transit agencies expressed being stretched thin during the COVID-19 pandemic and having limited capacity to implement new programs. Even though only the fourth measure was met, all these activities will continue to move forward after this grant as part of NCTCOG's commitment to enhancing mobility efforts for seniors and individuals with disabilities and improving coordination with regional transit partners.

Sustainability

The activities funded through the Innovated Coordinated Access and Mobility (ICAM) grant provided a foundation for future mobility management activities in North Central Texas and was the first phase in a larger vision for the My Ride North Texas initiative. As part of this first phase, partnering with MHMR and CCGD was crucial to implementing the project quickly since they had established relationships in the community and staff that was trained to provide travel navigation assistance. However, as future options were considered staff learned that continuing partnerships through a subrecipient relationship was not feasible and both MHMR and CCGD were unable to identify sustainable long-term funding. Efforts are now in place to integrate calls with NCTCOG's 511DFW traveler information system to ensure that riders can access information on public transportation resources and can benefit from the outreach and marketing done for the 511DFW system.

For the Regional Mobility Managers meetings and regional trainings, those will be absorbed into NCTCOG's Transit Management and Planning team as planned. As a designated recipient for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds, NCTCOG receives federal funding for short-range planning and activities to improve coordination among public transportation and other transportation service providers. Future phases of the My Ride North Texas project will be funded through a new funding program at NCTCOG for emerging and innovative transit solutions, which is anticipated in FY2024.

Lessons Learned

Although staff and partners had previous experience with similar projects, there were still several insights that were helpful to NCTCOG staff and will be used in future phases or incorporated into current planning efforts.

Staff Turnover

- Due to a competitive labor market one of our partner agencies, had difficulty in hiring a replacement travel navigator and retaining the staff they did hire. This was a significant challenge as it led to a lower than expected expenditure rate and having to extend the length of the project. During this time NCTCOG staff worked directly with the subrecipient to evaluate project needs and ensure they continued to have the capacity to respond to travel navigation calls. In the future, NCTCOG might consider combining multiple partners into one agreement and have one lead agency so that funding and staffing could be adjusted if needed.
- NCTCOG works to mitigate risk from staff turnover by including both a project manager and a project coordinator. However, due to the timing of the project coordinator's departure, there was not enough time to onboard new staff specifically for the My Ride North Texas 2.0 project. Staff from other areas were brought in to assist with activities but additional succession planning would have been helpful to have been fully prepared for any staff transitions.

Subrecipient Agreements/Partnerships

- Project was implemented in partnership with two subrecipients to cover the different areas of North Texas. However, one subrecipient started utilizing funding later and had a lower expenditure rate than they had budgeted. This created two different timelines for the agencies with MHMR completing their project much earlier than CCGD. Staff will explore alternative agreements structures in the future to help ensure subrecipients are both completing activities during the same time frame.
- Subrecipients had limited experience with FTA-compliant procurements, which limited the types of purchases and contracts they could pursue in their projects. NCTCOG staff spent extensive time reviewing federal guidance and FTA requirements for subrecipients and as a result NCTCOG is planning to create materials for future subrecipients and organizations who are interested in pursuing future FTA funding opportunities.

Transportation Inefficiencies & Gaps in Service

- Many areas continue to be excluded from public transportation opportunities, especially areas with underserved populations. This creates a need to have skilled travel navigators who are closely familiar with regional transportation options since riders are seeking to travel across the region to other cities for medical appointments and specialists.
- Transportation services are limited for seniors and individuals with disabilities who need additional assistance than what traditional curb to curb transportation services can provide. For those who can find specialized services it usually comes at a higher cost than public transportation options.

- There has been an increased need for transportation for non-medical trips (grocery store visits, social outings, etc.), especially for those in areas with limited to no public transportation services. Increased funding and support would be beneficial to improve quality of life.
- The community at large needs more targeted marketing, especially for seniors, to receive ongoing communications about what services are available and when transit providers update their services. Also, notifying friends and family members of seniors and individuals with disabilities about the resources available so they can help facilitate the needed services.

Conclusion & Impacts of COVID-19

Considering the impacts of COVID-19 on the ability to hold in-person outreach and hands-on training, the My Ride North Texas 2.0 project was still successful in educating individuals about their transportation options during a period of uncertainty and connecting them with transportation providers to reach medical appointments, work opportunities, education, and grocery stores.

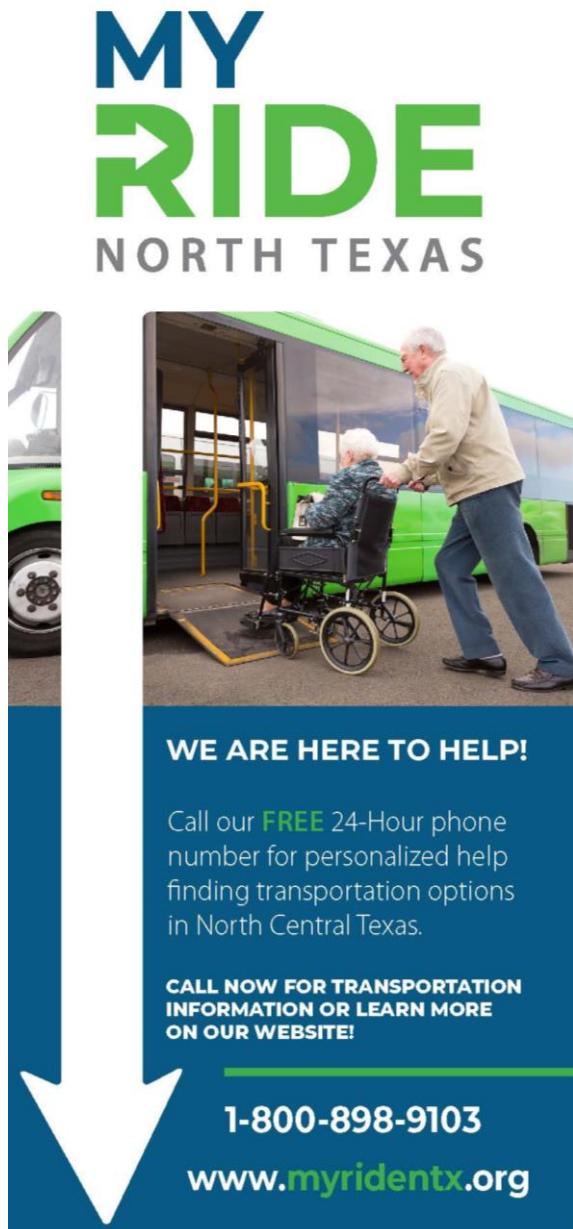
Travel navigators from MHMR and CCGD provided virtual trainings throughout the pandemic, which allowed him to reach larger crowds. While the day to day was remote, the travel navigators continued to meet face to face with some people served, such as those in re-entry programs and local senior organizations, to assure their transportation needs were catered to appropriately. Educational opportunities and support were adjusted at the beginning of the pandemic to network with transportation providers about their COVID-19 safety procedures, and travel navigators also focused on providing this information and other transportation updates that were impacted by pandemic to case management agencies and community members.

Appendix A – Travel Navigation Calls Breakdown

Reporting Measure	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	TOTAL
Calls by County										
Dallas	114	85	256	125	304	235	219	176	198	1712
Tarrant	37	171	179	209	333	317	26	12	11	1295
Collin	0	1	6	6	3	6	7	7	7	43
Denton	3	2	10	5	7	12	4	3	5	51
Ellis	0	1	1	3	0	2	2	2	2	13
Erath	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hood	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hunt	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Johnson	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Kaufman	2	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	4	12
Navarro	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Palo Pinto	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Parker	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	5
Rockwall	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	6
Somervell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wise	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	24	18	21	15	53	0	0	1	132
Total Calls	156	285	471	369	666	630	263	205	230	3275
Calls Routed to 211		0	0	1	0	4	24	7	13	49
Type of Trip										
Medical	133	252	425	316	554	523	283	223	231	2940
Employment	9	16	11	9	22	26	6	10	6	115
Social	9	5	21	22	38	44	27	13	25	204
Agency Visit	0	15	15	9	14	29	13	7	9	111
Shopping/Grocery	16	15	44	61	88	101	64	69	106	564
Other	23	4	42	22	55	19	6	4	7	182

Were Trips Taken?										
Yes	43	176	203	216	381	335	89	75	45	1563
No	25	57	136	69	105	91	41	37	39	600
Pending	18	7	25	14	16	15	6	0	68	169
Unable to Reach	40	38	97	48	149	163	125	88	76	824
No Data	16	4	13	18	15	11	7	5	2	91
Unwilling to Provide Info	32	7	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	43
Reason for Not Taking Trip										
Affordability	13	32	58	55	119	115	10	10	9	421
Capacity	1	0	4	7	11	15	0	0	0	38
Change in Trip Logistics	0	2	5	1	8	6	0	0	0	22
No Follow-Through	4	31	93	25	84	69	27	24	26	383
Provider Coordination	0	9	9	0	3	6	0	0	0	27
Waiting Listed / Eligibility	13	9	24	29	31	39	4	8	11	168
Other	4	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	10

Appendix B – Examples of Marketing Materials



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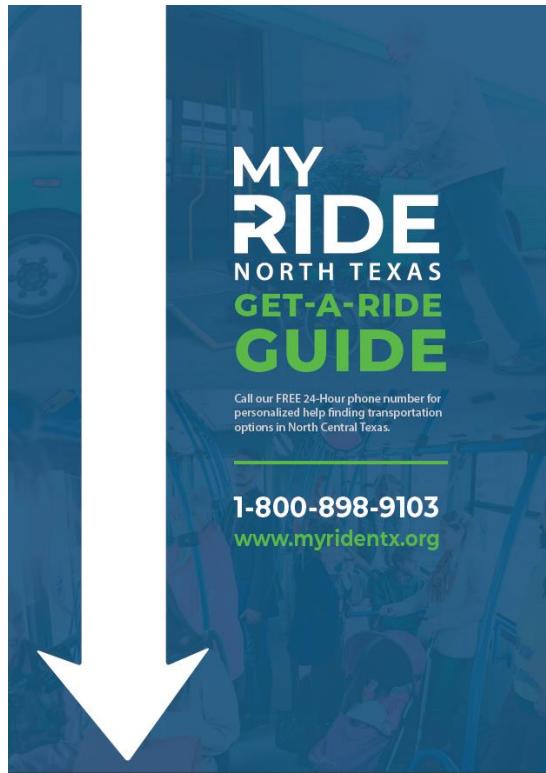
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Appendix C – Regional Get-A-Ride Guide



The Get-A-Ride Guide is a resource which provides information on various transportation resources throughout the North Central Texas region. It contains information on public transportation services, specialized transportation services, medical transportation services, private transportation services, vanpool and carpool services, accessible van rentals, driver safety resources, and referral resources.

To view a copy of the 2022 Get-A-Ride Guide, please visit
https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/eb8c1072-4451-4a41-b4eb-0961ad7c8044/GARG_FINAL.pdf

A copy in Spanish is also available at
https://www.nctcog.org/getmedia/48b6ef1d-7a5e-4eca-9827-bc2d9d06546e/Get-A-Ride-Guide-2_singlepages_Spanish_FINAL_digital.pdf