

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TxDOT Commissioners Allocate \$37,000 for Regional Transportation Coordination Project

(Austin) Texas Department of Transportation Commissioners in Austin today approved \$37,000 in funding for a project partnering TxDOT and the recently organized Greater East Texas Transportation Alliance transportation coordination task force with East Texas Center for Independent Living. Under the contract, ETCIL, a local nonprofit disability advocacy and support agency, will work closely with TxDOT doing research and data collection in support of the transportation task force. The project is designed help the GETTA task force engage citizens, transportation providers and community organizations in the process of deciding what transit services are needed in East Texas and how best to provide those services.

With the support and guidance of the Texas Department of Transportation, a coalition of consumer groups and civic leaders, have recently formed The Greater East Texas Transportation Alliance (GETTA) task force. The task force has been meeting since April for the purpose of developing and expanding transportation coordination resources in the district. The new TxDOT funding will allow ETCIL staff to conduct exhaustive research into what transportation resources already exist and to collect data that will help the GETTA task force make decisions about what should be done to meet the needs of people with disabilities, seniors and low income families who depend on public transportation to work, play and live in rural and small urban communities.

One of the major challenges faced by the task force is to bring transportation-challenged individuals as well as consumer groups, human service providers, faith-based ministries and advocacy groups into the transportation funding decision-making process. The task force provides a public comment mechanism to inform and direct federal, state and local legislative decisions about transportation; decisions have a direct impact on the daily mobility of the estimated 20% of adult East Texans who do not or cannot drive.

“It is wonderful to see the district and the commissioners of TxDOT supporting this effort. By aggressively working to bring consumers into the decision-making process, I believe we’ll be able to get a better idea of what people really need from our public transportation system,” says Tom King, East Texas Just Transportation Alliance coordinator. ETJTA is a coalition of consumers, transportation providers and human

service agencies that has been working closely with the Department of Transportation to help organize the GETTA task force.

“It’s a no-brainer that we need more public transportation resources,” King explains.

“The question is where do we need them and how do we grow those resources? This project is a BIG step toward answering those questions.”

According the recent *Texas Transportation in Crisis* report by Just Transportation

Alliances:

- One in five adult Texans do not have reliable access to a car
- East Texas’ population is growing increasingly older at a faster rate than the rest of Texas. East Texas is a major retirement mecca. Seniors make up 16% of our total population (6% higher than the rest of the state). By 2010, census figures predict that number will swell to 25%.
- Many East Texas seniors who do drive are effectively prevented from driving in certain Tyler and Longview business districts because of the bewildering crush of traffic along major thoroughfares.
- People who do not or cannot drive are often virtually trapped in their homes and completely dependent on a ride either from family or transit.
- Low income families, unable to afford to buy or operate their own vehicle, often have extreme difficulty finding and holding jobs, accessing medical care and taking care of personal needs.

In order to encourage local collaborative initiatives like GETTA to address transit services regionally, the Commission approved a \$75,000 total package for two projects at its monthly meeting today. As a result, Tyler will receive \$37,000 for the ETCIL project. VOLAR Independent Living Center, received the remaining \$33,000 from the

grant for a similar project in El Paso. The grant is from federal transportation research and development funds administered by the Texas Department of Transportation.

“It is gratifying to see a community recognize that a crisis is coming and have the foresight to pull together and use existing resources as efficiently as possible,” said Glenn Gadbois, Transportation Programs Director for Just Transportation Alliance. “Getting the community involved is a good step toward finding out what is working well and what is not, and then determining how do to it best.” For more than eight months, local TxDOT public transportation coordinator, Marty Allen, and ETCIL staff have been working closely with officials of Just Transportation Alliance and members of the East Texas JTA chapter to bring this grant to Tyler.

For more information about East Texas Just Transportation Alliance or to find out how you can be involved in efforts to expand and improve public transportation in East Texas, e-mail tking@etcil.org or call Tom King at (903) 581-8048. For information about what public transportation resources are available in your area for persons with disabilities or to get help with issues related to transportation for people with disabilities, seniors or persons with mobility impairments, call East Texas Center for Independent Living at (903) 581-7542 or toll free at (866) 567-8918.