

Inventory Transportation Resources

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What is a Council of Governments (COG)?

- Authorized under Local Government Code 391 in 1965
- The purpose of this chapter is to encourage and permit local governmental units to:
 - join and cooperate to improve the health, safety, and general welfare of their residents; and
 - plan for the future development of communities, areas, and regions so that:
 - Transportation is improved
 - Public Health grows
 - Agriculture and Business are recognized
 - Healthful Surroundings are recognized
 - Historical and Cultural Values are Preserved
 - Efficient and Economical Use of public funds is commensurate

What We Are Not:

- Transportation Providers
 - PRPC has no direct transportation services.
- Metropolitan Planning Organization
 - Staff Member Sits on Amarillo MPO
- Services Provider
 - As such not a major destination of public Transportation

We Do Lots of Planning

- Area Agency on Aging
- Dispute Resolution
- Regional 9-1-1 Services
- Workforce Development
- Regional Services
 - Criminal Justice
 - Emergency Preparedness
 - Solid Waste Mgmt.
- Local Government Services
 - Economic Development
 - Regional Transportation
 - Water Planning
 - Local Services
 - Parks
 - Infrastructure

What Role do they Play in Transportation?

- Began Public Transportation Planning in 2006
 - Adopted first regional plan in 2007
 - Utilized consultant for first plan development
 - By 2011 over 90% of identified strategies implemented
- Serve as a neutral meeting and planning entity
 - Private, urban, and rural transportation providers now talk
 - Forum for service providers to meet with transportation
- Conducted comprehensive update with 2011 Plan
 - Developed Plan Internally
 - Utilized Strategic Planning Methods from other planning

Why an Inventory?

- Utilized philosophies from Regional Water Planning
 - Identify available resources
 - Establish localized demand
 - Identify gaps between resources and demand (Needs)
 - Generate viable strategies to address Needs
- Established Comprehensive Processes to:
 - Find where resources are
 - Where in the region are transportation resources?
 - What is the availability of those resources?
 - What restrictions are there on those resources?
 - Establish Demand
 - What to Service Providers see as transportation needs
 - What do transportation users see as needs

How Do You Do An Inventory?

- Make Friends
 - Establish Relationships
 - Involve key members in planning group
 - Spend time explaining why regional transportation planning is important
 - These friends will be the people you are asking for information
- Listen to Smart People
 - Utilize experts to help design questions
 - What they want to know is what it is important to find out
 - Recognize that different groups want different information
 - Don't limit the information you are looking for to what others have done.

Parameters

- This is what has worked in our region
 - Each region will likely be very different
- This is a hybrid of what we have done and what we plan on doing this next time
 - We learned some lessons (good and bad)
- Realize that we are looking for more than:
 - “How many busses are in Roberts County”

Step 1: Research

- Identify everyone in the region providing public transportation
 - MPO (City Public Transportation)
 - Rural Public Transportation Providers
 - We are lucky there is only 1 major in our region
 - School Districts
 - Senior Care Facilities
 - Churches
 - Rehabilitative Services Companies
 - Taxi & Private Bus Companies
 - Home Health Care Providers
 - Others that come to the table

Step 2: Communicate (most important step)

- Communicate with each transportation provider
 - Call them to tell them who you are
 - Request a visit so they know you are not a salesman
 - Invite them to a planning meeting
 - Invite some of them to be on the Planning Group
 - Actually listen to what they say
 - Don't have a pre-explanation for what you think they will say
 - Just chat about the industry
 - We had to learn about different bus types and pay methods
 - This is also a great way to learn about other providers
 - Once a relationship is established
 - Then you can get contact information
- Ensure your list of transportation providers is comprehensive

Step 3: Develop A Survey

- 2 Options on Survey Types
 - Short – More likely to get returned
 - Long – Get much more information
 - We opted for long (7 pages)
 - We banked on the relationship resulting in good response
- Utilize a Focus Group
 - Take the experts and put them around the table
 - Snowball ideas and brainstorm
 - Establish the most important questions to ask
- Get you a “Survey Guy”
 - We utilized the local University
 - Ensure questions are logical and not loaded
 - Use the term “Survey Methodology” – they love it

Step 4: Get the Survey Out

- Final Input from your Planning Group
 - Many of them will be taking it
 - Can prevent embarrassing errors
- Call Each Recipient and Let Them Know its Coming
 - Leave Messages as Appropriate
 - Don't be harassing – Just a Friendly Heads-Up
- Mail the Things out
 - Utilize clearly marked envelopes
 - Provide pre-paid return envelope
- This is 2015 – Why not just email?
 - Because the email often gets deleted before it is opened
 - This is an unfortunate truth these days

Step 5: Don't Hate on Technology

- Put a survey option online
 - We utilized Qualtrics because of its linear regression capacity
 - Survey Monkey is a cheaper option
 - Some people feel this is a quicker option to take the survey online
- Be user friendly (and flexible)
 - Allow people to submit online (from a link in a cover letter); or
 - Allow people to submit hard copy via pre-paid envelope
 - We actually ended up entering the hard copies into Qualtrics when they came in for tabulation purposes

Step 6: Receive the Information

- Ensure the Information Comes in as Uniform as Possible
 - Much easier to analyze and tabulate
- Thank each entity for submitting when you get it in
 - You will likely be following up someday
- Enter data from the hard copies as it comes in
 - It can become overwhelming if you let it stack up
- Track who you still need information from
 - It is amazing how often you run across people and if you know their status you can get things in casual conversation

Step 7: Follow-up without being Annoying

- After a month:
 - Send a reminder packet to everyone that has not responded
 - Offer to be available via phone call if they need help
- After 6 weeks:
 - Call your friends that have still not responded
 - Be respectful of their time, but...
- After 2 months:
 - Call one more time and offer to walk them through

Step 8: Tabulate the Data

- Utilize the tools available to you
 - Xcel is great for building a basic database
 - If you use Qualtrics it will tabulate and analyze data for you
 - Your local university likely has the SPSS software that has gotten very easy to use
 - Your Xcel Spreadsheet can even be imported
 - It depends on what you want to do

Step 9: Inventory the Data

- This is the most basic function of this process
 - List the assets by type and owner
 - List the assets by type and location
 - List the assets by availability
- Step 2 of the Inventory would be to
 - Identify assets by age
 - Identify assets by mileage
 - Identify assets by public/private
- Why?: Because what each asset can legally do is very different
 - It depends on:
 - How it was funded
 - Who owns it
 - What it is being used for

Step 10: Go Super Nerdy

- You went to all of this trouble to inventory these assets
 - If like us you used a long survey you have lots of information
- Conduct a linear regression on multiple factors
 - This establishes correlations between 2 factors
 - For example:
 - Age of bus correlates to public or private in our region
 - Mileage correlates to urban/rural in our region
 - Aging or rehab destination on routes correlates to waits
 - This is some useful stuff to know, right?
- We utilized a professor at our local University
 - He was relatively inexpensive
 - He broke down things like R Squared and Spurious Relationships

Step 11: Put it in Useful Form

- Sift through the data
 - Ask your focus group what is most important
 - You can't show all of the data so identify the most important parts
- Make it understandable
 - Most people don't care for linear regressions, so break out what the correlations mean in text
 - Utilize a summary page as appropriate
- Ultimately, get it in your regional plan update

Step 12: Distribute the Information

- TxDOT Likely paid for the research
 - As such: ensure it ends up in the plan update
- Your friends gave you the information
 - Get a copy of the final plan to everyone who responded
- If you have a website...
 - Put it on the world wide web
- If your brave, you could even issue a press release
 - Be very careful not to let your friends get skewered

So What Have We Learned?

- Getting Useful Information for an Inventory is a Pain-in-the-Rear
 - Unfortunately, you can't just work up a survey, send it out, and toss it together and expect it to be meaningful.
- Our moderate success in this area is tied to relationship building.
 - Relationships built the survey, got us responses, and provided a meaningful use for the data
- If you are going to the trouble of bothering people
 - You might as well do a statistical analysis of what you get

Other Thoughts

- We went through a similar process with our region's
 - Service Providers (great response rates)
 - Public Transpiration Users (lower response rates)
- The really interesting thing occurred when:
 - We did data analysis between the 3 groups
 - You have to align your survey questions so they match in areas
 - I suggest writing a survey/data person in future planning
- Please remember that this is just a piece of a larger process related to Gap Analysis

If We Have Time... Question Areas

- Basic Information
- Provider type
- Type of Services Provided
- Fleet Capacity
 - Size, age, wheelchair, etc.
- Most/Least populous route
- Busy/Slow Hours
- Vacant Seat Count
- Counties Served
- Most Important Thing
- Use of Voucher Programs
- Level of Assistance
 - Curb-to-Curb
 - Door-to-Door, etc.
- Trip Purposes (checklist)
- Geographic Area
- Fee Structures
- Eligibility Requirements
- Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Challenges (checklist)
- Equipment Purchase
 - Source



PANHANDLE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Questions

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