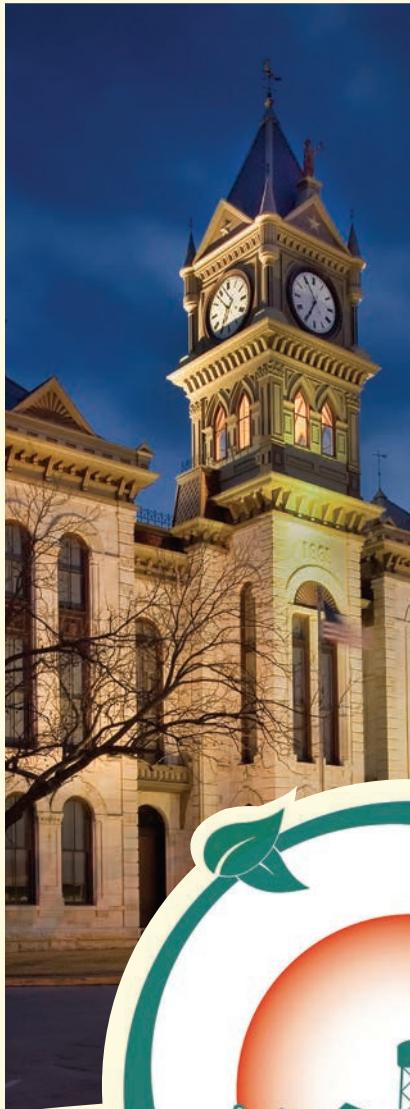


HEART OF TEXAS

EFFICIENT TOWNS & COUNTIES ROAD MAP

STRATEGIES FOR A STRONG AND HEALTHY REGION, COUNTIES, AND TOWNS



APRIL 10, 2015

Table of Contents

Section	Page	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		
1. Steering Committee	ii	
2. Other Acknowledgements	iv	
Report Body		
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2		
1.1. Project Statement	2	
1.2. Summary of needs and problems	2	
1.3. Summary of strategies and action recommendations	2	
1.4. Community Development Issues	3	
1.5. Environmental Development Issues	4	
1.6. Economic Development Issues	5	
1.7. Regional plans	5	
2. REPORT OVERVIEW 6		
2.1. Introducing the report	6	
2.2. Original project design	6	
2.3. Project process and governance	7	
2.4. Data collection methodology	7	
2.5. Public participation and education	8	
2.6. Report adoption by Steering Committee and recommendation to member governments	9	
2.7. Report submittal to HUD	9	
2.8. Implementing the recommendations	9	
2.9. Evaluation, updates, and amendments	9	
3. REGIONAL ANALYSIS 10		
3.1. Regional Characteristics	10	
3.1.1. Engagement	10	
3.1.2. Infrastructure	11	
3.1.2.1. Clifton	13	
3.1.2.2. Groesbeck	13	
3.1.2.3. Marlin	13	
3.1.3. Land Use	13	
3.1.4. Transportation	14	
3.1.5. Housing	17	
3.2. Environmental issues analysis	18	
3.2.1. Solid waste	18	
3.2.2. Air Quality	21	
3.2.3. Water	21	
3.3. Economic issues analysis	23	
3.3.1. HOTEDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy: Opportunities for		Updates Based on Heart of Texas Efficient Towns & Counties Work 23
		3.3.2. Community Based Planning 25
		3.4. Current approach to problem-solving 27
4. REGIONAL PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES 28		
4.1. Summary of needs and problems	28	
4.1.1. Community Development Strategies	29	
4.1.1.1. HOTETC Long-term Engagement Strategies	29	
4.1.1.2. Infrastructure Strategies	30	
4.1.1.3. Land Use Strategies	32	
4.1.1.4. Transportation Strategies	32	
4.1.1.5. FHEA Strategies	33	
4.1.2. Environmental Development Strategies	34	
4.1.2.1. Regional Solid Waste Management Plan Strategies	34	
4.1.2.2. Ozone Control Strategies	35	
4.1.2.3. HOTETC Water Needs and Strategies	35	
4.1.2.4. Drought Preparedness: Water Management Strategies	36	
4.1.3. Economic Development Strategies	37	
4.1.3.1. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy	37	
4.1.3.2. Community-Based Planning	38	
4.1.3.3. Other Strategies from Scenario Planning Process	39	
4.2. Regional Priorities	43	
4.3. Regional toolkit and strategies	43	
Related Reports		
A – HOTETC Long-term Engagement Study		
B – HOTETC Infrastructure and Land Use Assessment and Maps		
C – Marlin Asset Management Plan		
D – HOTETC Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan		
E – HOTETC Fair Housing and Equity Assessment		
F – Regional Solid Waste Management Plan		
G – Conceptual Model of Ozone Formation		
H – Ozone Control Strategies		
I – HOTETC Water Needs and Strategies		
J – Community-Based Planning Report		
K – Community Reports from Scenario Planning		

Study principally authored by Megan Henderson on contract to the Heart of Texas Council of Governments. Contact mhruralconsulting@gmail.com with questions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HOTETC STEERING COMMITTEE

The members of the HOTETC Steering Committee led the planning effort, directed the budget, oversaw the work of County Work Groups, consultants and staff, and championed the project in their communities. The city and county representatives – most of whom are volunteers – gave their time even beyond their own communities to support the regional shared vision; and the supporting individuals and organizations gave no less generously, to serve the region and its citizens. Their work made all of this possible.

Bosque County

• Bosque County	Dewey Ratliff	County Judge
• City of Clifton	Damaris Neelley	Small Business Owner
• City of Cranfills Gap	Russell Algren	Mayor
• City of Morgan	John Croom	Mayor
• City of Valley Mills	Jerry Pierce	Mayor
• City of Walnut Springs	Larry Stafford	Mayor

Falls County

• Falls County	Jay Elliott	County Judge
• Falls County EMC	Jeff Watkins	EMC
• City of Marlin	Elizabeth Nelson	Mayor
• City of Golinda	Doyle Park	Mayor
• City of Lott	Anita Tindle	Mayor
• City of Rosebud	Larry Boone	Mayor

Freestone County

• Freestone County	Kay Taylor	County Judge
• Freestone County EMC	Loren Miller	EMC
• City of Fairfield	Jeff Looney	City Administrator
• City of Streetman	Matthew Marfell	Resident
• City of Teague	Judy Keally	City Secretary
• City of Wortham	Kelly Calame	City Council

Limestone County

• Limestone County	Daniel Burkeen	County Judge
• Limestone County EMC	Matt Groveton	EMC
• Limestone County	Jackie Levingston	Resident
• City of Coolidge	Gay Pranger	City Secretary
• City of Groesbeck	Ray O'Docharty	Mayor
• City of Kosse	Jaren Eno	Mayor
• City of Mexia	Laura Rothrock	Mayor Pro-tem
• City of Tehuacana	Robert Robinson	Mayor Pro-tem
• City of Thornton	Joe Neason, Sr.	Mayor

Hill County

• Hill County	Justin Lewis	County Judge
• Hill County EMC	Tom Hemrick	EMC
• City of Abbott	Tony Pustejovsky	Mayor
• City of Aquilla	James Hamner	Mayor
• City of Blum	Chryle Hackler	Alderman
• City of Bynum	Mada Barron	City Secretary
• City of Hillsboro	Jerry Barker	Community Development Director
• City of Hubbard	Dorothy Jackson	City Manager
• City of Itasca	Mark Gropp	City Administrator
• City of Malone	Veresa Ingram	Council Member
• City of Mertens	Louis Thurston	Council Member
• City of Mount Calm	Jimmy Tucker	Mayor
• City of Penelope	Kyle Kucera	Mayor
• City of Whitney	Kristen Sims Miller	Mayor

Partner Organizations and Individuals

• HOT Council of Governments	Russell Devorsky	Executive Director
• AICP	Chris Evilia	Transportation Expert
• HOT Economic Development District	Russell Devorsky	President
• HOTRAC	Christine Reeves	Executive Director
• HOT Rural Planning Organization	Gary Luft	Health & Human Services Dir.
• Sam Houston State University Center for Rural Studies	Michael Fortunato	Director
• HOT Goodwill	Shannon Kendrick	Mission Services Director
• HOT Workforce	Rene' Clayton	Manager of Business
• Industry & Community Initiatives		
• McLennan Comm. College	Nancy Neill	Director
• Hill College	Leslie Cannon	Executive Dean
• Navarro College	Robin Lasher	Director
• Navarro College-SBDC	Robin Lasher	Director
• Neighbor Works-Waco	Roy Nash	President & CEO
• Prairie Hill Water Supply Corporation	Linda Jordan	Board President
• Prairielands Ground-Water Conservation District	Charles Beseda	General Manager
• TX-DOT-Waco Dist Office	Jim Reed	District Enhancement Coordinator

OTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- **Mark Pearson:** Community Resource Group
Mark and CRG were invaluable in supporting the water and infrastructure work.
- **Bill Vanderwaal and Chip Halbach:** Minnesota Housing Partnerships
MHP provided terrific coaching and insight, especially for the FHEA work.
- **Baltazar Acevedo y Arispe:** Borderlands Consulting Group
Baltazar supplied insight and edits to the strategies.
- **Liz Lagawa:** Baylor School of Social Work
Liz interviewed stakeholders and served as a second reader of the FHEA.
- **Gaynor Yancey:** Baylor School of Social Work
Gaynor and her students donated their time to create the Long-term Engagement Study.
- **Mike Barnes:** Mike Barnes Consulting
Mike supplied practical strategies in economic development.
- **Bobby Gierisch:** Texas Rural Innovators
Bobby and TRI offered community engagement and rural community development perspectives.
- **Russell Devorsky and Kathy Trimmer:** Heart of Texas Council of Governments
Russell and Kathy provided leadership and direction regarding the project's implementation.
- **Salin Geevarghese; Lynnette McRae; Kathryn Dykgraaf:** U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
HUD gave us three extremely talented and capable grant resource people who served our region well.



- **Aaron McMillan:** 1519 Surveying
Aaron saw the value of this project early, and added to that value with both advice and technical skill.
- **Heart of Texas Economic Development District**
HOTEDD supported the economic development work and will carry it forward with the CEDS process.
- **Heart of Texas Council of Governments, Solid Waste Advisory Committee**
The SWAC provided oversight for the SWMP and the solid waste sections of the final report.
- **Heart of Texas Council of Governments, Air Quality Advisory Committee**
The AQAC provided oversight for the SWMP and the solid waste sections of the final report.
- **Sue Kemball-Cook:** Environ
Sue led the Environ team preparing the region's air quality studies and recommendations.
- **John Nielsen-Gammon:** Texas State Climatologist
- **Cheryal Hills:** Region 5 Development Council
Cheryal, a rural grantee from the first program year, gave us great examples and camaraderie.
- **Jed Walker:** Walker Partners, Engineers
Jed advised the infrastructure approach and asset management plan concept.
- **Brent Bassett:** KSA Engineers
Brent serves many of our small cities, understands their needs, and put together the AMP for Marlin.
- **Troy Henderson** and the **Board of Directors of the Waco Downtown Development Corporation** allowed the completion of this work by the principal author. Thank you!



SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Project Statement

Communities throughout the Heart of Texas region were experiencing common but serious challenges. The towns, which range in from a few hundred to just over 8,000 in population, were experiencing slow or flat growth, fewer grant dollars, rising costs and increased complexity of water/sewer and other systems. County governments were also concerned about these issues, both in the towns and also the unincorporated areas / rural water supply systems.

These common issues and the need to seek solutions brought conversations, particularly at the regional level with the Heart of Texas Council of Governments. While some needs were immediate and practical – such as improved knowledge and management of water and sewer systems – other concerns were technical and required research, and still others were subjective and cultural in nature. In 2011 the region agreed to pursue technical information, cultural inquiry and practical tools, and began formation of the Heart of Texas Efficient Towns and Counties Co-op.

In 2012 the Co-op secured a federal planning grant anchored by locally-raised matching funds, and staffed the effort primarily using regional staff and contractors supplemented by expertise from technical consultants. Compared to a more turn-key, consultant-driven approach, this method cost less, strengthened local resources that could be tapped again over time, and leveraged deep familiarity with the region, its communities, and its people. After the grant funding is spent, the knowledge and tools will remain in the region and continue to grow.

1.2 Summary of needs and problems

- The region's water treatment, water distribution, wastewater collection, wastewater treatment, drainage, and street systems are worn out.
- Parts of the region do not have sufficient water supply.
- The region's housing stock is inadequate, both because of too many substandard structures and because of too little safe, attractive housing at all affordability levels.
- The region's small business economy is in transition, with many communities' businesses making do with fewer customers and a changing consumer base impacted by not only big boxes but also online sales of goods and services.



- The cumulative effect of these challenges is not only keeping communities from improving. Some are seeing reduced services and in quality of life, as systems fail and residents have fewer choices of housing, shopping, and recreation.
- Finally, residents report that they aren't working together as much or as effectively as they could – as much as they will need to in order to meet these challenges. Barriers still exist between generations, between races, and between longtime and new members of communities.

1.3 Summary of strategies and action recommendations

- Adopt regional and local strategies consistent with the following Efficiency Principleso Spend existing dollars
 - o Strengthen existing assets
 - o Serve existing customers
- Reduce infrastructure maintenance backlog by
 - o Using new GIS mapping tools to build increasing system and maintenance records and plan improvements more efficiently
 - o Lowering service levels in less important areas to focus resources on essential ones
 - o Right-sizing water and sewer rates based on the cost of providing the services, including system repair and maintenance
 - o Increasing regional ability to make improvements by sharing equipment and expertise
- Pursue water supply solutions by creating sub-regional partnerships and pursuing projects in Bosque County, Limestone/Freestone County, Groesbeck and Marlin
- Improve housing quality by enforcing ordinances, removing dilapidated structures, and incentivizing new and renovated housing development

When we started with the facilitated meetings by Sam Houston State University, we formed a group now called Rosebud Vision 2020. We're coming back to life a little. Our group is a good one and it includes folks from all over town. We've continued on past the Sam Houston series and are meeting on our own now. We're focused on getting our house in order before any other priority - and that means code enforcement, beautification, and clean-up. We have a code enforcement initiative beginning, and we've had lots of volunteer activity cleaning up the community, planting flowers, etc. We've purchased grant software and are using it to identify potential sources of funding. We're focused on communications as well, using a newly-established community website. The scenario planning piece was compelling. I've had several people come to me since that meeting and say, "For the first time we understand what the issues are and what we're facing." – Mayor Larry Boone

- Support small businesses in ways that also serve other goals, including business retention, building improvement, and small-business mentorship programs
- To preserve and enhance quality of life, deliver “Clean and Safe” – then protect and enhance existing amenities, and only last add new amenities or services
- Work with existing and reach out to potential new community volunteers, not only to secure their assistance with the issues mentioned above, but also to win their increased engagement, sense of belonging, and pride in their community

1.4 Community Development Issues

The Heart of Texas Efficient Towns & Counties Co-op consists of Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, and Limestone Counties and the cities in those counties. The region is geographically the heart of Texas: Interstate 35 connects the central portion to Dallas/Fort Worth and Austin/San Antonio, while I-45 connects the eastern portion to D/FW and Houston/ Galveston. Despite its location inside the “Texas Triangle” of fast-growing metro regions, the region grew by only 6% between 2000 and 2010. Projections call for continued slow growth. However, with much of that growth expected in the unincorporated areas, populations in most of the cities are expected to remain flat or even decline.

The region’s population was 115,821 in 2010, of whom 75% were white, 13% African American, and 18% Hispanic or Latino. The five counties range in population from Falls County, with 17,866, to Hill County, with 35,089. The region is very rural, with only Hillsboro, Marlin and Mexia having over 5,000 residents.

Recognizing the need for community involvement and volunteerism to maintain the close ties and strong quality of life the region enjoys, the project commissioned a study of long-term community engagement. Baylor School of Social Work found that there were significant barriers to involvement and recommended that the region prioritize and commit resources to overcoming them.

Perhaps the most pressing regional challenge is disrepair of infrastructure. Rising maintenance costs for water, wastewater, street and other systems – combined with falling revenues from flat or declining populations and a drop in grants – have left the region’s local governments with severe maintenance backlogs. Most if not all communities manage with maps that have serious inaccuracies, making it even more challenging to find and fix problems.

Land use policy is absent in most of the region since only the three largest cities have zoning authority, but development patterns pulling infrastructure further and further out are pressuring even very small communities.

A transportation system limited by low-density population distribution and long distances to travel has been further stressed by the impending partial dismantling of the Rural Transit District, with the most populous county pulling out of the network and removing its share of the funding.





Fair housing and equity in the region are challenged most pressing by economic factors, both of individuals and communities. Racism and racial discrimination are waning even as opportunities and housing are equally hard to come by for those without financial means. Communities struggle to improve impoverished neighborhoods with the same limited revenues already taxed by infrastructure and other issues.

Nevertheless, the region's communities are pleasant, walkable, and affordable places to live. People report knowing their neighbors and feeling secure and supported by those around them.

1.5 Environmental Development Issues

A review of solid waste collection and disposal in the region yielded no major alarms in terms of capacity, but identified several ways of reducing the waste stream and opportunities for regional partnership. In particular, improvements to solid waste collection systems and an increase in recycling programs are indicated.

An examination of the region's ozone formation and review of possible air quality improvement strategies noted that while much of the ozone and ozone precursors



in the region are blowing in from parts far to the east, there are some potential reduction strategies that make sense. Of those, retrofitting engines associated with oil and gas activities may garner the most significant reductions.

Three of the region's five counties have relatively sufficient water supply, but Bosque and Freestone are both near shortage. Regional water supply projects in both of those counties, plus reservoirs serving Groesbeck and Marlin and a few other improvement projects are recommended.

1.6 Economic Development Issues

The region's economy is growing, albeit slowly – similar to its population. Overall unemployment and wages are both relatively low. Outliers are Freestone County, which is outperforming, and Falls County, which is underperforming. Analysis of both regional and community economic factors has informed the current planning effort and will also add value to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). In addition there are several key areas of the CEDS that will be revised and viewed differently because of this work, and specific recommendations were made for that process.

Project partners Sam Houston State University Center for Rural Studies worked with Hubbard, Marlin, Rosebud, and Teague in community planning work to identify major issues and priorities and follow up with action. Groups in these communities achieved significant improvement in relationships, understanding of major issues, and consensus in how to move forward in collaborative engagement.

1.7 Regional plans

The following plans and studies were conducted as part of the project and inform its conclusions.

- Long-term Engagement Study
- Infrastructure and Land Use Maps, Assessment and Recommendations
- Pilot Project: Marlin asset management plan for water and wastewater plants
- Review and connection with existing Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan
- Fair Housing and Equity Assessment
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Conceptual Model of Ozone Formation for 2012
- Ozone Reduction Strategies
- Water Plan Analysis and Project Recommendations
- Strategies to Enhance Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- Entrepreneurial Community Planning Process
- Preliminary reports for communities based on scenario planning meetings in Clifton, Fairfield, Groesbeck, Hillsboro, Hubbard, Kosse, Marlin, Meridian, Mexia, Rosebud, and Teague



SECTION 2: REPORT OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Communities in the Heart of Texas Region share many concerns, challenges, and opportunities. In 2011, an awareness of these common issues grew into the clear identification of key areas of great importance to communities' survival and well-being. Through involvement with the Heart of Texas Council of Governments, a regional conversation grew around areas of concern:

- Local systems were in bad shape, and local resources were insufficient to fix them
- Complicated and technical issues beyond communities' control and understanding – demographic, environmental, regulatory – had potential to help or harm development
- Social capital seemed to be eroding, with fewer citizens participating in community efforts

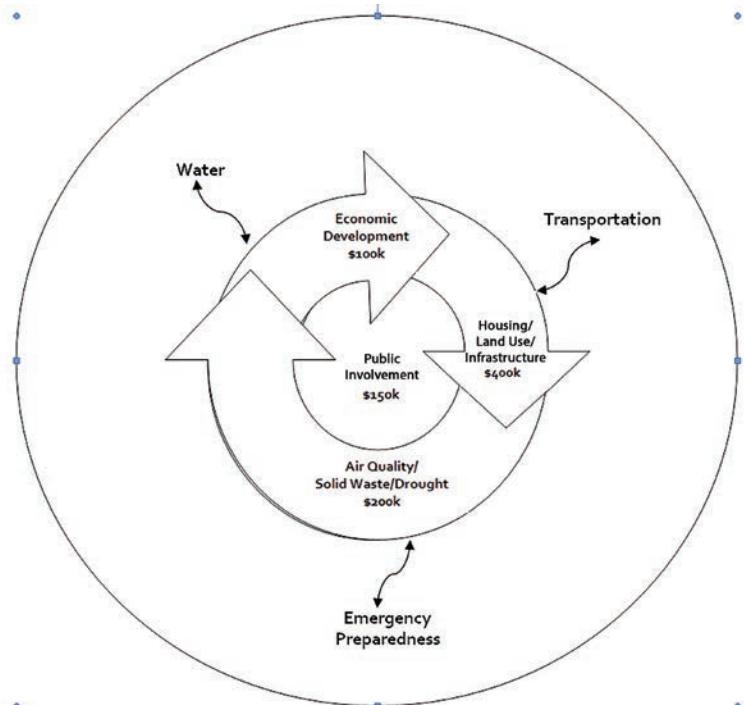
While local resources would be required for the long term to address these issues, a notice of federal planning grant funds provided hope that new tools and strategies could be developed. HOTCOG staff, who maintain close working relationships with the region's city and county officials, traveled the five counties to gather input into the greatest commonly-held priorities and concerns.

Over a series of meetings and conversations it became clear that the concerns fell into three broad categories: community development, environmental development, and economic development. Specifically, towns were challenged with declining citizen engagement, aging infrastructure, development patterns that taxed infrastructure design, populations in need of more transportation options, inadequate housing stock, solid waste management issues, a rise in air pollution, the threat of persistent drought, and lackluster economic performance.

While the individual systems are rightly the purview of individual city and county governments, all of the problems listed above can be better addressed by those local governments when supported by partnerships with other communities and an overall region working cooperatively. In some cases that cooperation looks like shared investment in tools and information, to drive the unit cost down and put those assets in the hands of communities that otherwise couldn't afford them. In other cases, the issues are truly regional, and best understood from a systems perspective. In all cases, however, it's not only the tangibles (equipment, reports,) but the intangibles (shared experiences, someone to call when a new challenge presents itself,) that make regionalism such a robust path forward. This isn't collective action or governance by committee: nothing gets between the

local government and its own path forward. Nevertheless it is collective impact, with each individual path reinforced by the work of others.

Naturally this project was a good fit for a HUD program that "supports locally-led collaborative efforts that bring together diverse interests from the many municipalities in a region to determine how best to target housing, economic and workforce development, and infrastructure investments to create more jobs and regional economic activity" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2013, P. 1.)



2.2 Original Project Design

The original project design, from the request for funding, is shown above. It illustrates how the technical work is developed around a core of public involvement, generating new community development plans (housing, land use, and infrastructure,) environmental development plans (air quality, solid waste, drought,) and economic development plans. Existing planning efforts in transportation, emergency preparedness, and water would be consulted and linked to the new work, so that the resulting new regional document would be integrated across disciplines and would be informative back to those areas as well.

In short, the communities got together and said, "We're all working separately in all of these areas, and all of the areas are separate as well. If we coordinate, we're bound to be more efficient and effective."



“This grant came at the exact right time for Hubbard. The whole process of working together, both with other communities and within Hubbard has been great. Naysayers are now onboard. We are engaged. I can’t stress enough how good this has been for Hubbard. A community like Hubbard can’t stand alone. When you try, it isn’t good. We are standing together with our neighbors and it’s great. HOTCOG has helped us focus on what we can do right now and how to build on our strengths.” – Dorothy Jackson, City Administrator, Hubbard

2.3 Project Process and Governance

From the beginning it was important to the partners that every member government have a vote in the work of the consortium. It was explicitly stated that the partnership in the form of a Steering Committee – not HOTCOG – would “oversee the project, set priorities, and make sure the planning results are relevant and practical.”

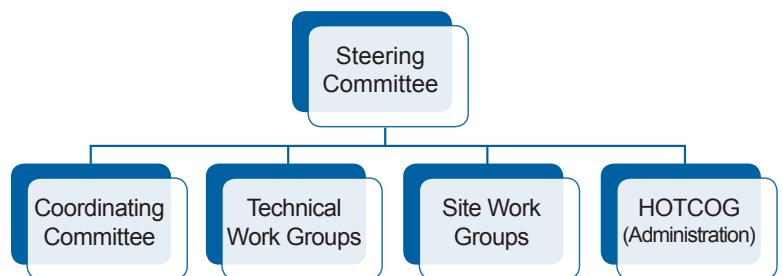
Working groups focusing both geographically (one per county) and by subject (such as Qir Quality) were formed to more closely inform the work of assembling the necessary tools and information and putting the report together. While technical expertise was secured through consulting contracts, the majority of project staffing, administration, and scoping was done by HOTCOG staff and a former-staff contractor under the direction of regional participants.

The partnership, which was named the Heart of Texas Efficient Towns & Counties Co-Op, determined the results of its work would have greatest long-term effect if as much of it as possible was done with local folks, both drawing on and adding to the expertise within the region.

From the Co-op Agreement:

“The Co-Op is structured to allow the members to lead the creation of the Regional Road Map while benefiting from staff support and regional expertise. Co-Op membership includes county and city governments in Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, and Limestone Counties, Texas, and partner organizations who can contribute to the creation or implementation of the recommendations based on their expertise, mission, or jurisdiction. Decisions are made by the Co-Op Steering

Committee, which has one seat for each Co-Op Member and five seats for individuals. Advising the Steering Committee will be Work Groups: Technical groups who deal with specific areas of expertise, and Site groups who deal with location-specific issues. These groups will ensure that the region’s local experts are plugged in to their proper areas and that field work and meetings held in a community make sense for that community. As Lead Applicant, the Heart of Texas Council of Governments provides administration and staff support under the direction of the Steering Committee. It is the Co-Op point of contact.”



2.4 Data Collection and Methodology

As noted above, the HOTETC approach was to blend the use of local expertise – consisting of not only professional qualifications but also of intimate knowledge of the region and its residents – with purely technical expertise secured according to subject matter.

The following chart illustrates the different entities leading on various components of the work.

	Component	Lead	Local expertise	Technical expertise
Community Development	Long-Term Engagement	Baylor School of Social Work	Personal connections and relationships, proximity	Highly ranked academic program
	Infrastructure Mapping	1519 Surveying	Granular knowledge of area, 2 regional offices	Experienced mapping and surveying company
	Infrastructure mapping field work	Local communities	Intimate knowledge of own systems	Supported by 1519, HOTCOG, and CRG
	Pilot Project: Marlin	Engineering firm		
	Field Work: Clifton	Local staff	Intimate knowledge of own systems	Supported by 1519, HOTCOG, and CRG
	Land Use	Local staff	Intimate knowledge of own systems	Supported by 1519
	Transportation	HOTCOG	Knowledge of own systems, region	Rural transportation planning authority
	FHEA	HOTCOG	Knowledge of own systems, region	Supported by Minnesota Housing Partnership, Waco Housing Authority
Environmental Development	Solid Waste	SCS Engineers	Supported by HOTCOG planning staff, advisory committee	Experienced engineering firm
	Air Quality	Environ	Worked in region already; supported by HOTCOG & advisory committee	Experienced environmental consulting firm
	Drought / Water	HDR	Supported by HOTCOG, CRG, BRA	Experienced engineering firm; working on state water plan
Economic Development	CEDS	HOTCOG	Knowledge of own systems, region	Supported by NADO
	Entrepreneurial Community Planning Work	Sam Houston State University Center for Rural Studies	Supported by HOTCOG, highly infused with local leadership and participation	Nationally and internationally experienced team focused on rural community development

2.5 Public Participation

Public participation in the planning process was achieved in a variety of ways.

First, the original project was developed prior to seeking funding by visiting dozens of communities to gather and synthesize input from around the region into the project design. Many of these visits took the form of public meetings with formal presentations; many others involved city officials and workers in smaller and more informal discussions of “boots on the ground” issues. This process over the summer of 2011 created the list of issues to tackle and framed the project from the beginning, prior to seeking funding.

Second, upon approval of the grant, City Councils and Commissioners’ Courts held public meetings to discuss the

project, determine their potential involvement, and debate the costs and benefits of the project. These public discussions provided yet additional opportunities to align the work with the region’s goals prior to beginning in the actual performance period. During this period the cooperative agreement was executed by all the counties and nearly every municipality in the region (only two chose not to participate.)

Over the course of the next two years, during which the technical aspects of the work were being performed, advisory groups –meeting in public, posted meetings – and work groups –meeting less formally, but inclusive of a diverse variety of perspectives – maintained the degree of local participation. Project staff also met with officials in various communities as new local leaders were elected or hired, in order to secure their understanding and participation in the project.

Opportunities to attract and inform a broader audience included a water and drought informational session, with speakers including the Texas State Climatologist and representatives from groundwater and surface water planning authorities. Another such opportunity came when the HOTETC sponsored interested regional residents to attend the Texas Rural Challenge Conference.

Steering Committee representatives kept their communities informed of progress in a variety of ways, including through press releases, social media, and updates in public meetings.

Direct engagement of regional citizens was also a key component of the work. To compose the Volunteerism and Long Term Engagement study, over 80 interviews were held across the region. Community-Based Planning Sessions, in which any interested regional community could begin a local engagement and planning process facilitated by the Sam Houston State University Center for Rural Studies, took place in 6 towns, lasted an average of 5 meetings per town, involved an average of 24 people per meeting, and were heralded by locals as some of the most highly-engaging and diversely-attended gatherings in recent memory.

Specific feedback of citizens into the Report itself was solicited via two series of additional workshops. The first round of meetings were held in 11 locations across the region, were advertised using traditional and nontraditional means, and offered meals and child care to reduce barriers to attendance. Over 300 participants from across the region participated in these meetings, and the participation included representatives from a diverse set of backgrounds and perspectives.

Following the initial construction of a set of recommendations based on this feedback, the draft

was re-circulated to the region in a final round of public meetings in 9 communities, with at least one per county. In addition the report was made available for review from a wider audience via electronic distribution. Feedback from these opportunities was collected and incorporated into the final version of the document, which was presented in a public meeting on April 10, 2015.

2.6 Report adoption by Steering Committee and recommendation to member governments

Major components of the report were presented to the Steering Committee throughout the planning period as they were developed, and the final report itself was presented to the Steering Committee in draft on March 6, 2015 and in final form for adoption on April 10, 2015. The Steering Committee Resolution both approved the document and recommended consideration of its contents to the region's local governments. Copies of the report were then forwarded to each local government, and staff/contractor were available to present the findings in person at City Council, Commissioners' Court, and other meetings as requested.

2.7 Report submittal to HUD

In fulfillment of the regional planning grant, the report was submitted to HUD on April 22, 2015.

2.8 Implementing the recommendations

Some of the report's recommendations are regional, and could be implemented by the Heart of Texas Council of Governments, Heart of Texas Economic Development District, or the HOTETC Co-op itself. Those Boards of Directors were invited to take up the issue of implementation.

Other recommendations could be acted upon by city or county governments, and those discussions are ongoing.

2.9 Evaluation, updates, and amendments

At their April 10, 2015 meeting, the HOTETC Steering Committee voted to continue the Co-op in order to build on the work that has already been completed. The group will continue to meet on a quarterly basis, and it will work with and among the local governments and partners to implement the local and regional strategies identified in the plan. The Steering Committee will also evaluate, update and amend the Road Map in order to ensure that its contents remain relevant and useful.



SECTION 3: REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of this section is to explain and summarize the major issues and characteristics of the region as explored in the various individual projects and technical studies that were developed through the planning work. More detail in each of the following areas can be found by referring to the associated Appendix section containing the complete study and findings in that area. In addition, HOTCOG staff and former-staff contractor are intimately familiar with the contents of the study and are available to answer any questions.

3.1 Regional characteristics

The Heart of Texas Region is a wide-ranging area of five counties which are physically spacious, but have low population densities. The west portion of the region, Bosque and western Hill County, is hilly with rolling terrain and sparse trees; the central portion of the region, Hill, Falls, and Limestone Counties, is prairie land that is now highly agricultural; and the eastern portion of the region, Freestone County, gives way to piney woods and has an abundance of mineral resources.

3.1.1 Long Term Engagement

The changing social dynamics of the region have created challenges and opportunities for community development. The increased prosperity and equality of communities of color creates a tremendous resource in social capital, creativity, and economic productivity. Stakeholders report that around the region there is genuine mutual respect and desire for engagement across racial and ethnic lines. In practice, however, there is still not parity in participation: whites are frequently more represented than other groups in civic clubs, volunteer organizations, leadership boards, chambers of commerce, and governing bodies than they are in the population as a whole. In fact, these organizations are not only whiter – they are also older than the populations they serve. Younger generations are similarly underrepresented in forums whose work will guide the shape and character of places these younger folks will live in for decades. There is a great deal of unutilized talent – and many of the leadership groups are well aware. While whites may at one time have been comfortable monopolizing structures of power, there is frank acknowledgment today that this must change. Changing attitudes, however, are only part of solving the problem: understanding the barriers

that exist and then overcoming them are the steps that need to happen next.

HOTETC therefore made long-term community engagement the central pillar of this project, and sought help to study the issue in order for communities to reach beyond historical patterns and welcome all community members to the table. Baylor School of Social Work has a graduate program focusing on Community Practice, the practice of applying social work skills to develop communities: Master's students in this program undertook the region's Long-term Community Engagement Study and made conclusions and recommendations. The report was accepted by HOTETC on December 6, 2013.

Under the leadership of Dr. Gaynor Yancey, the *Advanced Community Practice* class's mission was to: identify the reasons why citizens choose to, or choose not to, devote time to such endeavors as city government, volunteer service, community activities, and the like. In addition, the class was to attempt to identify real or perceived barriers to participation, as well as solutions/strategies/methods to foster citizens and communities who are engaged, invested, and working together within each individual community and across the five rural counties of Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, and Limestone.

Through this process, the class conducted 80 interviews across the five counties. The average length of time was 45 minutes per interview. The majority of interviews were conducted through telephone conversations; however some were

conducted in person or in a group setting known as a listening session.

In public meetings in Meridian, citizens were passionate about their town and its quality of life. They wanted to get more people involved, but weren't sure how to engage members of their growing Hispanic community and others. One community member spoke up about willingness to pitch in. "There are a lot of us with real knowledge about how to operate these systems. I know I'd be willing to help."

THE FINDINGS

1. EVENTS & ACTIVITIES. Community events and activities are important for creating connections.
2. WORKING WHERE YOU LIVE HELPS. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/JOB CREATION NEEDED. Respondents believe that residents who both live and work in the community is a key component to creating engaged communities—ownership, pride, investment, commitment. Job creation/economic development is needed to help facilitate this.
3. VOLUNTEERS. Volunteers tend to be either young (high school age or younger), or senior citizens. Those aged 20-40 tend to be involved in their children's activities, but do step up in crisis. Volunteer base needs to be expanded.

4. RICH DIVERSITY: Diversity in all 5 counties was described primarily through these 3 lenses:
 - a. The different ages: youth, parents, seniors
 - b. Varying ethnicities, cultures and sub-cultures (myths & realities)
 - c. Residential status: insiders vs. outsiders
5. "TECHNICAL" BARRIER:
 - a. Communication: No single method of communication ensuring that all citizens receive all relevant information, in accurate form, and in a timely manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In their report, the students encourage HOTCOG/HOTETC to increase the resources devoted to creating a region of more invested residents who will become more committed to playing active and engaged roles in their communities.
2. In order to maximize greater involvement from diverse groups within the communities, the students in their report encourage HOTCOG/HOTETC to:
 - a. **Create a committee:** The HEART OF TEXAS COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & VOLUNTEERISM
 - b. **Create a staff position:** COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR (Funding would be sought collaboratively, from the counties as well as through a partial grant.)
 - i Recommended methods:
 1. In collaboration with community leaders, create and begin to implement a long-term plan to increase volunteerism and community engagement in the region.
 2. Ultimately, the goal is for local, county centered leadership to be developed and to begin implementing all plans aimed at volunteerism and community engagement.
 3. Utilize graduate students, as field interns, from local universities, to focus on volunteerism and community engagement alongside the Director of Community Engagement and local county leaders.
 4. Utilize the listening session strategy to gain needed insight and build connections: "Through the suggested in-depth listening sessions" the committee and the coordinator can learn more about "the opportunities, and the barriers, to volunteerism and community engagement among these groups."
 5. Collaborate with community leaders to identify and nurture opportunities for diverse community involvement.
 6. TRAINING PROGRAM: Youth Civic, Community, Leadership Development & Education
 7. TRAINING PROGRAM: Civic, Community Leadership Development & Education
 8. TRAINING: Create/deliver a series of appropriate diversity training within the communities.



3.1.2 Infrastructure

Just as important as community engagement to the region's survival is its infrastructure. On a very basic level, the ingredients of an incorporated community in the heart of Texas are people and a built environment served by streets and pipes. Those streets and pipes are, to put a succinct caption on a region of over 40 different such systems, worn out.

The bad conditions have several causes. A large percentage of the assets were put into service in the first half of the 20th century; they have been maintained sporadically; and the biggest source of funding assistance (CDBG) is ineligible for use in many areas. Add to this the triple economic whammies of increased system and regulatory complexity; increased turnover, decreased institutional knowledge, and increased cost of training; and inflation of labor and materials, and the result is that systems are far more costly to operate than they used to be. The region's communities have not only not grown significantly – most have actually declined relative to the size they were expected to be when the systems were put in. The same trends that create sprawl in large cities are at work in small ones too: vacancies grow inside the city limits, while new settlement is more likely to go at the fringes. This stresses existing systems and reduces the dollars available to meet the rising costs of operation.

One of the main forces that brought so many communities to join the Heart of Texas Efficient Towns & Counties Co-op was the realization that infrastructure maintenance needs are simply out of control. Communities' revenues are unequal to the task of



If the rule is “measure it, and you can manage it” – the region had a great practical barrier preventing management of its infrastructure. The HOTETC began with the premise that by increasing knowledge of what is there, communities could find greater efficiencies that would help them address the cost issues and bridge the institutional knowledge gap. To that end, the HOTETC project funded creation of new GIS maps of all the region’s municipal water and wastewater systems and also purchased equipment to be used to increase the accuracy of the maps over time. What this means is that the data are now able to be updated, and the communities have the tools they need to make those updates and increase accuracy. In addition they can now add features such as the frequency of leaks, characteristics of the lines or other assets, and

catching up to decades of deferred maintenance. One typical example: while this project was being prepared, one community replaced a fire hydrant – and found the valve inside had been installed in 1902.

But cost isn’t the only problem: the other barrier is information. The increased technical complexity of systems, and the complexity of the funding that is available to assist with their construction, combined with the cities’ declining purchasing power for labor and equipment, have contributed to the fact that today most of the region’s communities do not install their own lines or do their own road construction. With each project done by a different contractor and frequently a different engineer, over the years cities have lost track of what is built. 30 years ago this was mitigated by the fact that utility workers had long work lives, and amassed maps in their minds of what was really where. Today’s workers do not have this institutional memory. Engineers make new maps from the old ones, preserving inaccuracies from version to version. Modern Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools have been developed to store map-based information like what is needed, but the GIS systems are unavailable to small communities who can’t afford the licenses or to pay people knowledgeable enough to run the software.

other maintenance information.

Over time these elements can inform a much more efficient asset management practice that the region’s communities can engage in both individually and collectively. They can form a community of practice because they have access to the same technologies and can cross-train and learn from each other over time.

Adoption of new techniques necessarily varies from community to community, and different communities are now using the system to innovate in their own ways. Hubbard has added layers to assist with economic development. Fairfield has used it to schedule mowing of rights-of-way. Wortham is logging information every time they dig up a line for any reason, and has found several inaccuracies in their existing map information. Marlin and Rosebud are locating pipes they had been uncertain of. All of the active communities are recording this information, and the updates are being made into the GIS system – during the project by a contracted survey company, but long after the project the updates will continue to be made by COG staff. The improvement created is already significant, but the most significant aspect is that improvement will continue long after the grant has been closed.

In addition to the across-the-board regional work, three communities requested additional work to go

“This has been a fabulous thing. I know it has been a turning point for Marlin. We’re a long way from where we need to be, but through this process we’re no longer moving in different directions, we’re moving together.”
– Marlin mayor Elizabeth Nelson

into greater detail. Each of the issues they requested assistance with was one that is likely experienced by other communities, so the efforts funded in Clifton, Groesbeck and Marlin are useful not only to those communities but also by example.

3.1.2.1 Clifton

Clifton had two significant issues to address: its water supply and its water distribution system. First, they were concerned about the adequacy of their existing water well, as the water table is dropping in Bosque County. Second, they frankly acknowledged a great amount of inaccuracy in their water system maps and wanted to accelerate their improvement. Clifton installed a sonic well level reader and conducted an engineering study to review their need for an additional well, and they hired a surveying company to professionally locate and map key features of their water system.

3.1.2.2 Groesbeck

Groesbeck is one of the region’s more prosperous communities, but it has its share of challenges. One of those is its difficulty in meeting the need for more housing and development. At the beginning of this project, Limestone County (of which Groesbeck is the county seat) did not have a digital parcel map. Recorded boundaries of properties – including the city limits of Groesbeck – were plagued with inaccuracies and inconsistencies, and records were difficult to locate. Groesbeck engaged a survey company to investigate properties at its boundaries to locate the exact edges of its city limits and identify areas in which it might be able to serve additional development.

3.1.2.3 Marlin

Of all the region’s communities, Marlin most exemplifies the problem of being upside-down in relation to infrastructure. Most of its infrastructure was built in the 1920s and 30s, but due to the loss



of both residents and its huge tourism industry the number of users today is significantly smaller. In addition its median income is among the region’s lowest, and the unreliability of its infrastructure has contributed to the loss of its major private employers. Marlin made the greatest investment in this project of any community, and it requested an engineering review of its water and wastewater treatment plants in order to analyze maintenance needs and practices and generate recommended cost savings methods. Using an asset-management model from the Environmental Protection Agency, Marlin engaged an engineer to perform this study.

3.1.3 Land Use

Only two communities in the region had land use maps at the beginning of this project. While not extensive, the HOTETC felt that mapping to identify, at minimum, residential and commercial areas was important for community development and planning. Accordingly this data was generated and overlaid onto the regional GIS maps.



This information will become increasingly valuable as communities seek to allocate scarce investment dollars in ways that will most leverage opportunities for their citizens. For example, sidewalks - which are too expensive to construct and maintain to be built all over - may be possible and important to connect to schools and employment areas. Mapping layers that allow planners to manipulate designs and find what works, will be helpful as communities consider the recommendations in the RPSD.

In addition, the infrastructure and land use maps in combination inform a new and vital conversation about density. The communities in the region now have the data to examine the rate structure required to maintain systems with differing numbers of feet of pipe per paying customer. While conversations about the cost of sprawl may seem impractical and abstract in this region of small communities, this project has created the ability to assign an existing and desired maintenance cost per linear foot of water line in a particular town and to then evaluate the future maintenance burden of a proposed

expansion. Replacing abstract, far-away concepts like sprawl with real-world, concrete measurements that apply to specific community situations is a powerful benefit the project has secured.

3.1.4 Transportation

Across Texas and the United States, the increasing need for public and human services transportation continues to outstrip the funding available. Those individuals hit hardest by decreased funding are the transportation disadvantaged, those with limited transportation options due to disabilities, age, or income. The Heart of Texas Council of Governments region is committed in pursuing planning and operational funding to increase the availability of public transit by implementing performance measures to evaluate effectiveness of service delivery.

Since the 2011 adoption of the Heart of Texas Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan, large changes have occurred to the public transportation system that have an effect on services to the Heart of

Texas Efficient Towns & Counties area. The HOTETC planning work called for a review of the existing plan and an update regarding what has changed since the plan was adopted and how transportation generally affects the region's and communities' development.

At the time the 2011 plan was adopted, it was envisioned that vehicle maintenance and dispatch would be consolidated for the region and be handled by the urban transit district in Waco (Waco Transit Service, or WTS.) The actual transportation services themselves were operated by four subcontractors, working under HOTCOG's Rural Transit District (HOTRTD) direction and using HOTRTD's rolling stock of vehicles. Over the past three years, that picture has changed dramatically.

- HOTRTD no longer employs subcontractors but has taken the rural transit services in-house.
- The centralized dispatch planned in the Transportation Plan was implemented, and has not been successful.
- McLennan County, the largest of the counties served by HOTRTD (although not a member of the HOTETC) has begun efforts to pull out of the Rural Transit District, which would have the effect of drastically reducing funding to the rural district and therefore cutting transportation services.

The following projects from the Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan have been or are being implemented, but the changes noted above have had an effect on how things are working out. The list below briefly identifies the original project, updates based on the changes, and the expected impact on regional sustainability.

Original Projects/Goals and Updates based on Changes/Impact on Regional Sustainability

PROJECT 1: Plan For and Sustain the Coordination Planning Process

Original Project:

Proactively coordinate transportation through a Regional Transportation Coordinating Council representing the entire six-county HOTCOG area via quarterly (or more) meetings.

Update:

The Regional Transportation Coordinating Council had its first meeting in more than 12 months in January 2015. The Council and newly elected officers voted to

increase the number of members on the council from 19 to 25. The increase in members will add one more representative from the rural portion of McLennan County and one more representative from each of the five remaining counties. The addition of these individuals will give the rural area of the HOTCOG region more participation in the overall coordination process.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

The rural areas of the Heart of Texas Efficient Towns & Counties Co-op will have more voting power in the newly-configured Council, giving rural voices greater impact.

PROJECT 2: Vehicle Maintenance Program

Original Description:

Consolidate maintenance of the region's fleet of rolling vehicle stock with one provider, Waco Transit, which is equipped to maintain these vehicles and could achieve cost-saving efficiencies.

Update

The regional vehicle maintenance program did consolidate the work done to the transit vehicles to Waco Transit System's facility, reduce the time of getting a vehicle back on the road and assured that well trained technicians were completing the work on the vehicles to State and Federal regulations. Unfortunately, there was also loss of jobs due to the loss of work now being performed by Waco Transit System.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

The gains in efficiency have been mitigated by some loss of rural economic impact from maintenance work done by local firms.

PROJECT 3: Regional Consolidation of Rolling-Stock

Original Description:

Coordinate the purchase of vehicles between Waco Transit and the Heart of Texas Rural Transit District, allowing for economies of scale and cost savings.

Update

The consolidation of rolling stock has caused inefficiencies in service throughout the entire six county region due to the numbers of miles between clients in the rural area, only one or two people on the vehicles at a time, the size of the vehicles constitute the path taken to pick up a client, and the cost of fuel.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

The expected increased efficiency has not materialized; rather, larger vehicles are now making mostly-empty trips due to the scattered nature of the clients and distributed area.

PROJECT 4: Sustain the Rural Community-to-Waco Connectivity Project

Original Description:

Maintain a service route between employment centers in Waco and underserved populations in Falls County.

Update:

The “link” system created by Waco Transit System and The Heart of Texas Workforce has created a way to get individuals from Falls County to get to jobs in the Waco Area. The system is a continuous loop from Waco to Marlin.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

Transportation-disadvantaged populations in the region’s most impoverished area have greater access to employment and other opportunities, but the project’s survival depends on continued funding.

PROJECT 6: Centralized Dispatching and Scheduling for Regional Trips

Original Description:

Replace a regional dispatching system in which multiple small providers handle their own dispatching with a centralized system hosted by Waco Transit that would enable callers across the region to access a single number, dispatchers to deploy the entire range of vehicles to consolidate trips, and route planning and other services to be more efficient.

Update:

The Centralized Dispatching and Scheduling for Regional Trips has from the onset been a disaster for all of the rural communities in HOTCOG’s six county region. The original conception of the program appeared to be a terrific idea. The major flaw that was not considered by any of the contributing parties was the fact that rural service and its clients are completely different from its urban counter parts. Urban demand response trips are for the most part contained in a small “box”. Rural clients can at time travel up 75 miles in a one way trip. The dispatchers and schedulers must be able to look at the entire region to determine the best possible route to get the client to their destination. The change to regional scheduling and dispatching has put the rural areas in

a small “box” and this has caused many individuals that could use the service to not be able to do so.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

The impact of the already limited rural transit services has been reduced, further lowering the number of trips and reducing service to the region’s transportation-challenged residents.

PROJECT 12: 5310 Funding – Heart of Texas Council of Governments – Rural Transit District – Purchase of Service

Original Description:

Provide service to elderly and disabled populations using 5310 funding.

Update:

The Heart of Texas Council of Governments applies to TXDOT for 5310 funds on an annual basis. The funds are used to provide individuals who are 65 years or older and individuals with disabilities regardless of their age affordable nonemergency transportation.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

The population served by 5310 dollars – seniors who frequently rely on transit to assist them in reaching medical and other resources – continues to be served, but the limitations noted elsewhere that impact the overall rural transit service are stressors on this aspect of service as well.

PROJECT 14: Increase Utilization of Public Transportation for Aging and Persons with Disabilities

Original Description:

Provide service to elderly and disabled populations using 5311 funding to supplement limited 5310 funds.

Update:

Along with the 5310 funds mentioned above the Heart of Texas Council of Governments also applies for 5311 rural public transportation funds through TXDOT. The 5311 funds allow us to transport any one regardless of their age in the six county region. The 5311 funds also allow the Heart of Texas Council of Governments to supplement the minimal amount of 5310 funds we received through the years on a constant basis.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

As with the senior service, the region’s service to general-population clients continues but is stressed by the changes to the system and inefficiencies noted above.

The Future “evolving transportation scenario for our region”

The future of transportation in the rural portion of HOTCOG’s six county region has its bright spots, as shown by the projects below, and it also has its unknowns. Federal and state funding always poses the question will there be more or will there be less from year to year and we as providers will provide as much service as possible with the funds we are allotted.

McLennan County is another of the unknowns in transportation’s future in the current six county region. McLennan County Commissioners have decided to move away from HOTCOG as the transit provider for the county and create their own Rural Transit District. Federal and state 5311 rural public transportation funds will be affected by this change when the process is completed.

The following planned projects would enhance service to the region.

“We’re seeing this as an opportunity to build back up. We’re in a situation as a community where our deferred maintenance is really biting us. HOTETC came in and laid it out: here’s the situation. And that was dynamic. We have some key issues and we need to overcome them. One main one is housing.” – Jerry Barker, Community Development Director, Hillsboro

and the other folks in town, often live within walking distance to schools or businesses, and report that overall folks of all races and backgrounds have access to housing, jobs, and other opportunities. However, challenges exist as well, and the purposes of this study are to identify not only the positive aspects but also those challenges. In particular, we focus on barriers to fair housing and equity, why things are the way they are, and what might be done

to improve access and opportunity for all residents.

Some of the challenges are social. While tremendous progress has been made and stakeholder reports were overall positive, racism and racial discrimination are still felt in the region to varying degrees, and must continue to be taken seriously and deliberately addressed in order for communities to see the kind of engagement and advancement opportunities recommended elsewhere in the Regional Strategies.

There is encouraging news. Communities should feel proud of stakeholders’ reports that for the most part all races have equal access to housing choices. However it is sobering that there was also great agreement that housing choice was sharply limited by other factors. Folks around the region identified great need for quality housing of all varieties, but especially affordable housing. Private-sector housing in the affordable range was all too often substandard, subsidized housing was full, and even market-rate housing was not seen as plentiful, particularly for families needing multiple bedrooms.

Perhaps the greatest challenges identified in the region, however, are both the communities’ and residents’ financial opportunities. While racial segregation of neighborhoods is waning, poorer neighborhoods generally had lower quality infrastructure and code enforcement issues that communities are struggling to address because of fiscal constraints. Similarly residents themselves reported that while access to opportunities exist across racial lines, those opportunities are relatively few and more jobs, training, and other opportunities would be needed in order for more residents to improve themselves and their families’ circumstances.

Bright spots certainly exist. Some communities reported almost no racial bias. Other communities cited community work, such as joint community planning processes, as making strides in bringing people together. Towns are making progress in cleaning up and providing services to poorer areas, while still other areas are seeing greater

PROJECT 5: Design Service Routes Serving Multiple Counties

Project Description/Background:

Create service routes serving multiple counties to more quickly, efficiently and reliably connect individuals with regular destinations such as employment.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

Transportation-dependent populations would have greater access to employment and other opportunities.

PROJECT 16: GPS tracking and remote monitoring of Public Transportation Vehicles

Project Description/Background:

Purchase and install monitoring equipment in transit vehicles to allow tracking and monitoring of vehicles in real time in order to assess incidents, improve response to problems, and record accidents or other disruption events.

Impact on Regional Sustainability:

Transit riders and drivers would enjoy increased safety and reliability of service.

3.1.5 Housing

The cities and counties in the Heart of Texas Region are good places to live: residents feel safe, know their neighbors



economic opportunities overall. This document and its recommendations aim to support these efforts and inspire new ones so that the region is a better home to all its citizens.

In the following pages we will explore the different conditions across the region, identify areas that may need action, and make recommendations for improvement, including the following:

1. Local Housing Policy that Encourages Quality and Affordability
2. Local Transportation Infrastructure that Works for Cars, Bikes, and Pedestrians
3. Code Enforcement and Development Policy that Builds Neighborhoods
4. City Management that Manages Assets
5. Economic Development that Serves Residents First

3.2 Environmental characteristics

The Region explored three areas of potential environmental risk and resource: solid waste, air quality, and water supply.

The solid waste analysis used a format recognized by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Regional Solid Waste Management Plan. The Heart of Texas had an existing planning document, but it was over a decade old and did not reflect changing demographic and programmatic trends in the region. It was impractical to tackle an update to that plan with only local funds because to do so would exhaust them – leaving no way to implement the activities the plan would identify. In addition the region's communities were interested in reviewing solid waste in conjunction with the HOTETC planning work because to do so would allow them to look at municipal solid waste practices and programs in the context of both the regional review of population and sustainability and also of local efficiencies and priorities.

The air quality areas of focus included a conceptual model of ozone formation, which serves to advise the region regarding the creation and level of ozone and ozone precursors in the region, and also the development of a list of control strategies for mitigation of these air pollutants. The Heart of Texas currently attains the air quality standard, but the Environmental Protection Agency has shown concern that the current standard may be too high. Identifying the degree to which local decisions can reduce air pollution is a crucial step. Another point very resonant in the Heart of Texas is that it is both more palatable and affordable to make air quality decisions before a project is undertaken, than to be forced into costly and unpopular retrofits. Since this region is home to many power generation plants and significant oil and gas resources, this review was felt to be important.

Another feature of life in central Texas is drought and the resulting concern for both short- and long-term water supply stability. Originally water supply and drought were expected to be separate areas of focus, but in developing the analysis we learned that the Texas state climatologist's office adequately meets the need for a review of drought risk, that the existing state of drought has already affected the region's water supply and so is included in the needs analysis of supply and demand, and that the greatest area of potential threat to communities in the region was posed by water supply issues; so focusing on that area would meet the greatest needs and not leave significant issues unaddressed.

The full texts of each review are included in the appendices; the scope, methodology, conclusions, and recommendations of each are summarized below.

3.2.1 Solid Waste

The purpose of the Solid Waste Management Plan is to create an assessment of waste collection issues and needs, and to produce a road map that will lead to the communities' ability to continue to manage the waste stream in the most efficient and sustainable, and least resource-intensive, way possible. The resources in question include not only natural resources that could be used rather than sent to landfills, but

also landfill space itself and the money associated with solid waste management. Cost savings and efficiencies in this area are good not only directly, but because they have the potential to free up resources that could be used to address other local challenges.

The Texas State Demographer's office advised that the study be predicated on a conservative growth projection, the "0.5 scenario" (p. 9.) This is because the study looks at a 40-year period through 2050, and the state's growth rate is expected to decrease – that is, we will grow, but not as rapidly as we did from 2000 – 2010. While this is appropriate for the state of Texas and was the choice of the engineers preparing the solid waste study, regional officials do not necessarily agree that this is the likeliest scenario for the Heart of Texas region. As is noted elsewhere, Heart of Texas officials feel the possibility exists for an upswing in the regional growth rate due to two primary factors: outmigration into the center of the Texas Triangle from the larger, denser metro areas; and the increasing strength and quality of the Waco MSA as an attractive urban center.

The study reviewed waste generation in the HOTCOG region, which includes McLennan County.

Municipal solid waste streams disposed of at permitted landfills in the region derive from residential, commercial and institutional, municipal biosolids, industrial, mining, and agricultural sources... (In the 12 years since the previous study) the region has experienced an estimated 33 percent increase in annual municipal solid waste requiring disposal. Current estimates of waste generation indicate that residents in HOTCOG are generating an average of 6.7 pounds of municipal solid waste per person per day requiring disposal. It is estimated that the region will generate a little more than 456,000 tons of municipal solid waste in 2020 and over 500,000 tons of waste in 2040. To minimize use of the region's valuable landfill resources, this suggests an opportunity for residents and businesses in the region to reduce and recycle (p. 10.)

The study also reviewed collection programs.

Municipal solid waste is either collected in the region by private haulers, public agencies, or dropped off by residents at rural collection stations. The 2013 Solid Waste Survey, which was conducted for the SWMP update, suggests that, in many areas of the region, multiple waste haulers oftentimes collect in the same general vicinity. While this affords residents a variety of waste collection choices, it does reduce potential economies of scale for collection, and potentially drives up waste collection prices. The region has a limited number of citizens'

collection stations that will accept some types of solid waste and recyclables. These six citizens' collection stations have been established in several municipalities as well as county governments within the region. These stations typically consist of open top containers that are set up at a convenient location for citizens to access, and are operated by a municipality or county in cooperation with private haulers. Based on discussions with county environmental officers, these facilities are heavily used by residents and those with lower fees are used much more frequently than the other facilities that charge more to dump loads. There are currently no collection stations that serve unincorporated areas in Hill County, Limestone County or Bosque County outside of the City of Meridian (p. 12.)

Some of the citizens' collection centers and private facilities in the region accept selected recyclable materials such as paper, plastic, ferrous, aluminum cans, and glass bottles. Other drop-off locations include schools, retail establishments, churches, and public buildings. Further, some of the cities host yard waste recycling programs with mulching or chipper services. However, the main limitations to recycling as a means to waste reduction are:

- Currently limited recycling infrastructure
- There are no cities with a population over 10,000) ...this decentralized population creates challenges for cost-effective recycling.
- Availability of relatively low cost disposal at the landfills within the region (p. 13)

Summary of Needs and Problems

According to the results of the *2013 Solid Waste Survey* and communications with the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC), illegal dumping and improving collection to underserved areas were issues of major concern for the HOTCOG region. In addition, there is a notable interest in increasing opportunities for recycling. Other concerns identified in the course of the study included maximizing disposal facilities and enhancing public awareness of solid waste issues in the region (p. 14)

1. Problem: Illegal Dumping / Open Burning Not Considered a Problem by Some Residents
2. Problem: Residents and Businesses Are Willing to Take Risks
3. Need: Convenient Options for Waste Disposal and Recycling
4. Need: Streamlining Collection Options
5. Need: Expanded Public Information/ Education on Solid Waste Management (pp. 14-16.)

Goals and Objectives Related to the Planning Horizon (found on page 1-9)

OBJECTIVES

GOALS	OBJECTIVES		
	Short Term (1-5 Years)	Intermediate Term (6-10 Years)	Long Term (11-20 Years)
1 Promote Integrated Solid Waste Management Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand residential collection services to currently underserved areas • Improve service to underserved areas through construction of new strategically located citizens' collection stations. • Maximize capacity and efficiency of recycling operations • Maximize capacity and efficiency of landfills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to address underserved areas as warranted by needs and population growth of the HOTCOG region, e.g., expand citizens' collection stations, as needed • Address recycling needs in response to changes in market dynamics of recycled commodities • Address capacity issues, as warranted by current capacity of integrated waste management system (e.g., expand landfill(s)) • Continue to monitor the development of waste-to-energy and waste conversion technologies and implement, when feasible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the development of transfer stations, as needed to address efficiencies of transporting MSW to disposal/processing facilities • Continue to monitor the development of waste-to-energy and waste conversion technologies and implement when feasible
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop public education materials about solid waste management and recycling • Increase public awareness of the importance of stopping illegal dumping • Increase public awareness through clean-up events such as Waste Tire Amnesty Days • Encourage community programs through school curricula, advertising campaigns, environmental programs, and volunteer organizations • Encourage local efforts to stop illegal dumping • Clarify local government responsibilities and encourage use of litter abatement officers with a vision of establishing a regional task force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In view of continuous evolution of the solid waste management system, continue to update the public on proper MSW management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In view of continuous evolution of the solid waste management system, continue to update the public on proper MSW management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize available grant funds for local plans, illegal dumping enforcement, and development of collection stations • Provide updates and distribution of the regional solid waste information system • Promote and encourage grant and loan funds from federal, state, and private sector institutions to comply with the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor the availability of grants and pursue grant funding consistent with HOTCOG's goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor the availability of grants and pursue grant funding consistent with HOTCOG's goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage public and private partnership efforts • Support reduction of HHW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the need, feasibility and public interest of a regional HHW collection facility(s) or mobile facility(s) • Recommend the development and use of alternative non-HHW products 	
2 Encourage Public Education and involvement in integrated solid waste management			
3 Encourage and Promote Funding Availability to Ensure Regional and Local Implementation of this Plan			
4 Encourage the Development of HHW and Diversion Programs			

3.2.2 Air Quality

In support of the region's Air Quality Advisory Committee's intention to move forward in reducing ozone and ozone precursors, ENVIRON compiled a list of Nitrogen Oxide emission control measures that have the potential to reduce ozone in the 6-county region. The method used to identify emission control measures for HOTCOG began with an analysis of the most complete and recent emissions inventory available, from 2008. The review of local sources of NOx resulted in prioritization of the important sources that can be controlled. Next, ENVIRON researched each control measure, noting the per-unit NOx benefits expected, limitations of technologies, and cost-effectiveness where information was available. Finally, ENVIRON estimated a potential reduction in NOx emissions over the 6-county area for each measure. The NOx reduction estimates reflect moderate assumptions of penetration of each technology or program in the HOTCOG area.

The table below summarizes each identified control measure, the estimated NOx reduction in tons per day (tpd), and a qualitative rating – Low, Medium, or High – reflecting ENVIRON's assessment of the relative importance of each measure. The qualitative ratings were assigned by placing potential emission reductions into ranges of below 1 tpd NOx, 1-5 tpd NOx, and greater than 5 tpd NOx. The qualitative ratings do not take into account the cost-effectiveness of control measures, only the potential to reduce NOx.

The potential for emissions reductions from the EGU sector has not yet been evaluated because information specific to each electrical generating unit is needed but currently lacking. ENVIRON's next step will be revision of the Point Sources section of this report after obtaining additional information from HOTCOG area EGU operators. In the meantime, this report identifies eleven viable control measures to support HOTCOG's efforts to voluntarily reduce NOx in the 6-county area.

3.2.3 Water

(The following is excerpted from pp. 1-2 of the Water Study.)

Background

Heart of Texas Efficient Towns and Communities (HOTETC) is a consortium of communities from five counties currently implementing a Sustainable Communities Planning Grant administered by the Heart of Texas Council of Governments (HOTCOG). The HOTETC requested HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR) to review existing regional water planning information, evaluate water needs and identify potential strategies for specific community water systems in Bosque, Hill, Limestone, Freestone and Falls counties.

This technical memorandum presents information gathered from the Brazos G and Region C planning data (2011 and 2016 plans), survey data and a November 22, 2013 workshop.

Sector	Control Measure No.	Description	Potential Reduction of NOx (tpd)	Qualitative Rating ^b
On-road Mobile	1	Truck stop electrification/APUs	0.2	Low
	2	Cleaner diesel beyond TxLED	0.2	Low
	3	Retrofit local HDDV ^a	1.0	Medium
	4	Repower/replace local HDDV	1.4	Medium
	5	Driver training	0.2	Low
	6	Compressed workweek	0.01	Low
Off-road Mobile	7	Engine retrofit with SCR	0.75	Low
	8	Engine repower/replacement	3	Medium
Oil & Gas	9	Retrofit 4-cycle rich-burn compressor engines	8-16	High
	10	Replace 2-cycle lean-burn compressor engines	2.4	Medium
	11	Repower drill rig engines	2.4	Medium

^a HDDV is the abbreviation for heavy duty diesel vehicles.

^b Qualitative Impact categories include: Low (NOx impact < 1 tpd), Medium (NOx impact between 1 and 5 tpd), and High (NOx impact > 5 tpd)

Objectives of the study are to:

- Identify water management strategies, including planned supplies, redundancies, possible local and regional solutions, drought resiliency and management, and conservation opportunities.
- Identify possible regional clusters as reasonable candidates to pursue regional water facility planning, and provide appropriate information that would support development of TWDB Regional Facility Planning Grant applications for Dec. 2013 cycle.
- Coordinate strategies with regional planning groups for the 2016 Brazos G and/or Region C Water Supply Plans by providing a letter to each planning group describing the water management strategies identified that the participants desire to be included in the regional plans.

Projection Methodology

Population

HOTETC identified 35 cities and utilities as participants of this study. Twenty of these entities are included as Water User Groups (WUGs) in either Brazos G or Region C and have TWDB-developed population and water demand projections. A municipal WUG is identified as a city or census designated place with a 2010 population greater than 500 or a water utility with municipal use greater than 280 acre feet per year (acft/yr).

Population projections for the study participants that fell below the TWDB WUG definition were developed by allocating growth associated with TWDB "County-Other" projections down to these cities and towns. The 2010 census population for each city and town is utilized as the baseline population and subsequently, population projections are developed for each decadal year. The baseline population for water utilities that are not cities or towns is estimated as the number of people served by the water utility in 2012.

For each non-WUG participant, the projected "County-Other" population growth rate associated with each decade (e.g. year 2020 to year 2030) is applied in order to develop their population projections.

Demands and Supplies

Baseline per-person water use values are developed with population served and average consumption data obtained from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Water Utility Database for most study participants. These values are expressed as Gallons Per Capita Daily (GPCD) for the year 2011. GPCD projections for study participants that are WUGs are developed from TWDB population and demand projections. The projected GPCD values for the non-WUG participants decrease over time at a rate that is proportional to the TWDB projected decreases in "County-Other" GPCD for each decade. In most instances, GPCD values for the entities evaluated are expected to decrease due to implementation of standards for water-efficient plumbing fixtures and appliances. The GPCD is held constant during the planning period for Aquilla WSC, Mount Calm, and Penelope due to the relatively low per-person water use that these entities have already achieved. In some cases, the total volume of water that the entity purchased

or obtained in the year 2011 as noted in their Water Use Survey is utilized to develop baseline per-person water use values.

Decadal water demands were projected for each entity by multiplying the population and GPCD projections and expressed in acre-feet per year.

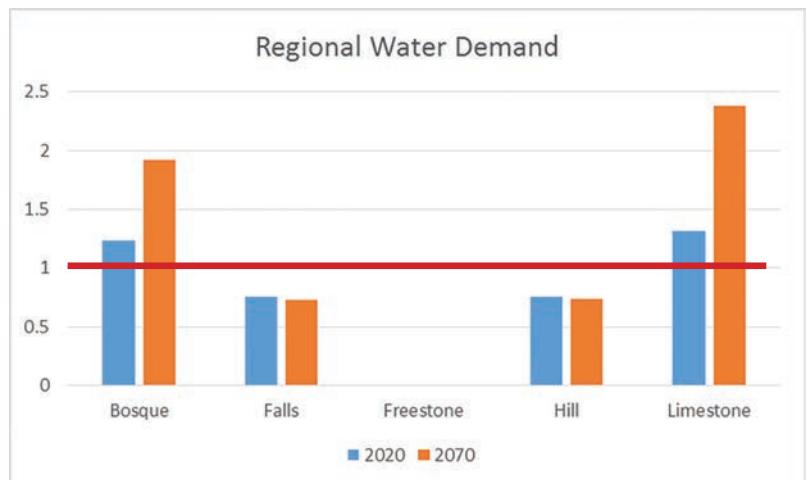
Supplies for entities were identified through the regional water plans and TCEQ database research for well data and supply purchases. Water supply estimates are based on estimates of annual availability. A detailed description of surface water analysis, groundwater availability and infrastructure constraints as applied to WUGs in the Brazos G plan is located in Appendix A.

To refine the planning data, a survey was developed summarizing projected water demands, supplies, and needs for each city and town of interest. Survey participants were requested to review the information that has been collected and provide information regarding drought response measures, emergency connections, and their general concerns related to future water and infrastructure needs.

Summary of Water Demands, Supplies, and Needs

Using the available information described previously, a summary is presented below by county of the total municipal and non-municipal water demands, compared to their available current water supplies and their resulting water surplus or need by decade. Appendix B includes a list of draft demands (including contractual demands) and balances for study participants. Although non-municipal needs are included in the analysis to present an overall picture of county water needs, this study does not consider how to meet those non-municipal needs.

The water surpluses or needs shown for each of the participants are developed using growth projections that are based on trends between 2000 and 2010 and do not show high growth rates. If communities begin to experience higher economic and population growth, then water demands will increase and indicated water surpluses may not be adequate to meet the demand.



The chart above shows each county's water demand relative to its supply. The red line indicates supply, and the blue bars show demand in 2020 while the orange bars show projected demand in 2070. As the chart

Costs and Yields of Summarized Water Management Strategies

Project	Yield (acft/yr)	Total Cost	Annual Cost	Unit Cost	
				\$/acft/yr	\$/1,000 gallons
Conservation				\$475	\$1.46
Supply from Waco	450	\$10,452,000	\$1,466,000	\$3,258	\$10.00
Bosque County Regional Project	1,772	\$24,559,000	\$1,549,000	\$874	\$2.68
Bistone MWSD Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer Development	3,600	\$18,500,000	\$2,000,000	\$556	\$1.70
Groesbeck OCR	1,775	\$10,400,000	\$991,000	\$558	\$1.71
Supply from TRWD	400	\$8,200,000	\$817,000	\$2,043	\$6.27
Lake Whitney Water Supply	7,572	\$110,800,000	\$7,012,000	\$926	\$2.84
Bushy Creek Reservoir	2,090	\$13,300,000	\$950,000	\$455	\$1.39

(Page 19.)

illustrates, water availability varies greatly in the region, and counties with existing shortfalls are projected to grow further behind in the coming decades.

As is projected for Texas as a whole, it is reasonable to assume that the growth projected for Bosque and Limestone Counties will be arrested by the lack of water. In other words, if the growth in population projected by current data would create such a huge water shortage as illustrated in the graph, it is reasonable to assume that the growth would not happen. Instead that growth would funnel toward other destinations where the water supply could accommodate it.

Addressing the water shortages in Bosque and Limestone Counties will require additional reservoirs, and project recommendations are outlined in the water study on pages 17-19. Those projects are:

1. Bosque County Regional Project
2. Lake Whitney Water Supply Project
3. Groesbeck Off-Channel Reservoir
4. Richland Chambers Reservoir
5. Brushy Creek Reservoir

3.3 Economic Development Analysis

3.3.1 HOTEEDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy: Opportunities for Updates Based on Heart of Texas Efficient Towns & Counties Work

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a document prepared by the Heart of Texas Economic Development District (District.) It uses funding and guidance from the Economic Development Administration to undertake an analysis of the prevailing issues of the region and recommend projects – both for the region to pursue on its own and possibly for funding

via one of EDA's many grant programs. The CEDS not only identifies and seeks support for projects; it also pulls many different economic development stakeholders together from all around the region and creates a dialogue among them. This dialogue is itself extremely valuable, as it enhances a regional approach to problem-solving and creates opportunities for knowledge sharing and increased capability within the region.

Looking forward to that process, the Heart of Texas Efficient Towns and Counties Co-op has intentionally carved out the following points and principles taken from this work to inform the next CEDS.

The Efficient Towns & Counties work began with the understanding that local resources were extremely stretched and the jobs that needed doing were immense. Cities and counties joined because they agreed that new thinking and tools were going to be needed in order to meet the challenges of service delivery so the communities could survive and thrive into the future. In serving the Co-op, staff and consultants have uncovered clear direction in the planning community that the Efficient Towns & Counties work is headed in the right direction, and have found support not only for the overall work but in particular for three points we call the Efficient Towns & Counties Principles:

- Use existing dollars
- Strengthen existing assets
- Serve existing customers

Use existing dollars. Look at existing revenues and what can be accomplished within those limits. It may be possible and appropriate to adjust revenues in some way, but that isn't always possible; more often, unfunded projects must be cut from the list.

“The information provided by the program will allow Mexia to make better future decisions by acting on issues brought to light. A proper response will provide Mexia with the best chance for sustainability.” – Tommy Tucker, Mexia Economic Development Corporation President and CEO



This particularly applies to grant or bond projects: the grant or debt issue may pay for something to be constructed, but that money will be gone when it's time for maintenance. Don't build with "special" dollars something that "regular" dollars won't be able to keep in good working order.

Strengthen existing assets. There are empty buildings, underutilized streets, and empty lots throughout the region. Whenever possible it makes sense to improve existing assets and developed areas and take advantage of investments that have already been made. Similarly, it makes sense to support businesses who have already chosen the region.

Serve existing customers. Most of the people and businesses who will populate the region a year from now are already here, and it's more cost-effective and productive to work with them to add value than to focus on potential residents and businesses who may never arrive.

Community Development Work

Qualitative data collected for both the Long-term Engagement Study and the Fair Housing and Equity Assessment identified several strong themes that are significant to economic development planning, including poverty, barriers to economic advancement, and shrinking but still-present divides between racial, age and income groups.

Infrastructure and land use reviews caution against further stretching of limited resources. Economic development plans often involve growth elements such as annexing more area or building industrial parks on the outskirts of town. Projects that get prioritized in the CEDS should be ones that can demonstrate affordability for the long term: not only to construct, but also to maintain. In addition infrastructure projects should be strongly considered as key CEDS projects, possibly including a regional EDA planning project to review several systems and recommend reconfiguration strategies.

Given the realities of declining transportation services, it makes sense for the CEDS to address projects that would increase access to jobs and other resources in at least the following ways: locate more jobs inside cities closer to workers, support development of pedestrian routes connecting neighborhoods and jobs, and support ride-sharing and other vehicle transportation options.

Housing is a significant factor in the region's economic development picture. Parts of the region are characterized by an overabundance of substandard housing, and getting rid of it is a tremendous challenge. In addition in most of the region there is a need for additional housing in many different levels of affordability.

Environmental Development Work

The Solid Waste Management Plan did not identify a scarcity of landfill space or any other solid waste-related issues that create a strong need for intervention

to avert a risk. Similarly the Air Quality work identified relatively few projects that would have a great effect on the region's ozone and ozone precursors. The strongest recommendations, however, would have impacts on economic development and the opportunity is present for economic development planning to take them into account.

Three areas in the region were identified as having serious water needs. The CEDS should identify the priority of water projects addressing these areas and might also fruitfully engage some analysis on the economic impact of the projects' not being completed. Local development projects of all kinds would do well to be conscious of water needs and to design for conservation.

Community-Based Planning Work

The Community-Based Planning work facilitated by the Sam Houston State Center for Rural Studies offers takeaways for the CEDS process. First, it can be powerful simply to get community members together on small things: it creates a model and momentum for the kind of collaboration that will be needed to take on the big issues. Second, in a landscape of dwindling resources it makes sense to leverage the contributions of citizen groups to assist in the betterment of communities.

3.3.2 Community-Based Planning (CBP)

The overall intent of community-based planning is to develop a comprehensive and well-managed plan that individual and associational actors can utilize to guide local community development initiatives. The process directly engages community leaders and the broad-based citizenry in an active effort to move their community from today's reality to tomorrow's possibilities. Examples include:

"Community-based Plan toward the Restoration of Mary Allen College", Crockett, Texas, "Leadership Vernon", the "Vernon Economic Development Planning Session," "Nocona EDC Roundup," "City of Rosebud CBP," "Teague CBP," and "Hubbard CBP."

The goal of community-based planning is to bring local stakeholders together into a productive forum for discussing the future of the community in a productive way. The attention then turns to setting actionable goals that can be accomplished realistically by the individuals involved. The two keys to community-based planning are the incorporation of diverse stakeholders

who normally do not have the opportunity to work together, and a focus on incrementally larger goals and achievements over time.

Sam Houston State University's Center for Rural Studies was chosen as the facilitator for the CBP. The Center has extensive experience in conducting and facilitating local community development processes, including community-based planning. The process utilizes the book *Preparing for the Future: A Guide to Community-Based Planning* by Gene L. Theodori, Ph.D., Founder of the Center for Rural Studies. Facilitators work directly with community members to customize the process to fit local needs.

The process begins with recruitment. Local leadership identifies key stakeholders in the community who are active in the community, and facilitators make an initial presentation to this group, demonstrating how the CBP is designed to move toward an active, conscious community. An active, conscious community is one that not only takes action, but has the ability and awareness to come together meaningfully around difficult issues, work through challenges, and emerge with a solution that is acceptable to most people. Participants debate, interact, and work through simple problems, such as what the mission statement of the community should be, what the community stands for, and what the biggest issues are facing the community. Facilitators work with the community to identify those issues that are highest priority that can be directly addressed by the group itself without significant external support. Once an action plan is in place, facilitators quickly move the group into applied action. Participants are expected to report back to one another and





hold each other accountable for progress in the community. Communities then often create their own working groups to keep up the momentum in perpetuity, identifying new community-driven goals and finding ways to solve them as a team.

CBP was attempted in five communities in the HOTCOG region. Three of these communities, Rosebud, Hubbard, and Marlin, went through the entire process and made substantial accomplishments. In only a few short months, Rosebud transformed from a community with several internal conflicts to a well-functioning team. Hubbard has made quick progress toward solving community problems on four fronts. The community prefers a less formal structure but has

been effective in making progress on early goals. Marlin has been grappling with a divided community and a sense of negativity about what the town has to offer. Their CBP has been aimed at turning around negative thoughts and ideas, and creating a visible “buzz” for people traveling through the community. For more information about the specific projects accomplished in each community, please see Appendix K for the full report. Two communities, Teague and Tehuacana, began but did not complete the process.

The community-based planning process illustrates the power of working not only through, but alongside local governments. Ideas for community-based groups to pursue include:

1. Community beautification, cleanup, and Main Street improvements
2. Coordinating diverse community information sources into one, publicly-available source
3. Taking code enforcement seriously by getting citizens involved in contacting absentee and delinquent landholders
4. Enhancing the small business environment by convening entrepreneurs
5. Connecting citizen groups to projects that typically required grant funding
6. Regional collaboration on strategy development, especially around business development, marketing, and promotion.

3.4 Current approach to problem-solving

Problem-solving in the region has been relatively individualistic, with communities and counties “going it alone” in matters of infrastructure, housing, and community and economic development. There is some collegiality and collaboration among communities. Regional endeavors such as the Heart of Texas Council of Governments, Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, and Heart of Texas Economic Development District have created opportunities for elected officials, subject-matter experts such as businesses or law enforcement, and development professionals to network and address the work of those organizations. Individual professionals occasionally meet with or consult their counterparts regarding particular issues, such as a lunch between several city administrators to discuss current projects. An economic development group in Falls County has been one area of unusually high collaboration, involving elected and appointed officials and interested volunteers from the different cities. In the main, however, issues arise and are responded to reactively, by communities working by themselves.

Several facets of this pattern have changed during the course of the Heart of Texas Efficient Towns & Counties work. First, county work groups have convened several times to address issues related to infrastructure and how to resolve them; these have almost all wound up with some degree of information and equipment-sharing and communication about practices and uses. A second area of change is with the addition of the HOTETC Steering Committee, which convenes a different group of regional stakeholders and representatives than that comprising the

HOTCOG Executive Committee or other committees. While the Executive Committee is made up of three elected officials per county and the various Advisory Committees are made up of subject-specific representatives (again, such as law enforcement,) the HOTETC Steering Committee has a representative from every single community and is a mix of elected and appointed officials, including public works folks, city administrators, etc. This creates a different dynamic – one more geared to implementation and improvement of day-to-day efforts.



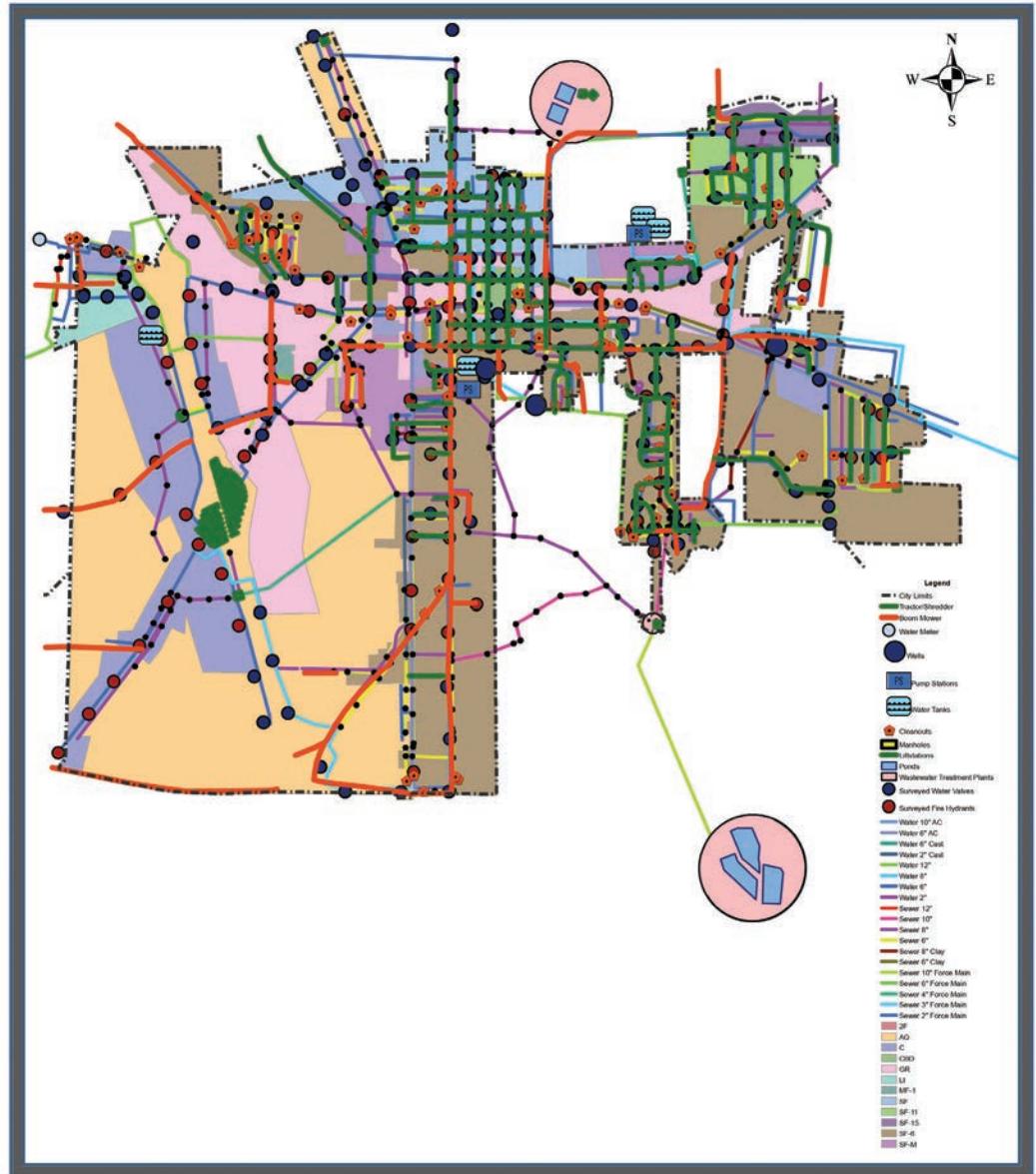
SECTION 4: REGIONAL PRIORITIES, STRATEGIES, AND

“We’ve been working in Fairfield to locate hydrants and valves. We caught many, many that were not where the maps said they were, so we got them updated. Then we overlaid those locations with the water line map and saw where the valves were on one side of the street, but the map says the line is on other side. So now even though we haven’t gone out to locate that line, we know where it is and can fix it on the map.”

– Aaron McMillan, Managing Partner with 1519 Surveying

“This has the ability to give us such good information about what we have. We’re creating a data set that’s going to be there, where we can see maintenance records, etc. This is going to be an asset for a long, long time.”

– Jeff Looney, City Administrator for Fairfield



4.1 Summary of needs and problems

The Heart of Texas Region is a wonderful place to live, work, raise a family, retire, or just have fun. Its communities and countryside display a variety of topographies, natural beauty, and range of attractions. In order to protect and enhance the region’s viability and quality of life, there are a number of issues that offer opportunities for improvement.

After reviewing previous research and existing data and conducting the studies described in the previous section of this report (and included as Appendices,) the following major needs were revealed.

- The region’s water treatment, water distribution, waste water collection, wastewater treatment, drainage, and street systems are worn out.
- Parts of the region do not have sufficient water supply.
- The region’s housing stock is inadequate, both because

of too many substandard structures and because of too little safe, attractive housing at all affordability levels.

- The region’s small business economy is in transition, with many communities’ businesses making do with fewer customers and a changing consumer base impacted by not only big box stores but also online sales of goods and services.
- The cumulative effect of these challenges is not just keeping communities from improving. Some are getting worse: seeing reductions in services and in quality of life, as systems fail and residents have fewer choices of housing, shopping, and recreation.
- Finally, residents report that they aren’t working together as much or as effectively as they could – as much as they will need to in order to meet these challenges. Barriers still exist between generations, between races, and between longtime and new members of communities.

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS



4.1.1 Community Development Recommendations 4.1.1.1HOTETC Long-term Engagement Recommendations

Timeline	Recommendation	Tasks
6 Months	1	Create a Director of Community Engagement position within HOTCOG.
	2	Form a committee with the purpose of addressing community engagement in the region.
	3	Hold “Small Business and Industry Building” workshops within the communities.
	4	Work with community leaders to identify and nurture opportunities for diverse community involvement.
12 Months	1	The Director of Community Engagement will continuously engage in conversations with a diverse representation of community members and leaders.
	2	The committee hosts leadership capacity building seminars within the counties.
	3	Acquire an economic development grant that will be used to encourage economic growth within communities.
	4	Host a series of appropriate diversity trainings within the communities.
18 Months	1	The Director of Community Engagement will begin to create a plan to increase volunteerism and community engagement, in collaboration with community leaders.
	2	The committee engages in local government meetings and county events.
	3	Introduce Community Benefit Agreements to communities.
	4	Incorporate skills and identified strengths of diverse community individuals and groups to plan and host a community event with an emphasis on increasing participation among diverse groups.
24 Months	1	The Director of Community Engagement, alongside community leaders, will implement a long-term plan to increase volunteerism and community engagement in the region.
	2	The committee establishes an internship program for social work students from accredited universities.
	3	Create and implement an annual community economic assessment.
	4	Evaluate the community event and create a plan for continued growth in diverse participation.

4.1.1.2 Infrastructure Strategies

Overall Priority Strategies: What Should My City / County Consider First?	
Adopt the Efficiency Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend existing dollars • Strengthen existing assets • Serve existing customers
Reduce infrastructure maintenance backlog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use new GIS mapping tools to build increasing system and maintenance records and plan improvements more efficiently • Lower service levels in less important areas to focus resources on essential ones • Right--size water and sewer rates based on the cost of providing the services, including system repair and maintenance • Increase regional ability to make improvements by sharing equipment and expertise
Detailed Steps and Strategies: What are some specific steps my City / County might consider?	
Water and Sewer System Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to GIS maps the size and composition of water and sewer lines • Add to maps the history of CDBG improvement projects: what was done and when • Add to maps the areas where most leaks and repairs occur • Add to maps the results of any recent smoke tests to identify where improvements were called for but not made • Continue to add information about lines as repairs are made or new things are discovered • Review map data to identify areas where projects are needed • Explore volunteer support for infrastructure projects of all kinds. Community members have expressed a desire to pitch in, both in labor and expertise.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify problem areas and price fixing them: replacing all remaining cast iron pipes, etc • Reorganize the budget to allow for maintenance of good lines and replacement of bad ones • Share expertise: skilled operators could be assets to more than one community • Find someone to train local crew in installing new line; consider making a YouTube video or other record that can be referred to over and over for training. • Budget for modest line replacement projects in areas CDBG will not cover and/or small parts of system. • Consider a formal asset management plan for the water plant, storage and distribution systems to evaluate their condition and how to maintain them most efficiently
Sewer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify problem areas and price fixing them: replacing all remaining clay pipes, etc • Reorganize the budget to allow for maintenance of good lines and replacement of bad ones • Find someone to train local crew to do smoke test to identify openings to sewer system • Conduct smoke testing one small area at a time to identify both public and private property locations of infiltration and inflow. Focus on following up with each of those locations before moving on to a new area. • Use code enforcement to require the capping of sewer inlets on private property • On public property, either resolve issues quickly or – if complicated – add to capital improvement plan for the following year. • Consider a formal asset management plan for the wastewater treatment plant to identify regular operation and maintenance protocols and ensure adequate maintenance budget • There may be small line replacement projects that can be done with local crew, but often sewer lines are deep and better addressed by a private contractor.

<p>Streets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that a street is not a surface: pavement is optional, structural base layer is not. A functional, drivable street does not have to be paved, but it does have to be maintained regularly. • Access existing thoroughfare study and add its contents to GIS map • Add to maps the width, composition and condition of streets • Determine appropriate improvement level for different level streets based on the annual maintenance costs of each street type and the number of feet of each type in the city. For some streets this may result in upgrade, for others, downgrade; but the goal should be to find the level that can be maintained in good functional order regularly year after year • Adjust capital improvement plan and budget accordingly • Inform residents of the improvement level assigned to their street. • Test priority streets for depth of base material and composition of soil to determine stabilization requirements • Use maps to determine materials cost for priority streets to be reclaimed and resurfaced • Reclaim priority streets with local manpower and regional equipment • Resurface priority streets with regional manpower and equipment • Depave non–priority streets by grinding and grading them. If funds permit, use a fog or slurry seal to protect them.
<p>Sidewalks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify city pedestrian assets and private pedestrian assets • Inform residents that they will be responsible for maintaining private pedestrian assets • Identify and implement alternative pedestrian amenities (instead of sidewalks)
<p>Drainage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access existing drainage study and add its contents to GIS map • Identify city drainage assets and private drainage assets • Inform residents that they will be responsible for maintaining private drainage assets • Identify the necessary equipment and reconfiguration necessary for routine, consistent maintenance of city drainage assets
<p>Regional Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a regional water and sewer rate study, to include both rate structure and what is being paid for (including each community's # feet of lines per capita, calculated from maps) • Water management planning with citizen/landholder input • Construction cost review: water line installation, sewer line installation, street reconstruction (full–depth reclamation), street surfacing by method • Shared professional services – group community projects to drive down individual cost to each city or WSC: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asset management plans 2. Water system operation, etc. • Explore shared workers. Every city and water supply corporation is currently on its own trying to staff licensed operators, people who can run equipment, know street repair, etc. Part of a really good operator is better than none – and may be cheaper than a contract service. • Cooperate on equipment purchase or rental, such as <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bow–mag or smaller grinding equipment for street reclamation 2. Rollers: sheep's foot, steel–wheel 3. Belly–dump for stabilizing materials 4. Smoke testing equipment 5. Sewer camera equipment • As a region, explore using volunteers to assist in public works projects. Community meeting attendees expressed a willingness to pitch in, and community–based planning points to the benefits of volunteers working alongside city governments. Involving community in infrastructure projects is a great way of helping them really “get” how important they are, which is vital to maintaining the resolve needed to continue improvement over time.

4.1.1.3 Land Use Recommendations

Discourage development that would overextend infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass an ordinance limiting the extension of water and sewer infrastructure. • Review subdivision and lot--size regulations to encourage appropriate density and discourage "infrastructure creep." • Cut off all other city services at the city limits (i.e., police, etc) or explore a way to capture revenue to cover them
Capture actual costs of existing sprawl development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase water and sewer rates for out--of--town users in proportion to the extra cost of providing those services. • Explore an out--of--limit payer system in lieu of taxes
Make it easy and cost--effective to locate in town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressively pursue foreclosure, abatement, and resale of tax--delinquent properties. For example, the City of Waco is moving now to sell such properties for 10% of the appraised value
Learn more about the issue as a region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a regional review of per--capita infrastructure to measure the burden of low--density land use

4.1.1.4 Transportation Recommendations

Plan For and Sustain the Coordination Planning Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively coordinate transportation through a Regional Transportation Coordinating Council representing the entire six--county HOTCOG area via quarterly (or more) meetings.
Sustain the Rural Community--to--Waco Connectivity Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a service route between employment centers in Waco and underserved populations in Falls County
5310 Funding --Purchase of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide service to elderly and disabled populations using 5310 funding
Increase Utilization of Public Transportation for Aging and Persons with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide service to elderly and disabled populations using 5311 funding to supplement limited 5310 funds.



4.1.1.5 FHEA Recommendations

This entire project of greater coordination and long--term planning and management of community development, environmental development, and economic development is the best way to increase fair housing and equity across the region, because a systems approach is the only way communities will be able to afford the transformation indicated by this analysis. Sub--goals and objectives follow:

<p>Local Housing Policy that Encourages Quality and Affordability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage (and if possible, incentivize) investment in the quality of existing housing stock • Mandate the repair or removal of substandard housing • Identify and pursue new affordable housing options that are sensitive to local fears based on previous “bad” housing projects, such as tiny houses, duplexes, and small multifamily developments • Incentivize development within the city limits and disincentivize development outside the city limits
<p>Local Transportation Infrastructure that Works for Cars, Bikes, and Pedestrians</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and implement street maintenance that is affordable enough to be used on all roadways regularly enough to keep surfaces smooth and crowned • Identify pedestrian routes on all arterial roadways. If sidewalks are present, they should be maintained. If sidewalks are not present, the roadway should be wide enough to accommodate a pedestrian/bike lane • Incentivize development within the city limits and disincentivize development outside the city limits
<p>Code Enforcement and Development Policy that Builds Neighborhoods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt and enforce “prudent person” standards that are easy to understand • Fund the execution of improvements with liens to properties • Aggressively divest of trustee-held properties for redevelopment
<p>City Management that Manages Assets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt and follow capital improvements plans • Remove from the plan activities that aren’t affordable • Invest in maintenance and operating reserves
<p>Economic Development that Serves Residents First</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize business retention and expansion • Incentivize jobs for locals, entry-level workers, and OJT • Use claw-back provisions • Invest in workforce training, beginning in local public school

4.1.2 Environmental Development Recommendations

4.1.2.1 Regional Solid Waste Management Plan recommendations

OBJECTIVES

GOALS	OBJECTIVES		
	Short Term (1-5 Years)	Intermediate Term (6-10 Years)	Long Term (11-20 Years)
1 Promote Integrated Solid Waste Management Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand residential collection services to currently underserved areas Improve service to underserved areas through construction of new strategically located citizens' collection stations. Maximize capacity and efficiency of recycling operations Maximize capacity and efficiency of landfills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to address underserved areas as warranted by needs and population growth of the HOTCOG region, e.g., expand citizens' collection stations, as needed Address recycling needs in response to changes in market dynamics of recycled commodities Address capacity issues, as warranted by current capacity of integrated waste management system (e.g., expand landfill(s)) Continue to monitor the development of waste-to-energy and waste conversion technologies and implement, when feasible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the development of transfer stations, as needed to address efficiencies of transporting MSW to disposal/processing facilities Continue to monitor the development of waste-to-energy and waste conversion technologies and implement when feasible
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop public education materials about solid waste management and recycling Increase public awareness of the importance of stopping illegal dumping Increase public awareness through clean-up events such as Waste Tire Amnesty Days Encourage community programs through school curricula, advertising campaigns, environmental programs, and volunteer organizations Encourage local efforts to stop illegal dumping Clarify local government responsibilities and encourage use of litter abatement officers with a vision of establishing a regional task force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In view of continuous evolution of the solid waste management system, continue to update the public on proper MSW management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In view of continuous evolution of the solid waste management system, continue to update the public on proper MSW management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize available grant funds for local plans, illegal dumping enforcement, and development of collection stations Provide updates and distribution of the regional solid waste information system Promote and encourage grant and loan funds from federal, state, and private sector institutions to comply with the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to monitor the availability of grants and pursue grant funding consistent with HOTCOG's goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to monitor the availability of grants and pursue grant funding consistent with HOTCOG's goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage public and private partnership efforts Support reduction of HHW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the need, feasibility and public interest of a regional HHW collection facility(s) or mobile facility(s) Recommend the development and use of alternative non-HHW products 	
2 Encourage Public Education and involvement in integrated solid waste management			
3 Encourage and Promote Funding Availability to Ensure Regional and Local Implementation of this Plan			
4 Encourage the Development of HHW and Diversion Programs			

4.1.2.2 Ozone Control Strategies

Sector	Control Measure No.	Description	Potential Reduction of NOx (tpd)	Qualitative Rating ^b
On-road Mobile	1	Truck stop electrification/APUs	0.2	Low
	2	Cleaner diesel beyond TxLED	0.2	Low
	3	Retrofit local HDDV ^a	1.0	Medium
	4	Repower/replace local HDDV	1.4	Medium
	5	Driver training	0.2	Low
	6	Compressed workweek	0.01	Low
Off-road Mobile	7	Engine retrofit with SCR	0.75	Low
	8	Engine repower/replacement	3	Medium
Oil & Gas	9	Retrofit 4-cycle rich-burn compressor engines	8-16	High
	10	Replace 2-cycle lean-burn compressor engines	2.4	Medium
	11	Repower drill rig engines	2.4	Medium

^a HDDV is the abbreviation for heavy duty diesel vehicles.

^b Qualitative Impact categories include: Low (NOx impact < 1 tpd), Medium (NOx impact between 1 and 5 tpd), and High (NOx impact > 5 tpd)

4.1.2.3 HOTETC Water Needs and Strategies

Recommended Strategies for Study Participants with Projected Water Needs

WUG	County	Balance 2020	Balance 2070	Strategies
CHILDRESS CREEK WSC	Bosque	39	(15)	Bosque County Regional Project
CROSS COUNTRY WSC	Bosque	37	(141)	Conservation
VALLEY MILLS	Bosque	35	(1)	Conservation, Bosque County Regional Project
WEST BRAZOS WSC	Falls	(109)	(118)	System Interconnections, purchase from Waco or Central Texas WSC
STREETMAN	Freestone	40	(68)	TRWD/Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer
TEAGUE	Freestone	470	(49)	Conservation, Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer ₁ /TRWD/Groesbeck
WORTHAM	Freestone	(168)	(343)	Increase contract with Mexia/Corsicana/TRWD
COOLIDGE	Limestone	(104)	(127)	Bistone MWSD
GROESBECK	Limestone	(705)	(703)	Groesbeck OCR
MART	Limestone	0	(2)	System Interconnections, Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer ₁
TRI-COUNTY SUD	Limestone	(80)	(84)	Groesbeck OCR, Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer ₁
KOSSE	Limestone	(80)	(90)	Groesbeck OCR, Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer ₁



4.1.2.4 Drought Preparedness: Water Management Recommendations

<p>Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each entity should have a plan that identifies specific, quantifiable 5- and 10-year targets for water savings. • Plan should be based on the individual community's characteristics such as population, water supply, cost, and expected demand changes; and should be updated annually
<p>Demand Management Tools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing water rates for higher amounts (i.e. more for the 3rd extra 1000 than for the second) • Limits on lawn watering and car-washing to certain days • Preferences for drip-type irrigation, water catchment systems and water-conserving plumbing fixtures
<p>Infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of municipal water distribution infrastructure, loss management and leak control

4.1.3 Economic Development Recommendations

Regionally there is recognition that economic development does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, communities' ability to compete for jobs and investment depends on their ability to retain residents, customers, and workers. In meeting after meeting, citizens recognized that their towns' and counties' futures depend on meeting basic needs; and that economic development must be consistent, complementary, and supportive of those primary goals.

4.1.3.1 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



Direct Guidance for CEDS Development from Other Plans	
Efficiency Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing dollars. • Strengthen existing assets. • Serve existing customers.
Long Term Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on poverty reduction • Thoughtfully involve participants from a variety of backgrounds
Infrastructure and Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use cost/benefit analysis to determine whether potential projects fit within local maintenance budgets prior to inclusion in CEDS • Include infrastructure-improvement projects in CEDS project list • Prioritize planning and implementation related to reconfiguring infrastructure systems to reach a more efficient operation design
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize removal of existing blighted housing stock • Support projects to increase housing stock, both affordable and market-rate, throughout the region
Air Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support projects that would imbed air quality control measures within economic development efforts, such as with emissions-control in oil and gas projects in Freestone County
Water Supply / Drought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Groesbeck Off-Channel Reservoir • Support Bosque County Regional Project • Support Freestone County Regional Project
Community-Based Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include as projects those efforts that can be operated by local volunteer organizations • Focus as much on small, achievable projects as on larger ones that would require outside resources • Show local efforts as evidence of engagement, investment and follow-through



“We’re so pleased to have been part of this process. Now we’re getting close to cap-and-gown time with your communities. If you look at the root of the word, commencement is not an ending, but a beginning. What’s so exciting to us is that now, we go to Marlin and hear about Rosebud, to Kosse and hear about Marlin, to Hubbard and hear about the rest of the region. You’re energized about what is going on around you and among you. This is a new way of being community - heightened engagement - and we’re energized and invigorated to hear what’s going on. We’re looking forward to being a part of this as it wraps up and beyond.” – Michael Fortunato, Director of the SHSU Center for Rural Studies

4.1.3.2 Community-Based Planning

Continue Community-Based Planning and Focus Efforts on Complementary Improvements	
Community beautification, cleanup, and Main Street improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gardening initiatives, festivals, and public events • Local artisan contributions like murals, planters, and Main Street improvements
Coordinating diverse community information sources into one, publicly-available source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting these community “news networks” with formal media outlets to direct attention to community events - improving the community’s image across the region • Developing welcome and orientation materials for incoming and potential residents, including locally-supported welcome baskets, orientation events, and signage
Taking code enforcement seriously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting citizens involved in contacting absentee and delinquent landholders
Enhancing the small business environment by convening entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group strategy sessions to build teamwork across former competitors, to help them compete “as a region” • Developing a commercial identity that attracts customers and enhances local demand for local products and services
Connecting citizen groups to projects that typically required grant funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building youth participation by creating youth-focused community service and apprenticeship events • Boosting volunteerism by connecting volunteers more effectively with local needs
Strategy development, especially around business development, marketing, and promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the business environment of their community • Expanding commercial and industrial offerings there • Continued relationship building across communities to identify the potential developmental strengths of each • Crafting a common identity that can serve as a marketing strategy for the entire region

4.1.3.3 Other Strategies from Scenario Planning Process

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Local Strategies		Uses Existing Dollars	Serves Existing Businesses	Builds Quality of Life	Attracts New Businesses
Main Street	The Main Street Program is designed to use a slim public budget to leverage private-sector investment both of dollars and of time (volunteerism).	X	X	X	X
Business Startup, Retention and Expansion	Establish a Business Retention Committee of (Main Street, Chamber, EDC or partnership) supported by volunteers and operate a business retention program. HOTEDD can advise about how to operate, but in a nutshell it means identifying critical local businesses and then visiting each of them every 1-3 years or so to make sure they are getting what they need in order to stay strong and healthy.	X	X	X	X
	Operate a Shop Hillsboro First campaign and work very hard to ensure that as few dollars as possible leave town. To do this well you'll need to make the case to residents—sometimes local costs a little more, and you'll need to show why the investment is worth it.	X	X	X	X
	Identify a person prospective startups can contact if they have questions or need resources to help them figure out their path. This might be Main Street, Chamber, EDC, an existing business, or a staff person at the City or HOTCOG. Publicize this person's contact information so folks know whom to call or to refer people to.	X		X	X
Business Climate	Identify key business districts and make sure they are served by reliable infrastructure and services.	X	X	X	X
	Identify what skills businesses are looking for in employees and work with high school and volunteer organizations on possible training opportunities.		X	X	X
	Explore an internship or job shadowing program where high school students spend time in several locally-owned businesses.		X	X	X
	Improve housing and other quality of life issues.		X	X	X
Regional Strategies					
Business Startup, Retention and Expansion	Empower the COG, SBDC, SCORE, and/or others to provide customized small business counseling in the region.	X	X		X
	Employ regional data solutions for small businesses and relocations.		X		X
Business Climate	Develop regional best practices for business-friendly cities.	X	X	X	X



LOCAL STRATEGIES	
Use scarce local funds to leverage private sector action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce local codes about substandard buildings, junked vehicles, overgrown grass and trash • Implement an interlocal agreement with the County and HISD to first abate and maintain, and then to sell for a nominal fee (i.e. 20% of appraised value) properties that have been struck off to the taxing entities. • Explore a cooperative agreement with Hill County to rebate both City and County taxes on improvements, in an amount equal to five years' worth, up front to help cover the cost of improvements. • Encourage growth of volunteer cleanup efforts, such as church--supported home improvements for needy individuals. • Group projects to create greater impact: demolition of substandard housing, church--sponsored home repair for needy family, neighborhood cleanup, all within a block or two. • Consider involving civic--minded people in investing in neighborhoods. For example, buy 2 lots and pay city to mow them, as a long--term investment in the city's future. Helps share the cost and gets more people with "skin in the game."
Strengthen existing housing and infrastructure assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize and incentivize renovation and repair of existing homes. • Incentivize infill construction as appropriate, but do not incentivize construction outside the service of existing infrastructure.
Serve existing residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify what types of housing are needed and work to identify either existing resources (gather information about houses and apartments for sale or rent, etc.). • Ensure that existing rental properties meet standards of quality and safety.
REGIONAL STRATEGIES	
Develop a regional housing development program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revive housing as a regional issue addressed by the Heart of Texas Economic Development District. • Recruit builders interested in projects in rural communities. • Identify regional realtors specializing in rural areas and convene them regularly to learn the greatest issues and challenges in rural housing market.

Strategies to Build Quality of Life

TOP PRIORITY	Make “Clean and Safe” an essential requirement. Establish what it will take to attain and maintain the impression that the town / county is clean and safe, and protect the resources needed to do this.
General guidance from Efficiency Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In considering how to allocate scarce dollars, focus on those quality-of-life enhancing issues that are high priorities for their own sake, such as infrastructure and business development. Other areas that are also important, but not as high in terms of priority – such as recreation – might be areas to approach with volunteers or other resources. • Consider quality of life to be enhanced by the reliability of the asset as well as the asset itself. A park with extensive play equipment that isn’t maintained may not be any better than a park with just swing sets that are always in good shape and ready to use. • Making existing assets work well is more important than adding new assets, and Meridian has a great list of quality-of-life enhancing assets if they all work well. • To find out what quality-of-life assets are most important, ask the people who use them now. Existing residents are the best test of what people think is valuable. Consider making the things they use as good as possible; if there are things that aren’t used, ask why. Maybe some assets could be removed from the list to free up resources for the really valued ones. • If the City engages an asset management plan, consider adding the most-valued quality-of-life assets to it to ensure their maintenance is budgeted for and they’re protected for the future.
Safety and Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain public safety via police department, neighborhood watch, etc. • Ensure stability between city council and city administration changes
Health and Health Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain access to hospital, clinic, and service providers • Assure continued or strengthened transportation options to assist residents in reaching health care
Environment and Access to Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain parks, open spaces, and trees inside city limits • Enforce regulations against illegal dumping • Enforce regulations against trash, overgrown grass, and junked vehicles
Income and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue smart economic development • Address poverty as a whole-community issue, not just affecting poor
Cost of Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote local businesses to keep access up and costs down
Equality and Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote inclusion and access across gender, race, and income lines
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local school district • Support and enhance public library services to increase opportunities for distance learning, jobseeking, and training
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize infrastructure improvements (see greater detail, above)
Family and Community Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote all organizations that create community events and programs, including churches, clubs etc. • Maintain shared calendar and strong local communication to directly invite residents to participate, even if they’re not “members”
Culture and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate school activities as community cultural opportunities • Pursue art and performance exhibits and events that might visit town • Collaborate to create and expand new cultural opportunities • Maintain modest but solid facilities: library, parks
Healthy Business Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work very hard to support existing businesses by purchasing locally • Operate a simple business retention program to maintain knowledge of local business needs and assist with meeting them • Recognize that businesses are vital and enact policies that treat them fairly • Don’t “give away the store” for new businesses, but work to meet their needs
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner on regional transportation projects • Work to be even more walkable and bikeable by improving pedestrian routes
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve existing neighborhoods and housing stock by enforcing codes, removing abandoned structures, and maintaining public property • Incentivize construction of new homes inside city limits
Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support high construction and design standards
<p>Quality of life is a very localized concept; we expect the regional projects listed in other areas to assist with this rather than identifying separate regional quality-of-life strategies.</p>	

Community Engagement Strategies

LOCAL STRATEGIES	
Spend existing revenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When local revenues are spent, it's a good idea to get input from volunteer groups and organizations who work hard to support the assets the revenues affect.
Strengthen existing assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know which community assets are important to citizens and focus on those. A great way to measure community priority of an asset is whether there are people working to support and use it Existing volunteers are an incredible resource and should not be taken for granted. Celebrate and strengthen these existing assets by recognizing their efforts both formally and informally.
Serve existing customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While we all appreciate those members of the community who “show up and show out” as part of a volunteer effort, consider the many reasons why others don't participate. Some are physically unable and others are limited by their time or other resources – but the greatest number are probably simply unaware of the need and haven't been personally invited, so they figure someone else has it all figured out. Consider “serving the existing customers” not just by providing volunteer services to them – but also by energetically inviting them to volunteer themselves.
Use volunteers to assist in community priority areas to free up funding for other critical needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold cleanup and beautification activities throughout the community Have an “adopt-a-spot” program where volunteers maintain critical areas of town so they always look nice Train volunteers to assist with ongoing programs, like code enforcement, business mentoring and business retention
Strengthen existing volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify how volunteers will be recruited, retained, and recognized for their service. Folks don't really do it for the “thank you,” but a little appreciation goes a long way. This will probably be a volunteer position too! Consider volunteers major stakeholders and community investors. Just like the business climate, a good “volunteer climate” means that people who invest in building up local assets are consulted, listened to, and taken seriously.
Involve new volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach out to people who don't yet volunteer, but make it personal. A general invitation can often feel like “it's not really meant for me.” Tell people why you think they'd be great, what skills or talents they could add, and why the important work will be done better if they are there. People often need to know they're really needed and wanted before they try new things. Consider doing things differently. Trying to reach out to the younger generation? Use Facebook. Younger than that? Use Instagram. Incorporate music (maybe even music you don't personally enjoy.) Try to anticipate what might make someone else feel welcome.
REGIONAL STRATEGIES	
Develop a regional community engagement program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the regional Community Engagement Advisory Committee to identify how to build engagement and share tools among communities Develop a youth version of this group to capture the enthusiasm of the next generation and create buy-in for their hometowns Staff these efforts at HOTCOG, possibly but not exclusively using interns from Baylor School of Social Work and other areas, to assist in implementation and connection region-wide



4.2 Regional priorities

The region's priorities were very consistent. In the 13 scenario planning meetings held in 11 cities, there was a high degree of emphasis on the following issues, in the following order.

1. Infrastructure
2. Water Supply
3. Business Development / Housing / Quality of Life
4. Community Engagement

Other issues that were highly important, but to fewer communities were:

- Industrial Development
- Recruitment of residents and businesses into the city limits
- The need to attract development inside city limits
- Meridian's mismatch between jobs and jobseekers
- Marlin's location advantage for both residents and businesses
- Clifton's tourism development
- Marlin's workforce
- Hillsboro's commercial development along the interstate
- The opportunity presented by growth in nearby population centers
- Air quality in Freestone County

4.3 Regional toolkit and strategies

Summary of strategies and action recommendations

- Adopt regional and local strategies consistent with the following Efficiency Principles
 - o Spend existing dollars
 - o Strengthen existing assets
 - o Serve existing customers

- Reduce infrastructure maintenance backlog by
 - o Using new GIS mapping tools to build increasing system and maintenance records and plan improvements more efficiently
 - o Lowering service levels in less important areas to focus resources on essential ones
 - o Right-sizing water and sewer rates based on the cost of providing the services, including system repair and maintenance
 - o Increasing regional ability to make improvements by sharing equipment and expertise
- Pursue water supply solutions by creating sub-regional partnerships and pursuing projects in Bosque County, Limestone/Freestone County, Groesbeck and Marlin
- Improve housing quality by enforcing ordinances, removing dilapidated structures, and incentivizing new and renovated housing development
- Support small businesses in ways that also serve other goals, including business retention, building improvement, and small-business mentorship programs
- To preserve and enhance quality of life, deliver "Clean and Safe" – then protect and enhance existing amenities, and only last add new amenities or services
- Work with existing and reach out to potential new community volunteers, not only to secure their assistance with the issues mentioned above, but also to win their increased engagement, sense of belonging, and pride in their community

