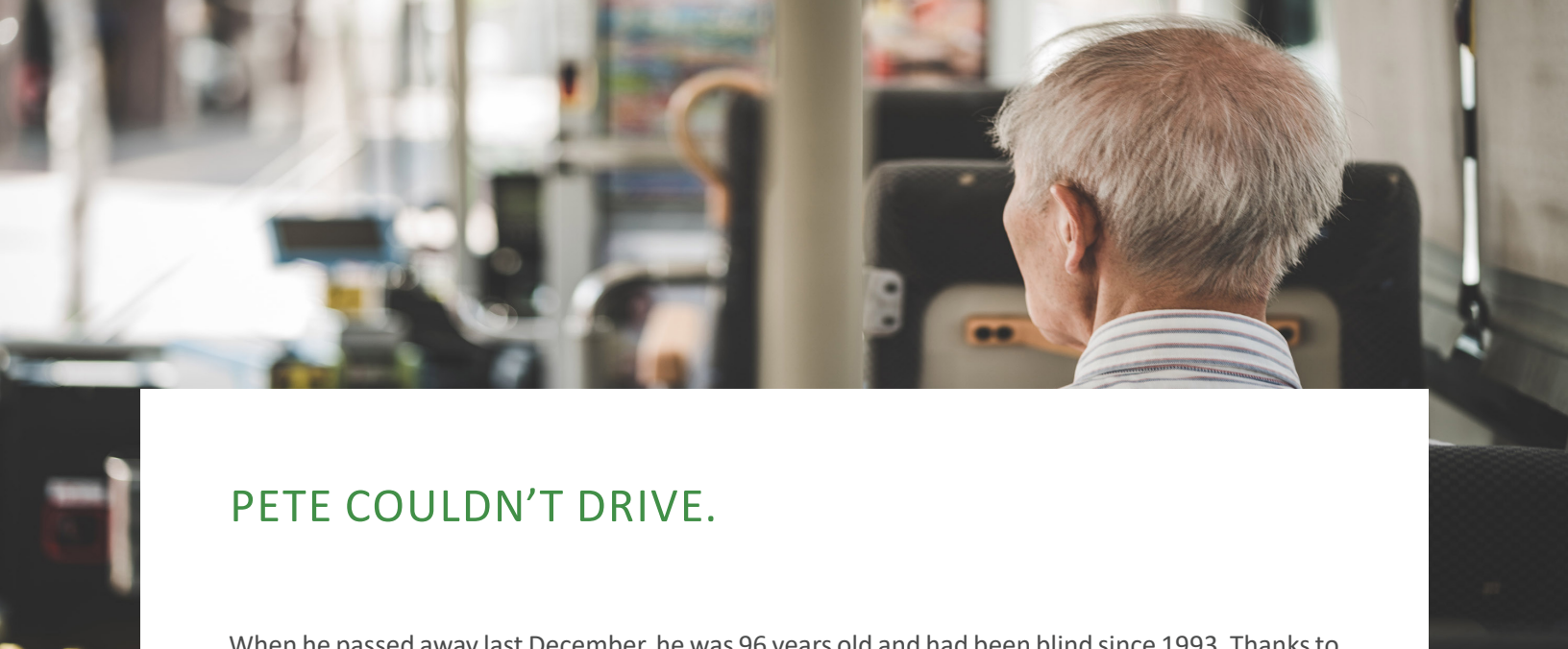




# Successfully Aging and Living in San Antonio

Transportation for Older Adults:  
Summary of Issues, Actors, and Solutions  
Fall 2020

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## PETE COULDN'T DRIVE.

When he passed away last December, he was 96 years old and had been blind since 1993. Thanks to a group of volunteers from Northeast Senior Assistance who gave him rides, brought him food, and kept him company, Pete was able to stay in the home he once shared with his wife and maintain his connections to his community. Evelyn, who is 86, spry, and independent, has hearing and vision problems that are getting worse and limiting her ability to get around. She needs the kind of support that Pete had. But she gets frustrated when trying to find folks to help her. She'll call one phone number thinking she's found what she needs, only to be told they can't help her because she doesn't fit their program - so they give her another number to call and the process repeats. She wants to know why there isn't just one number that can give her the correct information.

Luisa, like many octo and nonagenarians, cannot drive and knows few people well enough to ask them to drive her around. The people she does know are mostly younger relatives who work and cannot take time off to drive her to appointments during the work week—which is the only time doctors' appointments and rides to the bank can be made. Luisa does not have internet access, doesn't know where to look for services, and doesn't even know the words to use to ask the right questions. She doesn't have money—or doesn't want to spend the money—to buy a pc, tablet or smart phone. She wants to use a regular telephone to talk to a live person. But she needs to go to the bank, see the doctor, go to the pharmacy, grocery, and other retail stores. And she does not want to plan 3 days to two weeks in advance for these rides. Luisa and folks like her are simply not on the radar for transportation planners and providers.

The San Antonio Area Foundation's [Successfully Aging and Living in San Antonio \(SALSA\)](#) initiative seeks to create a community where older adults are respected, thrive, and live connected lives. The SALSA Transportation Workgroup focuses on mobility issues impacting older adults (defined as individuals age 60 and older) and persons with disabilities. The workgroup's vision is that older adults in all parts of the county have equitable access to a variety of affordable, accessible, spontaneous, and appropriate transportation options that allow them to go where they want, when they want—like Pete had. The Workgroup commissioned this white paper to highlight the challenges facing the existing transportation system for older adults like Evelyn and Luisa, and to propose a solution to improve service coordination, accessibility, and data collection.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transportation is a major concern for older adults, who are often living with a disability and have specific requirements for ride provision. A recent study estimated the number of older adults that miss **essential rides** - rides to medical care, nutrition, or legal/financial activities - at 16% of all persons over 60. And as the Bexar County population ages over the next few decades, this situation will worsen.

The system currently in place includes a wide array of transportation providers and a few agencies that provide information and referral services to residents who need transportation assistance. This system worked for Pete but as the experiences of Evelyn and Luisa, and those like them, highlight, it doesn't work for everyone.

To improve our transportation services and the means through which older adults access them, SALSA proposes the implementation of a **1 Call 1 Click (1C1C)** system. This system would provide a single point of entry for information and referral that would allow consumers, information and referral specialists, social service and medical service providers, and mobility managers to access comprehensive and complete information on regional transit, paratransit, and personal mobility services. This system would help to improve accessibility for users like Evelyn and Luisa, and, through data collection and sharing, would help providers and planners reduce service gaps and inform advocacy efforts. Since many of the issues and needs of older adults overlap with those of persons with disabilities, a 1C1C system would serve both populations.

Realizing a 1C1C system is within reach, and supported by ConnectSA desire to focus on taking a fresh approach that isn't confined by mode or lines on a map, SALSA's proposal is recognized as one of 25 projects to be initiated by 2025.



The **COVID-19 crisis** revealed that persons in the older adult and disability communities in particular require adequate nutrition, exercise, and health care. Access to these essential resources cannot be insured without reliable and readily available transportation.

# PART 1

## The State of Transportation for Older Adults in Bexar County



## TRANSPORTATION: A MAJOR CONCERN

Transportation is essential to the well-being of older adults. As the Baby Boomer generation ages—and lives longer and in more suburban settings than previous generations—cities and regions across the U.S. are facing a “mobility crisis.” Many individuals can expect to live 7 to 10 years past their ability to drive or independently use other modes of transportation. This will inhibit their ability to be socially engaged and manage day-to-day activities, which can have devastating effects on quality of life.

A 2016 survey conducted by AARP asked San Antonio residents age 50-plus to rank the importance of different features within eight domains of an “age-friendly community.” Survey respondents gave Transportation features the second highest overall average ranking, behind only Health and Wellness features. The importance of transportation to older adults was also borne out in various community conversations held in 2016, including an Elder Summit, focus groups, and a community academic forum. In the conversations, older adults themselves and their caregivers expressed that not having transportation options was equal to losing one’s independence. The ability to keep driving for as long as possible was important, as was access to more reliable and faster public transportation.

## THE NEED FOR BETTER COORDINATION

There are a variety of options for older adults when it comes to securing transportation to and from medical appointments, grocery stores, banks, social events, and other locations and events (see Section III for a list of current providers). There are also entities that provide referral services, helping connect individuals to transportation providers that can meet their needs (see Section 3).

However, there is no entity responsible for coordinating different ride providers and helping to ensure that every older adult that needs or wants a ride is able to get one in a timely and affordable manner. As the experiences of Evelyn and Luisa demonstrate, the lack of coordination and cooperation among providers can make the system inefficient and hard to use for older adults.





## SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR RIDE PROVISION

The SALSA Transportation Work Group identified two primary **levels of service** for older adults who cannot drive a personal vehicle for some or all trips: (1) VIA buses travel throughout San Antonio and are wheelchair-accessible. Bus travel is an option for older adults who have the stamina to walk or roll for short distances and can understand/use route and schedule information; (2) However, when the distance to or from a bus stop is a limiting factor, or when persons live in neighborhoods where buses are unavailable, other accessible options are needed.

Paratransit service is trip-specific and consumer-activated. Unlike bus transportation, it must be individually scheduled in advance by (or for) a traveler at a specific time and with a specific origin and destination. Providers, such as Ride Connect Texas, Presa Community Center and Medicaid, often have qualifying criteria and service is not necessarily available on the basis of age alone. Vehicles – a car, van or small bus – operate in a curb-to-curb mode but persons with limited ambulatory or wayfinding skills may require “door-to-door” assistance from the vehicle driver. In some situations, an older adult will need “door-through-door” assistance for the entire trip.

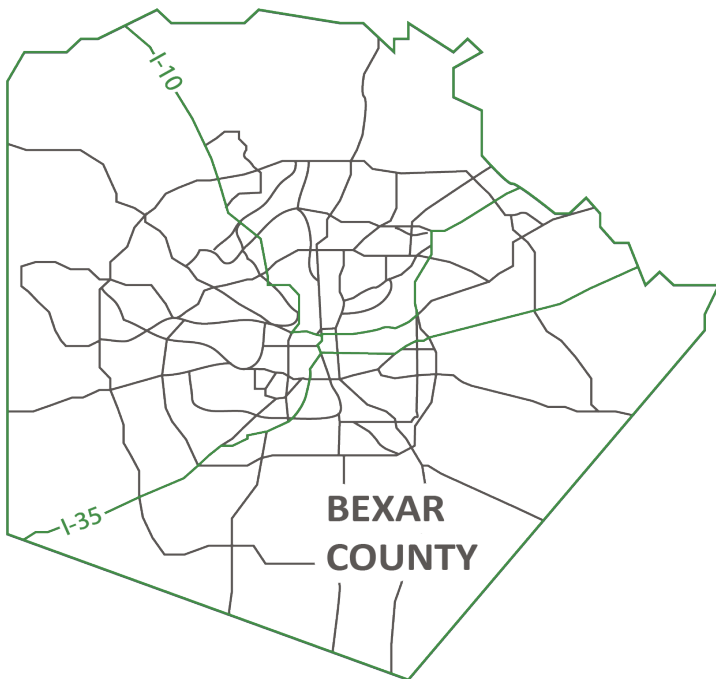
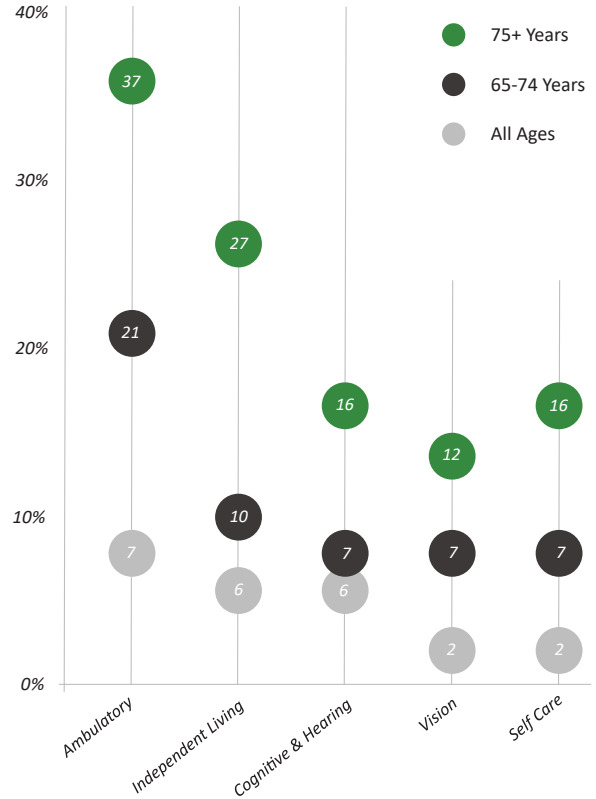
Ride Hail services such as Uber, Lyft, and taxi fares are often prohibitive for persons on fixed and limited incomes. In addition to affordability, transportation for older adults must:

- Collectively serve the entire San Antonio area;
- Be accessible to persons who use wheelchairs, scooters and other mobility devices;
- Include space for companions, personal care attendants and/or service animals;
- Provide door-to-door or through-door assistance when needed;
- Respond to unanticipated same-day trip requests;
- Offer a variety of appropriate communication formats;
- Assure that vehicle drivers are properly trained to assist older adults & individuals with disabilities; and
- Support scheduling and fare payment options for persons without access to or who cannot independently use smart phones, credit cards or the internet.

## DISABILITIES' EFFECT ON TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 42% of individuals over the age of 65 in Bexar County are living with a disability. This is higher than the nationwide rate, which is estimated at 35%. (Note that, while this paper defines older adults as individuals over the age of 60, the Census uses 65 for their disability data, which is why we are using 65 here; additionally, these data are only recording disabilities among the “civilian noninstitutionalized population”, meaning they do not take into account individuals living in retirement homes, prisons, or mental health facilities). This chart shows the breakdown of disability by type for the Bexar County population overall, for persons age 65 to 74, and for persons age 75 and over.

*These data show that a higher percentage of older adults live with a disability than the population as a whole.*



## AN AGING REGION MEANS ADDITIONAL STRAIN

San Antonio is one of the fastest-growing major cities in the United States. Over the next few decades, the number of older adults will make up a larger and larger share of Bexar County’s population. By 2050, it is estimated the population age 60 and older will comprise 21% of the Bexar County population, compared to 16% in 2017. According to VIA Metropolitan Transit’s Vision 2040 Long Range Plan, “Aging residents may rely more on public transportation or on-demand transportation services (such as paratransit, taxis, ride-hailing applications or other, similar services) to maintain mobility and independence.”

**COUNTY POPULATION AGED 60+ BY YEAR**  
**16% (2017) versus 21% (2050)**

## THE OLDER ADULT TRANSPORTATION DEFICIT

A 2011 study conducted by the Senior Transportation Collaborative presents the best local data on needs and gaps in the transportation system for older adults in Bexar County. Through a survey of older adults, the study analyzed the **senior transportation deficit**, which it defined as the “measure of persons age 60 and above who lack a basic level of mobility because they cannot drive; cannot always rely on friends or family for transportation; do not have access to or are unable to use mainline bus service; cannot afford taxi fares; or are ineligible for or underserved by other public programs.”

To measure the older adult transportation deficit, the study looked at “essential rides” not taken by this population. According to the study, 16% of older adults in Bexar County in 2011 (approximately 1 out of 6, or 36,000 individuals) faced a transportation deficit. The survey results showed that each individual was unable to make approximately 6 essential rides per month, which equaled approximately 200,000 total missed essential rides per month. The missed rides were mostly for medical or nutritional purposes.

Of the older adults that reported forgoing essential rides, the majority did so because they could not always afford to pay for a taxi. The report termed this an *income-based deficit*. A smaller number of older adults were found to be eligible for existing transportation programs (VIAtrans, for example) that would meet their needs, but were unaware of those options. The report labeled this an *information-based deficit*. The smallest group of older adults that reported missing an essential ride were those that faced a service-based deficit: they lived beyond existing transportation service areas, did not drive, could not rely on friends or family, did not qualify for specialized services, or had needs (such as door-through-door assistance from an attendant) beyond what those services could provide.

The study also estimated how the older adult transportation deficit would grow in the future. To do this, the authors used population projections from the Texas State Demographer and assumed the percentage of older adults facing a transportation deficit would continue to be 16% of the total over 60 population. Using this same methodology and updating projections with current population growth estimates from the State Demographer, the transportation deficit for older adults in 2050 could be equal to 113,531 individuals. If we assume that each individual facing a deficit will miss 6 rides per month - based on the survey findings - the deficit would equal 681,186 missed essential rides per month.

# 1 OUT OF 6

Older adults in Bexar County face a transportation deficit (2011)





# MYTH

1. VIAtrans gives rides to ALL older adults and people with disabilities
2. Uber/Lyft accommodate people with wheelchairs and walkers
3. Nonprofits are able to fill the transit gaps in the community
4. Technology solves everything
5. The City of San Antonio provides transportation to ALL residents who want to attend a senior center

# REALITY

1. VIAtrans operates in most, but not all areas of Bexar County, and people do not automatically qualify based solely on age or disability
2. Uber/Lyft are not required to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers
3. Nonprofits do not have the capacity or funding to fill transit gaps
4. Many older adults and those with disabilities lack access, devices, and training to be proficient with ever-changing technologies
5. The City of San Antonio provides rides only for residents within a 5-mile radius of a senior center

# PART 2

## Existing Transportation Assets, Priorities, & Strategies



## OPERATORS OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

There are a variety of organizations in Bexar County that provide transportation services to older adults and persons with disabilities. Services vary in terms of operating hours, service coverage areas, cost to users, eligibility criteria, how far in advance rides need to be scheduled, and accessibility (which is of particular concern for options that operate exclusively through mobile phone apps and/or the Internet, such as Uber and Lyft).

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**Organizations that provide rides to a variety of locations and events, including medical appointments, shopping, and social events.** These organizations include free-ride providers like Jefferson Outreach, Northeast Senior Assistance (NESA), and Ride Connect Texas (Formerly Southwest Community Outreach for Older People and Southeast Community Outreach for Older People). Another provider, the Presa Transportation Collaborative, partners with St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church, Kirby Senior Center, Ride Connect Texas, and Greater Randolph Area Service Program (GRASP) to facilitate rides.

**Organizations that provide rides to non-emergency medical appointments only.** These providers include Greater Randolph Area Services Program (GRASP), LogistiCare, Comfort Care (operated by WellMed), and Texas Department of Health and Human Services Medical Transportation Program.

**VIA Metropolitan Transit.** VIA is the public transportation agency for San Antonio and many surrounding municipalities, providing scheduled bus service on nearly 100 routes. All buses are accessible to persons using mobility devices. VIAtrans, operated by VIA Metropolitan Transit, provides shared ride, curb-to-curb service for qualified persons with disabilities who cannot independently utilize VIA buses.

**City of San Antonio Senior Center Transportation.** The City of San Antonio provides free transportation to and from senior centers for older adults who are enrolled and that live within a 5-mile radius of a senior center.

**Rideshare Companies.** Examples such as Uber and Lyft provide on-demand curb-to-curb transportation for a per-mile rate. Rides are requested and paid for exclusively through a mobile phone app - there is no cash payment option. The apps include accessibility features for individuals who are blind or low-vision. In certain cities, Uber has introduced wheelchair accessible vehicles; however, this option is not available in Bexar County. Costs are generally lower than taxis but are subject to increases during times of peak demand.

**Taxicab Companies.** Taxis provide on-demand curb-to-curb transportation for a per-mile/per-minute rate. Rides can be requested via phone or hailed on the street. Some companies also have introduced mobile phone apps through which rides can be requested and paid for, while others have wheelchair accessible vehicles.

## LEVELS OF SERVICE

There are a variety of different ‘options’ of transportation assistance available in our community.



### BUS ROUTES

*For riders who don't need assistance and use public transportation.*

Driver picks up riders at bus stop and delivers to bus stop near destination. This is supplemented by VIAtrans, which picks up qualified riders who live within 3/4 mile of bus stop and brings them to a bus central location.



### CURB TO CURB

*For riders who are mobile and don't need assistance.*

Driver picks up rider at curb of residence or other location and delivers to curb of destination. This is not one-on-one. Normally, there are other riders in the vehicle to be delivered to individual destinations.



### DOOR TO DOOR

*For riders who need some assistance.*

Driver comes to rider's door, escorts rider to vehicle, assists rider in and out of vehicle, walks rider to destination door, then leaves. Arrangements are made for driver to return to deliver rider home.



### DOOR THROUGH DOOR

*For riders who need more assistance.*

This is a one-on-one, Personal Escort service. Driver never leaves the rider. Driver comes to rider's door, escorts rider to vehicle, assists rider in and out of vehicle, walks rider into doctor's office or other destination, waits, and then returns rider to home door.

## COORDINATING AGENCIES

Organizations that provide information & referral services to residents needing transportation assistance.

Alamo Service Connection (ASC) | A service of the Alamo Area Council of Government (AACOG), which has an online list of transportation resources for older adults and persons with disabilities, as well as a phone number that individuals can call for referrals to service providers.

2-1-1 | An online database and phone system operated by United Way that connects residents to services, including transportation providers.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES & STRATEGIES

Several entities in San Antonio & Bexar County have developed plans, strategies, and solutions related to transportation generally, and transportation for older adults, specifically. These entities and their reports include:



- **AARP.** Creating la Vida Buena: Strengthening Livability in San Antonio
- **ConnectSA.** Proposed Framework for a Modern Mobility Plan
- **Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.** Mobility 2040
- **Senior Transportation Collaborative.** Meeting Senior Transportation Needs in Bexar County
- **VIA Metropolitan Transit.** Via Reimagined
- **SATomorrow.** Multimodal Transportation Plan

In most reports and plans, continued population growth and increasing congestion were cited as major challenges facing the region's transportation network. These documents emphasized the need to invest in and encourage non-auto modes of transportation to address congestion over the long term. Specific priorities and strategies that are either recurring in the above listed documents, or are relevant specifically to the transportation needs of older adults include:

**Expanding services to improve existing service and address service gaps.** The expansion and improvement of transportation services was identified as a key priority. Strategies for achieving this goal included building new Advanced Rapid Transit/Bus Rapid Transit infrastructure, improving VIA service by increasing service frequency, expanding transportation cooperatives that service older adults, and developing and funding new and expanded paratransit services—including both a publicly-funded paratransit service and a taxi subsidy program.

**Increasing local funding for transportation.** According to the ConnectSA Proposed Framework for a Modern Mobility Plan, “Based on existing plans from SA Tomorrow, [VIA] Vision 2040 and [Alamo Area MPO] Mobility 2040, we estimate an additional \$1.3 billion in capital projects are needed by 2025 to deliver on the system our community has envisioned. From 2025 to 2030, we estimate the needs contained in these same plans will require an additional \$1.4 billion to support new projects” (ConnectSA, page 37). To fund these projects, ConnectSA recommends exploring the following funding options: reallocating existing sales taxes, including the Edwards Aquifer and Linear Creek fund and the ¼ of Advanced Transportation District funds that go to COSA; issuing general obligation bonds; leveraging other public and private funds, including federal and state

funds, public private partnerships, and Transportation Reinvestment Zones; and generating new revenue through fees.

### **Improving pedestrian & bicycle facilities, safety, and use.**

Increasing walking and biking as a mode of transportation was a priority identified by all of the entities listed above. While educating residents about non-car modes, including bicycling and walking, was identified as important, the primary strategy highlighted in these reports was to improve the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructures. Eliminating sidewalk gaps and building protected bike lanes could increase access to public transit stops and help people make short rides within their neighborhoods.

### **Leveraging and connecting to emerging technologies.**

Both ConnectSA and VIA highlighted the need to leverage and connect to new technologies as part of San Antonio's transportation future. This includes integrating car/ride share and bike share applications and deploying mobile applications for ride planning and ticket purchasing.

### **Encouraging transportation-efficient residential patterns.**

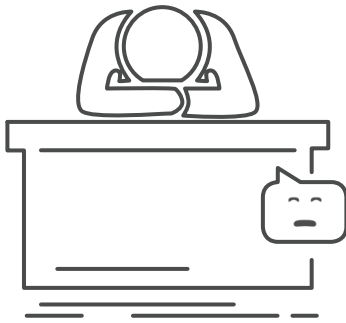
A key strategy for reducing car dependency is to encourage development patterns that facilitate walking, biking, and public transit use. Two frameworks for thinking about this include Transit Oriented Development, which focuses on increasing density and the mix of uses around transit stops, and “livable communities,” which are places “designed to promote physical independence, dignity, and opportunities for community engagement and choice” through various physical and social tools.

# PART 3

1 Call 1 Click System  
A Solution Worth Pursuing



### CURRENT TRIP-PLANNING PROCESS



### PROPOSED 1 CALL 1 CLICK SYSTEM

- ✓ Single Access Point
- ✓ Manage Process
- ✓ Coordinate Providers
- ✓ Ongoing Support



# 1 CALL 1 CLICK

SALSA proposes developing a 1 Call 1 Click (1C1C), single point of entry system for information and referral that would allow consumers, information and referral specialists, social service and medical service providers, and mobility managers to access comprehensive and complete information on regional transit, paratransit, and personal mobility services. The 1C1C system would go beyond the current level of service coordination provided by ASC and 2-1-1 by allowing consumers to plan and schedule complete rides directly through the system. This system would primarily serve older adults and persons with disabilities.

## AN EXPANDING BEST PRACTICE

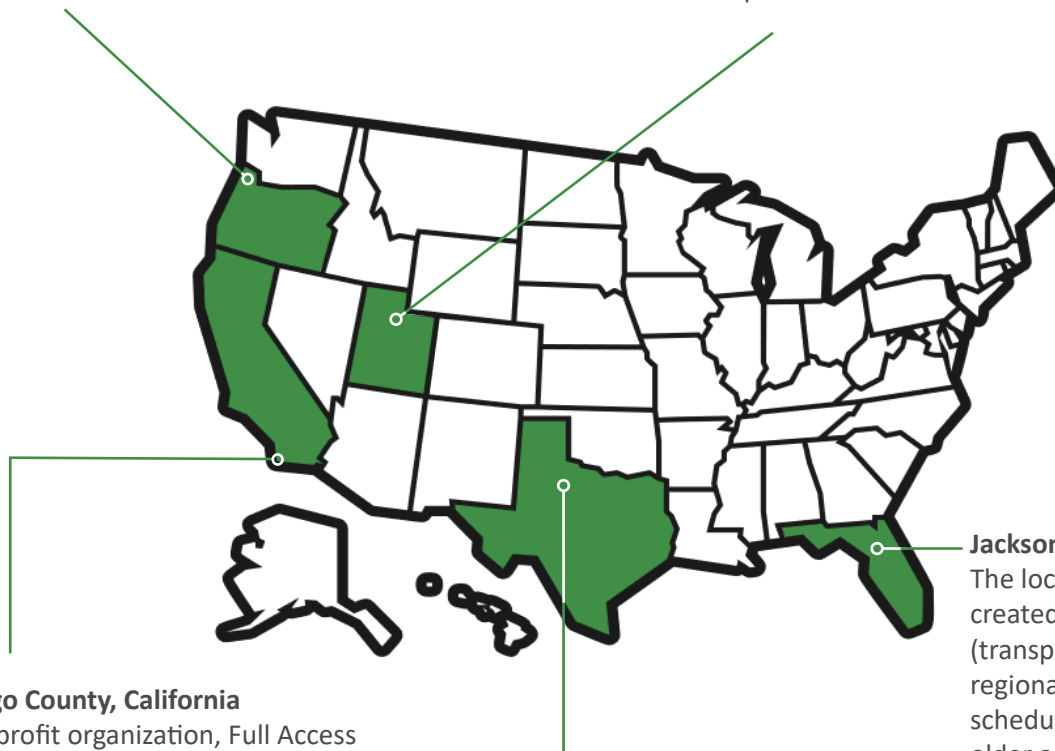
Similar systems are in operation or are being planned in multiple regions. A report prepared during the planning effort for a 1C1C system in Portland, Oregon, analyzed systems in operation across the country.

### Portland, Oregon

Ride Connection, in collaboration with a team of state and regional stakeholders, has completed a planning study to bring a new technology to the Portland region. Dubbed a “One-Call One-Click” system, its goal is to bring all the available resources to a single database that can be accessed by telephone, smartphone, and online.

### Salt Lake City, Utah

RideLink operates an online One-Click system ([www.utahridelink.com](http://www.utahridelink.com)) that brings together all regional transportation options, including rail, bus, taxi, Uber, accessible transportation, and transportation provided by community groups and healthcare service providers. The system allows consumers to plan their rides online and compare costs of different transit options.



### San Diego County, California

The nonprofit organization, Full Access and Coordinated Transportation (FACT), has established a call-center for transportation reservation, booking, and dispatching, as well as a web-based platform ([factsd.org/](http://factsd.org/)) that serves as a transportation provider database, provides consumers with information and referral to transportation providers, includes a ride planner, and helps to streamline eligibility.

### North Central Texas

MyRideNorthTexas, operates a ride planning system available online and via a mobile app ([mrnt.qryde.com/v30/QRyde](http://mrnt.qryde.com/v30/QRyde)). The system includes public transit options and private transportation providers, the ability to request specialized services, and estimates of ride length and cost.

### Jacksonville, Florida

The local transit authority created an online portal ([transportal.net](http://transportal.net)) to provide regional ride planning, scheduling, and booking for older adults and persons with disabilities. The site incorporates services from social services agencies, volunteer driver programs, public transit, paratransit, taxis, and for-profit providers.



## POTENTIAL BENEFITS

**Alignment with system needs and community priorities.** A 1C1C system can help address the mobility challenges facing older adults and persons with disabilities in Bexar County in a way that complements existing community priorities and strategies.

**Collect/disseminate data.** We know there are gaps in existing services, but we do not have a concise understanding of where these gaps are and who exactly is being left behind. By facilitating data collection on transportation needs and services, a 1C1C system can help transportation planners and providers make more efficient and effective decisions. 1C1C systems maintain records of filled and unfilled ride requests. This data can be reported at the provider, sub-area, and ride purpose level, and then used to evaluate the deployment of existing resources. Additionally, data on unmet needs will support efforts to design and fund additional transportation resources for older adults and persons with disabilities.

**Leverage technology to increase accessibility/ease of use.** A 1C1C system can include automated search features and decision trees for customers who have some level of technological proficiency, in addition to on-site staff for customers who require individual assistance. Shared or compatible scheduling software would greatly facilitate the process of searching for available rides. The growing field of wayfinding technology may eliminate the need for some customers to travel with companions or assistance. These and similar features would be included in a 1C1C system to the greatest extent practical and would especially benefit persons with disabilities.

**Improve service coordination and efficiency.** The current system of transportation for older adults and persons with disabilities could benefit from increased coordination. Each service provider has unique hours of operation, eligibility requirements, service areas and reservation procedures. A 1C1C system would include an intake and screening element to match customers with the most appropriate providers. Shared or compatible software, mentioned earlier, could also find and fill spaces in vehicle schedules and perhaps also arrange shared-ride rides. Creating a more resource-effective system while recognizing the autonomy of individual transportation providers is an achievable goal of the 1C1C initiative.



AS MANY AS

30%

of patients skip doctor visits  
because of transportation  
according to the New York Times.

Missed appointments could cost the patient and health care system even more in the long-term if a mild illness - left unchecked - turns into a chronic or debilitating one.

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

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Through a variety of planning processes, community members have identified shared priorities and strategies for addressing transportation issues in general. More funding is needed. Existing services can be improved, and service gaps must be filled. New technology should be embraced. These factors particularly affect transportation for older adults and persons with disabilities, as existing providers often experience inadequate or unstable funding; coordination and outreach limitations; and outmoded technology.

A 1C1C system to coordinate transportation for older adults and persons living with disabilities would improve current services and enhance future resources. This initiative will coordinate limited resources, identify gaps, and make transportation services more accessible to users. Essential data will be collected and made available to inform planners, policymakers, and advocates.

As the City of San Antonio, through ConnectSA, moves from planning to implementing our future transportation network, the needs of older adults and persons living with disabilities must be given full consideration and support. The 1C1C system, by strengthening the public and private transportation providers throughout the San Antonio area, will become the foundation for adequately serving these populations now and into the future.

As an immediate next step, the SALSA Transportation Workgroup is leading a collaborative effort to develop a framework for the 1C1C system in San Antonio. This initiative will identify software, coordination options, staffing requirements and a governance plan for a system that will serve the transportation providers and the residents of our area. With the resulting 1C1C system design, the San Antonio community can begin to fill gaps and expand the existing transportation network. This will provide older adults, people with disabilities and others with the appropriate resources to go where they want, when they want. 1C1C will be a critical piece of the infrastructure to help us achieve our vision of a community where older adults are respected, thrive and enjoy connected lives. We greatly appreciate your support and participation.

# THANK YOU

To our partners for their ongoing support and involvement with SALSA's transportation initiatives.



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The San Antonio Area Foundation's Successfully Aging and Living in San Antonio (SALSA) initiative seeks to create a community where older adults are respected, thrive, and live connected lives. The SALSA Transportation Workgroup focuses on mobility issues impacting older adults and persons with disabilities. Visit us online at [www.saaafdn.org/nonprofits/investing-in-key-issue-areas/salsa-initiative](http://www.saaafdn.org/nonprofits/investing-in-key-issue-areas/salsa-initiative).

Report Prepared By



**SUCCESSFULLY  
AGING AND LIVING  
IN SAN ANTONIO**  
An Initiative of the San Antonio Area Foundation  
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