**Innovative Solutions to Transportation Needs in the Colonias**

An estimated 400,000 Texas residents, most of whom are legal citizens of the United States, currently live under poor conditions in underdeveloped neighborhoods called *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border. They are challenged daily with the simple tasks of seeing their children off to school, going to work, obtaining water for daily use, buying groceries, obtaining quality health care, and having their trash removed. A major link in all of these basic needs is sufficient and affordable transportation. While many areas are gradually working to provide desperately needed infrastructure to these communities, the process is slow and expensive. Innovative and cost-effective solutions are needed to solve immediate transportation needs to help support these Texans in daily life. This research attempts to assess and document innovative, affordable, and cost-effective methods for meeting some of the unique transportation challenges facing residents of the *colonias*. The overall approach is to provide resources that may help improve the quality of life for these citizens by meeting their transportation needs on a daily basis.
Innovative Solutions to Transportation Needs in the Colonias

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ABSTRACT

An estimated 400,000 Texas residents, most of whom are legal citizens of the United States, currently live under poor conditions in underdeveloped neighborhoods called *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border. They are challenged daily with the simple tasks of seeing their children off to school, going to work, obtaining water for daily use, buying groceries, obtaining quality health care, and having their trash removed. A major link in all of these basic needs is sufficient and affordable transportation. While many areas are gradually working to provide desperately needed infrastructure to these communities, the process is slow and expensive. Innovative and cost-effective solutions are needed to solve immediate transportation needs to help support these Texans in daily life. This research attempts to assess and document innovative, affordable, and cost-effective methods for meeting some of the unique transportation challenges facing residents of the *colonias*. The overall approach is to provide resources that may help improve the quality of life for these citizens by meeting their transportation needs on a daily basis.
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DISCLAIMER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A dream of nearly every American, whether native-born or immigrant, is that one day they will own land, a place to call their own. It is an integral part of the American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, an estimated 400,000 Texas residents, most of whom are legal citizens of the United States, currently live under poor conditions in underdeveloped neighborhoods called colonias along the Texas-Mexico border.

Originally established during the latter half of the 20th century, colonias are unincorporated areas outside city limits or in isolated areas of Texas counties. They were established by developers who sold land with little or no infrastructure under contract for deed agreements at high interest rates. The appeal to the new owners was minimal up front costs and affordable monthly payments. Many of the houses were built on land with the promise of future infrastructure necessities, such as running water and natural gas, being provided by the developer in the future. These services were not provided by either the developer or the local government entity.

In the years since, inhabitants have had to resort to the use of outhouses, cesspools, or most often inadequate septic tanks. They are challenged daily with the simple tasks of seeing their children off to school, going to work, obtaining water for daily use, buying groceries, obtaining quality health care, and having their trash removed. A major link in all of these basic needs is sufficient and affordable transportation. While many areas are gradually working to provide desperately needed infrastructure to these communities, the process is slow and expensive. Innovative and cost-effective solutions are needed to solve immediate transportation needs to help support these Texans in daily life.

Colonias are found in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, but Texas has both the largest number of colonias and the largest colonias population. Twenty nine border counties report having colonias and the Texas Attorney General has documented over 2,294 colonias. A vast majority of these locations have land that is either considered floodplains or has essentially
no economic or agricultural value. This tendency of *colonias* continues along the U.S.-Mexico border into New Mexico, Arizona, and California as well.

Some of the most pressing problems for the *colonias* residents are water, sewage treatment, transportation infrastructure, and transportation options. In many ways these problems are intertwined. There are some facilities in place to start providing these services; however the many of the same obstacles that allowed the *colonias* to come about hinder the solutions.

An extensive review of programs implemented in other areas such as Native American tribal lands found that issues unique to the *colonias* would constrain their implementation. The major issue being the lack of legal identity for a *colonias* so that funding can be acquired for major infrastructure. The researchers found that there is no one solution for solving the transportation issues facing colonias residents. However, a combination of programs under one clearinghouse may provide the focus needed to address these issues over time.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

A dream of nearly every American, whether native-born or immigrant, is that one day they will own land, a place to call their own. It is an integral part of the American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Those individuals living in the *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border are no exception. However, because of their living conditions, they must struggle to pursue their dreams often without the basic needs of adequate potable water, sewer, electricity, natural gas, storm drainage, paved roads, and safe housing. Originally established during the latter half of the 20th century, these unincorporated areas outside city limits or in isolated areas of Texas counties were established by developers who sold land with little or no infrastructure under contract for deed agreements at high interest rates. The appeal to the new owners was minimal up front costs and affordable monthly payments.

Since many of the residents have either low or very low income, they slowly improve their property, as funds are available. The result is an estimate of nearly 400,000 Texas residents, most of whom are legal citizens of the United States, now live under poor conditions and are challenged daily with the simple tasks of seeing their children off to school, going to work, obtaining water for daily use, buying groceries, obtaining quality health care, and having their trash removed. A major link in all of these basic needs is sufficient and affordable transportation. While many areas are gradually working to provide desperately needed infrastructure to these communities, the process is slow and expensive. Innovative and cost-effective solutions are needed to solve immediate transportation needs to help support these Texans in daily life.

A recent status report prepared by the Community Transportation Association of America, Institute for Economic and Social Measurement, for the Rural Transit Assistance Program, Federal Highway Administration, reported that more than one-third of America’s population lives outside of urbanized areas. Based on the 1990 Census, this figure is nearly 91 million people. Of these rural Americans, 32 percent are considered transit dependent, mostly senior
citizens, persons with disabilities, and low-income residents. They have no personal means of transportation and must rely on public transit to meet their daily transportation needs.

In these prosperous times of the early 21st century, it is difficult for some to fathom that such situations exist. However, Texas is no exception to this rule, especially in the colonias along the Texas-Mexico border. What complicates the matter in these impoverished areas is that they lack the basic infrastructure such as storm drainage and paved streets that can adequately support transit service were it available. Rural counties are diligently working to resolve the infrastructure problem, but they are still faced with providing basic transportation services for these citizens. Innovative, affordable, and cost effective methods of providing transportation services for these residents are critical to their basic survival and necessary for the future prosperity of Texas and her people.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The goal of the research is to assess and document innovative, affordable, and cost-effective methods for meeting some of the unique transportation challenges facing residents of the colonias. The research team conducted an assessment of the colonias in Texas, their transportation needs, and current services to which they currently have access. The research also attempted to identify and investigate innovative and successful programs in both in Texas and across the United States that have met transportation challenges for similar population groups, including but not limited to, the elderly, the physically disabled, and residents of Native American reservations. The overall goal was to provide the citizens of Texas who reside in colonias with transportation alternatives that improves their quality of life and increases their potential success toward living the American dream.

1.3 PERFORMANCE TASKS: THE WORK PLAN

Task 1: Establish Task Force

The research team assembled a task force composed of key decision-makers in cities and counties along the Texas-Mexico border. The goal of the task force was to facilitate
communications with the research team and each other, to electronically to aid in the research, and to serve as a critical link to the colonias. The project monitor, research supervisor, and other key staff at TTI approached individuals both involved with and long-time advocates for the colonias to ensure that a high-quality and committed task force was assembled.

**Task 2: Conduct Assessment of Colonias in Texas**

Working with the task force, the research team initially identified the number of colonias along the Texas-Mexico border and the number of residents facing these challenges. This list was cross checked with the list maintained by the Office of the Secretary of State for Texas. The team also assessed the transportation needs of the residents in the colonias and the transportation services to which they had access.

**Task 3: Conduct Literature Review, Assessment of Potential Solutions, and Case Studies**

After identifying gaps in the current services, the researchers identified potential innovative and cost-effective methods of filling those gaps and improving services. Information was also gathered from an extensive literature review and a number of case studies on innovative rural transportation programs both in Texas and across the United States. One particular area investigated was those efforts that are in place to serve the populations on Native American reservations in Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Wisconsin, Florida, Alaska, and elsewhere.

**Task 4: Identification of Funding Sources**

Having identified possible innovative solutions to the transportation needs of the colonias, the research team then identified potential funding sources and programs to aid the transit agencies, rural counties, and local municipalities in the provision of these services. Such programs may be part of those funded through agencies and organizations such as the Federal Transit Administration, the Rural Transit Assistance Program, the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, the Community Transportation Association, the Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Center for Health Care Strategies, and others.
Task 5: Development of Handbook

A handbook that would be both informative and useful was initially proposed. The handbook was to have been created which documents potential innovative transportation solutions that can assist local decisions makers. However, due to the lack of information in this area, it was decided to abandon this task and to concentrate on finding other possible solutions to problems faced by colonias residents.

Task 6: Final Report

A final report and recommendations for pursuing innovative transportation funding was written and submitted.
2.0 BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

2.1 BACKGROUND

In Spanish the term *colonia* actually refers to a neighborhood or community. The term is used in the United States to refer to an unincorporated settlement along the US-Mexico border. These settlements are often characterized by lack of water and sewer systems as well as poor a transportation infrastructure and unsafe or unsanitary living conditions. *Colonias* began to appear along the Texas-Mexico border in the 1950’s and have continually grown despite attempts at restricting their creation by the state government. Currently, there are believed to be approximately 400,000 people located in Texas’ 2,294 *colonias*, which span along the 1,248-mile border.¹

2.1.1 Location of Colonias

*Colonias* are found in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, but Texas has both the largest number of *colonias* and the largest *colonias* population. Twenty nine border counties report having *colonias* and the Texas Attorney General has documented over 2,294 *colonias*. Figure 1 depicts counties in Texas with *colonias*. Some counties that have very dense *colonias* populations; these include: El Paso County, Hidalgo County, Cameron County and Webb County. Of these areas, Hidalgo County has the largest concentration of *colonias* and *colonia* residents in Texas. A vast majority of these locations have land that is either considered floodplains or has essentially no economic or agricultural value. This tendency of *colonias* continues along the U.S.-Mexico border into New Mexico, Arizona, and California as well. Many *colonias* areas also have very few urban areas in close vicinity, and those that do, such as the ones in the Brownsville and El Paso vicinities, can not rely on financial support from the already economically drained region.
2.1.2 How Colonias Developed

Development of Texas colonias began in the 1950s. A majority of these colonias were developed by individuals trying to create an inexpensive housing development for immigrants, while making a large profit off of land deemed unusable for agricultural purposes. The land was subdivided into small lots with little or now infrastructure and sold to low-income individuals seeking affordable housing. Developers often financed the land purchase with a contract for deed. A contract for deed is a property financing method where a low down payment and low monthly payments are offered but no title to the property transferred until the final payment. \(^1,^2\)

Prior to 1987, Texas counties did not have the authority to regulate new developments in unincorporated areas. Every regular session of the Texas Legislature since 1987 has made changes to the laws governing development of land along the border. The emphasis of these
statutes is restricting subdividing, selling, and providing utilities to residential lots. Before 1989 the State of Texas had no direct authority to enforce laws related to development of subdivisions or the sale of lots without utilities or a guarantee of utility service. In 1989 a state law was passed authorizing the Texas Water Development Board to create rules requiring developers to provide water and sewer. The intent of this law was to stop the creation of new colonias. 3

Because the land was purchased by contract for deed and a title is not present, the land cannot be used as collateral to secure financing for homebuilding or home improvements. The housing on the land is therefore generally constructed piecemeal by the owner and often lacks electricity, plumbing, and other basic amenities.3

In the 1950’s Texas adopted a state constitution that minimized the powers of government and made counties subdivisions of the state with no home rule powers. As a result, county authorities have limited authority over land development4. County authority is limited in most cases to the establishing minimum road and drainage requirements; this limited authority has allowed legal development of subdivisions that do not have water and sewer services. This leaves colonias with no municipal government and funding that is generally available to assist low income housing must be applied for by a local government entity. Nearby cities are reluctant to annex colonias because of the requirement to extend basic services to annexed lands. Because of the high poverty rates in the colonias, the ability of the colonias to increase a city’s tax base to sufficiently offset the cost of such an extension services is nonexistent.4

The overall population of these areas is predominately Hispanic. However contrary to speculation, over 75% of colonias dwellers were born in the United States, and almost 85% are either legal immigrants or U.S. citizens. Colonias dwellers generally have incomes well below the state annual income of $16,717. The trend of colonias communities is continuing at an alarming rate, and some speculate that their total population in Texas will reach 700,000 by the year 2010.3
2.2 COLONIAS: PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The following sections discuss some of the issues with regard to the *colonias* in Texas. These issues include water and wastewater, sanitation, unemployment, underemployment, health care, education, and inadequate or substandard housing.

2.2.1 Lack of Infrastructure — Water and Sanitation Services

Many problems exist in *colonia* communities, but those of greatest concern are the issues of potable water and wastewater treatment. Many of the houses were built on land with the promise of future infrastructure necessities, such as running water and natural gas, being provided by the developer in the future. These services were not provided by either the developer or the local government entity.

In the years since, inhabitants have had to resort to the use of outhouses, cesspools, or most often inadequate septic tanks. Surveys show that Texas *colonias* households list the following waste systems 50.7 percent septic tanks, 7.4 percent outhouses, and 5.5 percent other means. In many cases the land does not “perk” properly and is unsuitable for septic systems. Septic tank systems that are installed are often too small or improperly installed, leading to overflow. The lack paved caliche roads and drainage often compound the problem by preventing water run-off during rains. This lack of drainage leads to water pooling on the ground during times when septic tanks are taxed the most.

The lack of potable water in the *colonias* is by far the most pressing problem facing residents on a daily basis. Water stations like the one shown in Figure 2, may be as much as 30 miles from the *colonias*. Residents must buy and transport water from these water stations by the bucket or drum to meet their daily needs or use well that may be contaminated from wastewater and raw sewage. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate residents buying and transporting water. Residents use barrels, 500 gallon bladders and drums to store the water. This storage is often outside on porches or lean-tos that provide minimal protection from contamination. Figure 5 shows water storage at a home in *colonias*. *The Colonias Factbook* reported that 23.7 percent of households
did not have treated water in the house, and a 1995 Texas Water Development Board Study estimated that at least 428 colonias with about 81,000 people need potable water facilities.

Allocation of money for water systems for counties lacking the capability to provide colonias residents with water is not the sole solution. Other impediments to providing colonias residents access to water includes homes that do not meet minimum standards and building codes, the cost of extending water lines to homes, homes that do not meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) standards, the lack of a sponsoring entity to apply for funding for a water distribution system, and in some cases the unavailability of water. Homes that do not meet county building codes cannot access services. Many of the colonias homes were built without regard for indoor bathrooms or plumbing, and are rated as substandard by housing inspectors. For these homes to be hooked up to water supplies, repairs and improvements, which may cost large sums of money, must be made.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Figure 2. City of Laredo Water Station.*
Figure 3. *Colonias* Residents Filling Containers at Water Station

Figure 4. *Colonias* Resident Transporting Water
2.2.2 Substandard Housing

Residents of colonias typically do not have access to typical financing or assistance when buying or building a home. Without this traditional financing, housing in the colonias is often constructed with available materials and are often makeshift structures, which are works in progress. Residents rarely use professional builders and construct homes from available materials including wood, cardboard, and other materials. As finances dictate they continue to improve the structure. Housing in older established colonias tends to be more developed because residents have had a longer time to make improvements. As noted in the previous section, homes often do not meet building codes. Many of the colonias homes are built without regard for indoor bathrooms or plumbing, and are rated as substandard by housing inspectors.5

2.2.3 Lack of Services —Health Care

These conditions have lead to rampant problems with communicable diseases such as hepatitis, hepatitis A, salmonellosis, shigellosis, typhoid, and tuberculosis. One study by the University of Texas System Texas-Mexico Border Health Coordination Office found that
tuberculosis and hepatitis A was twice as likely in these colonias areas as it was in any other part of Texas. This problem has become compounded by the fact that people in these regions are far less likely to have healthcare because of a lack of access to hospitals, clinics, and primary care providers. In addition to the shortage of medical facilities within proximity to many colonias, health care is compounded by other factors such as:

- restricted transportation capabilities to reach medical facilities,
- fear of loss of wages or employment due to time away from work,
- inconvenient facility hours,
- lack of awareness of health care programs,
- lack of education on health issues, and
- no health insurance.

2.2.4 Unemployment and Underemployment

Colonias residents have incomes that are classified as either low or very low. Colonias residents in the workforce tend to be young, unskilled labor. Primary occupations are agricultural service providers and construction related jobs. Many of these jobs are low paying and seasonal. A random survey in June 2000 by the Texas Department of Health of 96 colonias found that the median household income was $834 per month. A 1993 study by Texas A&M found that unemployment in colonias ranged from 20 to 60 percent compared with an overall Texas unemployment rate of 7 percent.

2.2.5 Education

Education of colonias residents and their children is also a major issue. For colonias residents and their children to become productive citizens, break the cycle of poverty, and raise their standard of living proper education is essential. However, the dropout rate for children in colonias excessive. Although studies show that the estimated longitudinal dropout rate for the border area where colonias are located, is 17.3 percent compared to the state average of 14.4 percent; the actual rate is much higher. Anecdotal evidence and a number of studies show that as many as 50 percent of children in the colonias may leave school before the eighth grade, when dropout statistics begin being kept. Students leave school for a variety of reasons including:
getting a job to help their parents, health problems, inadequate clothing, language barriers, ostracism by other students, and peer pressure. 9

Transportation to school for colonias children is also often a problem. Because the roads of the colonias are often not paved, school buses can not safely traverse the roads during inclement weather. School children are faced with missing school or walking through the mud to a main road to meet the bus. This leads to further teasing and isolation, because they are the only children with “muddy” shoes if they have shoes at all. One poignant anecdote that was often repeated in interviews of colonias residents is of siblings taking turns going to school because of only one pair of shoes or lack of sufficient clothing to allow both children to attend school at the same time.

Because colonias are often in rural areas, there is often no late bus on those routes in the afternoons. This makes participation by the children in after school, extra-curricular, and athletic activities impossible. This lack of participation and involvement leads to further isolation, and increases the probability that the child will drop out. Many times all family members are forced to work in order to provide for the family, as noted above children often times drop out of school to help the family. Graduation rates are well below the state’s average as a whole, and many individuals in the colonias never even attend high school at all. Less than 1 percent of colonias children attend college and many of those drop out prior to receiving a degree. This lack of education reinforces the cycle of poverty in the colonias.

2.3 TRANSPORTATION AS RELATED TO COLONIAS ISSUES

The effect of transportation on all of the above issues highlights its importance. Colonias are often in remote areas and may be as much as 60 miles from the closest city. Although some colonias are served by rural bus service, the routes and times are typically very limited and do not adequately serve a population with limited means of private transportation. A lack of paved roads and the tendency for colonias to flood often cuts off residents from their community centers, their mail delivery, bus service, and in some cases school and work.
It has been documented through studies that in some cases, colonias unemployment rate is as high as 60% or eight times the state unemployment rate. Residents that have jobs are often underemployed with little change of improvement. Residents are restricted to finding jobs that are near transportation or close to the colonias. This due in large part to the lack of residents actually having transportation of their own or community provided transportation to attend a normal job. These are often low paying jobs, which hamper the ability of the worker to save money to improve their transportation status.

Transportation in the form of a vehicle is also crucial to the colonias resident’s dilemma of obtaining potable water. Potable water must be hauled in barrels or pods from water stations. Basic water requirement are needed to meet basic human needs. Gleick defined this basic water requirement in a 1996 article, “Basic Water Requirements for Human Activities: Meeting Basic Needs,” by designating four basic human needs. These four needs are drinking water for survival, water for human hygiene, water for sanitation services, and modest household needs for preparing food. The author found that a minimum of 50 liters per day per person was required for basic existence. The minimum need for a family of four is 200 liters or approximately 53 gallons of water per day. Many colonias are located in climates which require more water during much of the year, so this estimate is probably low. This means at a minimum the family vehicle must bear the wear and tear of hauling approximately 400 gallons of water per week just to meet the requirements of basic existence.

Transportation also plays a crucial role in colonias residents’ access to adequate health care. As previously stated, rural bus service is limited. Since many colonias are not near health care facilities, access to medical services is also limited. A trip to the doctor may take an entire day to accomplish by bus, missing work to. In most cases it is found that colonias inhabitants spend as much as one fifth of their annual salary on transportation services for themselves and their children. Considering their already limited average salary, which is well below the state poverty limit, transportation often becomes a “luxury” they cannot afford.
3.0 TRANSPORTATION RELATED PROGRAMS AND THE COLONIAS

3.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

The research team conducted a thorough literature review and internet survey to identify existing programs and funding sources that might provide possible solutions and financial aid for issues in the colonias. The search included but was not limited to current and past projects aimed at transportation issues in the colonias, as well as projects for federal transportation programs on Native American reservations, and sustainable development programs in other countries. The initial search provided considerable amount of documentation about a wide range of programs addressing transportation solutions. However, a more thorough review of the programs found that the number of solutions that could be applied to colonias was severely constrained. The following sections discuss programs that address colonias transportation issues as well as a discussion of successes, problems, and concerns related to each program.

3.2 THE TEXAS COLONIAS VAN PROJECT

In 1996 the Texas Transportation Institute in partnership with the Texas A&M Center for Housing and Urban Development (CHUD) initiated a Colonias Van project. The project goal was to increase access for colonias residents by providing transportation services. The demonstration project which was funded by the Southwest University Transportation Center (SWUTC) was designed to document the transportation needs of colonias residents on the Texas border. The Highway 359 colonias residents near Laredo in Webb County were selected for the demonstration project. The Highway 359 colonias are Larga Vista, Old Milwaukee, Tanquecitos, South Acres I, South Acres II, Los Altos, D-5 Acres, San Carlos I (also called San Enrique), San Carlos II, Ranchitos 359 East, Laredo Ranchettes, and Pueblo Neuvo. These 12 colonias are located along a 10 mile stretch of Highway 359 east of the city of Laredo. They are comprised of approximately 934 homes and 3,500 residents. At the time of the study the Highway 359 colonias had the following transportation services:

- *El Aguilar*, a fixed route demand responsive rural public transportation service,
• a bus operated by Mercy Hospital, which provided transportation to the Gateway Clinic, and
• bus transportation to school provided by the United Independent School District.\textsuperscript{11}

*El Aguilar* is a small fixed route transit operation with a limited number of vehicles. The service is operated by the Laredo Webb County Community Action Agency and operates a total of five fixed routes. The routes are designed to transport passengers to the Jarvis Plaza only. The Jarvis Plaza is the central transfer point for El Metro, Laredo’s municipal bus service. The *El Aguilar* route which served the Highway 359 *colonias* provided service on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday via one morning round trip run and one afternoon round trip run with limited seating capacity. Residents are picked up and dropped off at the Highway 359 entrance to each *colonias*. Additionally, cash service is not accepted for the bus trips so tickets must be purchased in advance.\textsuperscript{11}

For a period of time Mercy Hospital provided a bus to transport Highway 359 *colonias* residents to the Gateway Clinic. This service was comprised of a morning run that picked up *colonias* residents and an afternoon run which brought residents home. The service stopped at designated bus stops inside each *colonias*. The service which provided transportation solely for residents using the clinic was later suspended.\textsuperscript{11}

Transportation for school children residing in the *colonias* is provided by the United Independent School District. Children are picked up and dropped off at the entrance to each of the Highway 359 *colonias*. Most school buses are restricted to traversing only paved roads due to safety issues. This forces students to walk to the paved road bus stop in inclement weather. The school district does not currently run a late bus which limits the ability of children in *colonias* to participate in any type of extracurricular activity.

The study identified a number of transportation needs and issues in a series of meeting and surveys. The identified transportation issues included: frequency of bus service; evening and night bus service; larger buses to accommodate peak travel ridership; additional locations for bus
ticket sales; and provisions and coordination of transfers between the county bus service and the Laredo El Metro system.\textsuperscript{11} A survey of the residents of the Highway 359 colonias revealed that 96 percent had access to public transportation; however, 82 percent indicated that the public transportation service was inconvenient due to the distance to bus stops, infrequent service, and/or inadequate service.\textsuperscript{11}

The study also surveyed the number of personal vehicles available to colonias residents. Ninety-eight percent of the households surveyed had at least vehicle and the average number of vehicles per household in the surveyed households was 1.48. However, 52 percent of the households had only one vehicle for use and 85 percent of the privately operated vehicles were used to travel to work. This indicates that there are a large number of households that do not have a vehicle available for daily use for purposes other than work.\textsuperscript{11}

Based on these results a 15-passenger van was purchased with funding from the Texas Oil Overcharge fund and a contribution from Webb County. The van was owned and operated by Webb County. The use of the van is limited to service for the Highway 359 colonias. The van provided transportation to the Community Center and limited additional service to a nearby grocery store. Additionally the van was available to provide transportation to special meetings and events held at the community center and for individual medical emergencies. The initial results of the van implementation were extremely positive and led to an expansion to the passenger van program. By 2005, 35 vans were operating in colonias neighborhoods and transporting over 75,000 residents monthly. The monthly van usage indicates trips are made for food and household essentials, medical trips, educational trips including attending GED classes and job training, community trips and business related trips such as bill paying.

3.3 BORDER COLONIAS ACCESS PROGRAM

In 2001 the 77\textsuperscript{th} Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 1296 which created the Border Colonias Access Program. This program administered by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) provides financial assistance to counties for roadway projects. The
Border *Colonias* Access Program pays for connecting *colonias* to other public roads as well as providing roadway improvements such as paving, repaving and constructing drainage structures. There are $175 million in bond revenues allocated for this program.\(^{13}\) Currently 25% of these projects have been completed and the final 75% are in the final stages of construction. Another $50 million was recently allotted to continue this work in the growing *colonias* areas.

This program has the potential of solving many of the inherent subtle problems created by the lack of transportation infrastructure for the *colonias*. By paving roads the *colonias* become more accessible for school buses and other forms of transit. Improved roads also decrease the amount of wear and tear on the vehicles that residents do own. By increasing the drainage infrastructure, flooding and standing water problems are also resolved. However, a recent workshop revealed some impediments to program implementation.

In August 2004 a workshop was hosted by the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M International University in Laredo to assess innovative solutions to transportation needs in the *colonias*.\(^{14}\) Discussions from this workshop, which can be found at Appendix A, revealed that many of the *colonias* streets and roads are not eligible for the program because of the absence of legal platting. Roads funded with public money cannot be built on private lands, since nearly all of the *colonias* have not been legally platted, there is no way to gain easements or rights-of-way so that roads can be publicly built and maintained. Many of the *colonias* residents either do not have the funds or are apprehensive of surveying their land so the area can receive proper platting. Some residents fear that they will incur higher taxes and greater restrictions as a result of platting.\(^{14}\)

### 3.4 Rural Transit Services

In some parts of the border area the implementation of rural public transportation services have provided the key to transportation solutions for the *colonias*. This is especially true in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The *colonias* in the lower Rio Grande Valley, specifically Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy Counties are closer to the urban areas. These *colonias* have benefited
greatly from rural public transportation services. These areas have further enhanced the
effectiveness of the service by instituting on demand service for certain categories of trips and by
working with social service agencies such as health clinics and programs for the elderly to
coordinate bus schedules and appointment schedules.\textsuperscript{15}

Rural transit does not work as well for \textit{colonias} residents in the Laredo (Webb County)
and El Paso (El Paso and Hudspeth Counties) because of the distance between some of the
\textit{colonias} and the urban metropolitan area. Many of the \textit{colonias} in these areas are geographically
isolated from the urban centers and towns and rural transit is a sporadic fix at best. Because of
the distances of 30 to 50 miles, and low ridership as compared to more urban locations any
transit schedule of more than one roundtrip bus a day is impractical as well as cost prohibitive.

3.5 TRIBAL TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

At first glance the transportation issues facing the \textit{colonias} are very similar to the
transportation problems experienced in Native American Tribal areas. Native American tribal
lands are often located in rural areas, are often economically depressed, and have a lack of
transportation infrastructure. The vast majority of tribal reservations to not have existing
infrastructure to support public transit, location of the reservations required travel over
considerable distances to reach needed destinations, and some residents, especially those with
disabilities, do not have the financial ability to afford personal transportation.\textsuperscript{16}

The primary difference in \textit{colonias} and tribal reservation areas however, is the
organization of Native Americans as a recognized governmental entity. Because each tribe and
reservation is organized with tribal councils which are recognized as a jurisdictional entity, tribal
reservation areas are able to apply for and receive resources and financial assistance to develop
transportation infrastructure and programs. Many tribes have developed their own transportation
planning groups and are adopting versions of traditional long range transportation planning
methods.\textsuperscript{17} The \textit{colonias} lack of jurisdictional infrastructure severely limits the \textit{colonias}
residents’ ability to spearhead efforts for improvement of their areas. \textit{Colonias} must rely on
nearby cities or county governments. Cities are often reluctant to annex *colonias* as either parts of the municipality or as an extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) because of the cost of improvement or installation of required infrastructure. County governments by law in Texas are inherently weak as governmental taxing entities. County governments are as often reluctant to take on infrastructure other than roads and drainage issues. The ability to apply for individual grants as a legal jurisdictional entity is a solution to many problems facing *colonias* residents.
4.0 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 GENERAL FINDINGS

The most pressing problems for the colonias residents are water, sewage treatment, transportation infrastructure, and transportation options. In many ways these problems are intertwined. There are some facilities in place to start providing these services; however the many of the same obstacles that allowed the colonias to come about hinder the solutions. For example is a requirement that the homes must meet inspection to connect to the water and sewage lines. To bring the houses up to code it would cost the residents an inordinate amount of money, and many families cannot afford this added expense.

The roads, which are in the process of being paved through the Border Access Program, have provided many residents of the colonias areas access to much needed services. However due the lack of platting of many properties and the continuous increases in population, this will be a project that has no clear finish in sight. The platting requirement which includes the cost of surveying the residents land may be cost prohibitive for the resident and is often met with distrust. Funds need to be found to assist residents in paying for plats and to provide general education to property owners about the benefits of deeding right-of-way. Currently in many instances roads in colonias are only maintained via an emergency order from the county attorney. This type of emergency order is often only issued in the event that the road has become impassible due to a weather event.

Transportation services such as the vans, while effective, have only reached a limited number of people due to the spread out nature of these communities. Rural transit services while helpful, cannot meet the total needs of colonias communities without becoming cost prohibitive. Van services though are the most effective form of transportation services. They have the ability to provide a cost effective means of transporting people on either a scheduled or on demand basis.
4.2 COMMUNICATIONS AND COORDINATED EFFORT

While the government is hard at work in an attempt to better provide for colonias communities, there are still many roadblocks that hinder success. The lack of services and the efforts to correct issues are often splintered and institutionally isolated. There is a large communications disconnect between the residents who are affected and the entities that can produce the needed changes. There is also an overall lack of leadership on all sides in developing long range solutions to the problem instead of creating an easy fix for the current hot topic. Protectionism exists among decision makers at all levels, and the colonias and their residents are often treated as a relatively low priority issue. In turn, Colonias residents are often unwilling or unable to speak out and advocate for changes that are needed.

One large hurdle for the colonias is the lack of a legal jurisdictional identity. Many colonias, especially those in outlying areas, are not within a city or the ETJ of a metropolitan center. There is no benefit to the city to annex a colonias; in fact, there is often a distinct disadvantage to annexation. Once an area is annexed by a city, the cities assume some responsibility to improve and provide basic services and infrastructure for their jurisdictions. As previously stated county governments in Texas are traditionally weak in their abilities to provide services, and investments in infrastructure may be perceived as primarily providing help to the developer. Counties governments are also by law not able to apply for certain types funding to help blighted areas. Therefore the lack of help from the County government is also a matter of economics. Because of this reluctance to assume responsibility for the colonias local politicians and policy makers are often disconnected in processes to find solutions and means of innovative funding. Their involvement in this process is crucial.

A solution to the problem of jurisdictional identity is incorporation of the colonias. Incorporation although tedious and complicated can offer a solution. Once a colonia incorporates and becomes a jurisdictional entity with its own governing body, several things can happen. First of all the colonia becomes eligible for a number of grants and funding mechanisms that are not available to an unincorporated area or the county. Second it creates a mechanism for colonia residents to become involved in solutions to their problems. Finally, and by no means least
importantly, the *colonia* becomes a political entity in its own right and earns a place at the political table for countywide issues.

**4.3 OTHER POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND FUNDING MECHANISMS**

One possible solution for completing infrastructure is the utilization of Tax Increment Finance (TIF) mechanisms. This mechanism has been used quite successfully by a number of cities to finance development and redevelop blighted areas. TIFs are property tax incentives that are used to publicly finance needed structural improvements to enhance infrastructure in a defined area. The cost of the improvements to the designated area is repaid through the contribution of future property tax revenues by each taxing unit that levies taxes against the property in the designated area. By creating a TIF for *colonias* areas, portions or possibly all of the property taxes paid by *colonias* residents, could be used specifically for the *colonias* to improve infrastructure. The money could be used as a means of providing the matching money for federal programs as well as bond financing.

In Texas, the law states that property owners constituting 50 percent of the property in the proposed zone may petition the city for designation of an area as a TIF. The taxing unit can dedicate all or a portion of the tax revenue to the TIF. Texas law also requires a specific, enumerated minimum requirement for blight within the TIF. *Colonias* would fall into this category. However, in Texas, only cities have the authority to initiate tax increment financing. Special legislation would be required to allow the county government to utilize the TIF financing mechanism for *colonias* development.

A more traditional avenue is to seek grant money to supplement the van program. Grant money for van replacement and maintenance could possibly be acquired from private foundations to supplement current funding. Grant applications could also be made to provide funding for the needed property surveys needed for platting *colonias* areas targeted by the Border Access Program. There are a number of possible foundations which focus on this type of philanthropy, including the Toyota Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Ford
Foundation. This type of funding is often a one time funding source, however, it may be a source to provide matching monies as well as fund one time projects such as van replacement or supplemental funding for plating colonias. Funding applications do require expertise in grant writing and a commitment by some entity to assist in these types of applications. The state of Texas does have a grant writing team as well as a website for grant seekers which could assist in this endeavor. The mission of the State Grants Team is to provide technical assistance, statewide grants training, and federal liaison services to Texas state agencies, all subdivisions of government, and nonprofit organizations. More information about the State Grants Team and possible funding cant is is found at http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/stategrants.

4.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary there are no easy answers and no specific answer to the transportation and other issues that the residents of the colonias face. The workshop in Laredo, as well as current and previous programs, reveals that there are innovative advocates in Texas who are attempting to help residents achieve a better quality of life. However, this issue is a long term problem that requires long term commitments and solutions as well as involvement by politicians and policy makers at all levels. The colonias did not happen overnight and the problems and issues that have been created will not be solved overnight. The Texas A&M Center for Housing and Urban Development provides a firm platform for building lasting solutions to colonias issues. This center should be supported and become a clearinghouse for all colonias related projects. Only through focus and coordination can projects achieve long term goals needed to assist colonias.

It is also necessary for the State of Texas to remain vigilant to ensure that the colonias situation is not repeated. The State needs to regularly examine areas outside of the designated colonias zone of 150 miles from the Texas border to ensure that new colonias type subdivisions are not created. Strengthening county governments and their ability to control development in unincorporated areas is paramount to keeping history from repeating the chapter of the colonias in Texas history.
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APPENDIX A

COLONIAS WORKSHOP
Workshop to Assess Innovative Solutions to Transportation Needs in the Colonias

Workshop Summary

SWUTC/04/167151-1

Texas Transportation Institute
Texas A&M University System
College Station, Texas 77843-3135
WORKSHOP TO ASSESS INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO TRANSPORTATION NEEDS IN THE COLONIAS:

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

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Report SWUTC/04/167151-1
Project Number 167151
Research Project Title: Workshop to Assess Innovative Solutions to Transportation Needs in the Colonias

Sponsored by the
Southwest University Transportation Center

August 2004

TEXAS TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE
The Texas A&M University System
College Station, Texas 77843-3135
DISCLAIMER

The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the information presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official view or policies of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), or the Southwest University Transportation Center. This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the Department of Transportation, University Transportation Centers Program, in the interest of information exchange.

The United States Government and the State of Texas do not endorse products or manufacturers. Trade or manufacturers’ names appear herein solely because they are considered essential to the object of this report.
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The research team also wishes to acknowledge the cooperation and input of the individuals who attended the workshop. Their input was critical to the success of this event and their time and participation was greatly appreciated.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A dream of nearly every American, whether native-born or immigrant, is that one day they will own land, a place to call their own. It is an integral part of the American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Those individuals living in the colonias along the Texas-Mexico border are no exception. However, because of their living conditions, they must struggle to pursue their dreams often without the basic needs of adequate potable water, sewer, electricity, natural gas, storm drainage, paved roads, and safe sanitary housing. Originally established during the latter half of the 20th century, these unincorporated areas outside city limits or in isolated areas of Texas counties were established by developers who sold land with little or no infrastructure under contract for deed agreements at high interest rates. The appeal to the new owners was minimal up front costs and affordable monthly payments.

Figure 1. Colonias Residence – Laredo, TX

Since many of the residents are of either low or very low income, they slowly improve their property as funds are available. The result is an estimate of nearly 500,000 Texas residents, most of whom are legal citizens of the United States, who live under poor conditions and are
challenged daily with the simple tasks of seeing their children off to school, going to work, obtaining water for daily use, buying groceries, obtaining quality health care, and having their trash removed. A major link in all of these basic needs is sufficient and affordable transportation. While many areas are gradually working to provide desperately needed infrastructure to these communities, the process is slow and expensive. Innovative and cost-effective solutions are needed to solve immediate transportation needs to help support these Texans in daily life.

BACKGROUND

A recent status report prepared by the Community Transportation Association of America, Institute for Economic and Social Measurement, for the Rural Transit Assistance Program, Federal Highway Administration, reported that more than one-third of America’s population lives outside of urbanized areas. Based on the 1990 Census, this figure is nearly 91 million people. Of these rural Americans, 32 percent are considered transit dependent, mostly senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and low-income residents. They have no personal means of transportation and must rely on public transit to meet their daily transportation needs.

Figure 2. Colonias Roadway – Laredo, TX.
In these prosperous times of the early 21st century, it is difficult for some to fathom that such situations exist. However, Texas is no exception to this rule, especially in the colonias along the Texas-Mexico border. What complicates the matter in these impoverished areas is that they lack the basic infrastructure that can adequately support transit service were it available, that of storm drainage and paved streets. Rural counties are diligently working to resolve the infrastructure problem, but they are still faced with providing basic transportation services for these citizens. Innovative, affordable, and cost-effective methods of providing transportation services for these citizens are critical to their basic survival and necessary for the future prosperity of Texas and her people.

OBJECTIVES OF WORKSHOP

The goal of this workshop was to gather advocates for the colonias and other individuals that work with these communities to work with the research team to assess and document innovative, affordable, and cost-effective methods for meeting some of the unique transportation challenges facing residents of the colonias. The research team led the workshop with the intent to identify critical needs of these communities, discuss potential short- and long-term solutions to their transportation-related problems, and examine successful endeavors to meet these needs.

Figure 3. Colonias Residents and Advocates at Workshop – Laredo, TX.
This information will be used to develop case studies to highlight unique programs that have potential applicability to the colonias and to identify potential funding sources for these programs that will serve the needs of the colonias and provide financial relief to the counties in which they are located. Finally, the results will be used to produce a handbook that can be made available to counties, local governments, transit agencies, and other agencies that serve colonias and similar areas. The overall goal is to provide the citizens of Texas who reside in colonias with transportation alternatives or services to circumvent the lack of transportation to improve their quality of life and increase their potential success toward living the American dream.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER RESEARCH

Since 1997, the Southwest University Transportation Center (SWUTC) has teamed with the Texas A&M University Center for Housing and Urban Development (CHUD) to look at transportation issues and possible solutions for those impoverished people living in colonias along the Texas border. Through this project, SWUTC developed a demonstration project to supply a 15-passenger van for transportation service for a community center in El Cenizo, a Webb County colonia.

Figure 4. CHUD Van Program.
Because of the projects success, a multi-year State Energy Conservation Office (SECO) contract has replicated the initial pilot project, and the program has approved the purchase of 31 vans. Through the course of this workshop and its related overall project, it is anticipated that the researchers will build upon and complement the success of this program and document similar successful programs from around the country that can be modeled to benefit the citizens living in Texas colonias.

RESEARCH BENEFITS

The results of this research will be useful to any public or private agency that works with, supports, and seeks to improve the quality of life for Texas citizens living in colonias. It will also be beneficial to those outside of Texas who have communities with similar transportation challenges their residents face on a daily basis. Potential benefits of the research include: (1) an increase in the general awareness of the transportation needs of colonias residents; (2) an increase in the availability and variety of transportation services available to those residents living in colonias; and (3) an improvement in the quality of life for these residents to secure the future for themselves and generations to come.
CHAPTER 2: WORKSHOP ORGANIZATION

COORDINATION

The workshop was the collaborative effort of a number of entities. All of them were critical to the overall success of the workshop. The following sections highlight the participating entities and the manner in which their contribution impacted the research effort.

Southwest University Transportation Center

Primarily, the workshop was funded through the Southwest University Transportation Center (SWUTC) at the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). SWUTC was established at Texas A&M University System in October 1988 and is comprised of a consortium of three universities within the Federal Highway Administration’s Region 6: the Texas A&M University System (Texas Transportation Institute), the University of Texas at Austin (Center for Transportation Research), and Texas Southern University (Center for Transportation Training and Research). The Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University serves as the lead institution. The SWUTC is headquartered in College Station on the main Texas A&M University campus.

The SWUTC has developed a stable, consistent program that is maturing in its role as a center of excellence for transportation research and education in Region 6. The theme for the SWUTC is Transportation Solutions to Enhance Prosperity and the Quality of Life. To put this theme into operation, the Center's scientists, engineers, and students focus their research expertise upon advancing four strategic thrusts. The specific thrust that this workshop advanced is the improvement of transportation activities along the Texas-Mexico border. The SWUTC funds supported the preparation of the workshop including the planning and preparation of advance materials, the mailing of registration brochures, all materials necessary to hold the event, the travel expenses incurred by attendees, and the development, publication, and dissemination of this document.
Texas Transportation Institute

The research team for this study was comprised of individuals from the System Management Division of the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). TTI is a national leader in transportation research whose mission is to facilitate innovations in transportation system operations through leadership in research, education, and technology transfer. TTI is a state agency and part of the Texas A&M University System and is the largest university-based transportation research agency in the United States.

Center for Housing and Urban Development

The workshop was coordinated with the support of Texas A&M University’s Colonias Program. The Center for Housing and Urban Development (CHUD), which is located in the College of Architecture, Texas A&M University, is a research and outreach center dedicated towards improving the quality of life of Texas residents. The Colonias Program, which is housed in the CHUD, is designed to assist residents of low-income settlements, called colonias, in improving the quality of their lives. The program works in partnership with local government, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and promotes the active involvement of residents to strengthen the social infrastructure of the community. The program helps colonia residents access education, health, human services, job training, youth and elderly programs available in their areas, as well as those located at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU).

Mr. Oscar J. Munoz, Regional Coordinator for the Center for Housing and Urban Development Colonias Program, worked with the research team to organize and host the meeting. He identified the potential attendees for the meeting and served as an initial liaison with TAMIU. He also acted as a contact for the workshop, providing background and registration information to those contacting him in that capacity. Moreover, he served as an advisor on the development of the workshop, helping to ensure that the research team could glean the most appropriate and relevant information from attendees.
Texas A&M International University

Finally, TAMIU was an integral part of the workshop coordination. Texas A&M International University, a member of the Texas A&M University System, is committed to the preparation of students for leadership roles in their chosen profession and in an increasingly complex, culturally diverse state, national, and global society. Located in Laredo, Texas, the University provides students with a learning environment anchored by the highest quality programs built on a solid academic foundation in the liberal arts and natural sciences. TAMIU was gracious to provide meeting space and all audio-visual needs for the workshop.

PROMOTION AND REGISTRATION

The research team initially developed a promotional flyer to notify the potential attendees of workshop. This flyer is provided in Appendix A. The list of potential attendees numbered over 40 and included key decision-makers in cities and counties along the Texas-Mexico border and other individuals both involved with and long-time advocates for or residents of the colonias. Agencies, organizations, and communities invited to the workshop included the following:

- Assocacion Pro Servicios Sociales, Inc.,
- Bruni Community Center,
- El Cenizo Community Center,
- Del Rio/Eagle Pass Community Center,
- El Aguila Rural Transportation,
- Gateway Medical Clinic,
- Laredo Community Center,
- Laredo/Webb County Community Action Agency,
- Larga Vista Community Center,
- Maverick County,
- Penitas Community Center,
- Quad City Community Center,
• Rio Bravo Community Center,
• Secretary of State Office,
• South Texas Development Council,
• South Texas Work Force Development Board,
• Southwest Region University Transportation Center,
• South Texas Environmental Education and Research,
• Texas A&M International University,
• Texas A&M University Colonias Program,
• Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs,
• Texas Department of Transportation,
• Texas Transportation Institute,
• United Independent School District,
• Val Verde County,
• Webb County,
• Webb County Economic Development, and
• Webb Road/Bridge.

The research team developed a two-page registration brochure that discussed the goals and objectives of the workshop and provided specific information regarding the date, time, and location of the meeting. These brochures were mailed to the list of potential attendees and registrations were accepted until the day of the meeting. Attendees incurred no registration fees for the meeting itself and travel expenses were reimbursed per State of Texas travel guidelines. A copy of the registration brochure is provided in Appendix B.

MEETING AGENDA

The research team developed a 1-day agenda that was split into two ½ day events. The intent was to facilitate participation from individuals in the region and minimize the amount of time attendees would have to be away from home or work. Activities undertaken during the meeting included a general open discussion, breakout sessions for more detailed discussions, and
a general consensus-building effort targeted at identifying potential solutions to transportation needs in the colonias. A copy of the meeting agenda is located in Appendix C.
CHAPTER 3: WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Twenty key decision-makers in cities and counties along the Texas-Mexico border and other individuals either involved with or long-time advocates for or residents of the colonias assembled on the TAMIU campus on Tuesday, 24 August 2004, to discuss transportation problems in the colonias along the Texas-Mexico border. The list of attendees is provided in Appendix D. Those attending the workshop represented a variety of public agencies along with representatives from numerous colonias in the Laredo, Eagle Pass, and Del Rio regions. Their enthusiasm and insight into the challenges that come with living in the colonias ensured a successful workshop.

![Figure 5. TAMIU Campus in Laredo.](image)

ISSUES IN THE COLONIAS

After a short welcome by Dr. Beverly Kuhn and initial self-introductions by the workshop attendees, a group discussion followed regarding an assessment of general needs of Colonias residents. These needs were then discussed to determine what transportation aspects were parts of the problem. The workshop general session provided the following non-prioritized list of issues:

- The lack of water in colonias, which results in residents having to haul water for their households.
- Drop-out problems and other educational issues for children in colonias.
- Cost of transportation and transit including:
  - Per person fees for riding transit,
  - Vehicle upkeep and maintenance,
- Requirement for riders to purchase tokens elsewhere rather than when boarding the bus,
- Insurance and licensing for privately owned vehicles,
- Families with children whose transportation needs, whether via transit or privately owned vehicle, are complicated due to multiple riders, and
- Vehicle upkeep and maintenance.

- Personal responsibility of residents and choices with respect to transportation.

Figure 6. Colonia Resident Hauling Water – Laredo, TX.

- Colonia access program.
  - Paved roads on school bus routes.
  - Provide access to service providers.
- Cycle of service by transit that is available versus service that fulfills residents needs, desires, and usage.
- Never enough representation from all concerned when discussing issues with transportation.
• Disconnect between urban and rural bus systems:
  o Rural service provided by Webb county;
  o Municipal service provided by the city;
  o Transit to Medicaid-related appointments privately funded and provided only to patients and not dependents.
• Fire protection.
  o Currently, no fire hydrants in the colonias.
  o Water needs for adequate protection.
• EMS is provided by a contract between city and county but road access is a challenge.
• Residents who are illegal immigrants create risks that could be incurred by service providers and legal residents who may provide transportation services to those individuals. They may be considered aiding and abetting the transport of illegal immigrants and expose themselves to potential felony arrest.
• Communications issues compound the problem for residents accessing currently available transportation services.
  o Many residents have no phone.
  o Outlying colonias residents are a long distance call away from services, resulting in toll calls, limited services, long waits, etc.
• Water co-op was attempted in one colonia with mixed results. Lessons learned from the attempt included:
  o Logistics of hauling and delivery of large amounts of water are massive and complex.
  o Poor roads resulting on increased wear and tear on the vehicle amplify vehicle maintenance.
  o Transportation of water is illegal except when performed by individuals.
  o All government entities must take water out of lines
• Construction companies and businesses are using water intended and reserved for colonias, causing additional queues for residents
• Residents cannot dig wells in region to provide their own water because well water is non potable.
• There are disputes between city and county over water and water service.
Solid waste removal is an issue for residents as well.
  - No solid waste removal services to the colonias.
  - There is illegal dumping in colonias by non-colonias residents.
  - There is no county dump and the rural fee for dumping at the city dump is higher for non-residents.

Old vehicles stored in yards and on acreage in and surrounding colonias are often used as play areas by children.

There is variability in working hours and employment centers which hinder car pools and primary wage earners wind up using the only family vehicle.

Residents are underemployed, often working 2 or 3 jobs. They are also underinsured.

Multi-job families are the norm

Programs for federal welfare support require recipients to attend classes or programs but residents do not get paid to do so.
  - May receive tokens for transportation to the program.
Program may pay for vehicle repairs for participants.

- Current assistance funding does not allow for flexibility.
- Car-sharing possibilities.

Figure 8. Accumulation of Residential Solid Waste – Laredo, TX.

After discussions in the general session about the above-enumerated issues, workshop members divided into three breakout groups. Each group was charged with defining critical issues pertaining to the transportation aspects of the colonias issues. They were also charged with providing uses for potential funding to alleviate short-term problems. The following sections provide the results of the breakout sessions.

BREAKOUT GROUP 1

Critical Issues

- Disconnect: between those that are affected and those who can affect change.
  - Groups are not communicating or working together for solutions.
- Services and efforts are splintered. There is a lack of overall leadership for planning, etc.
- Protectionism abounds between local and state or federal decision-makers.
- Numerous obstacles to navigating any/all of the systems.
- Agencies discouraged to think out of the box.

- Lack of various forms/means of transportation.
  - Lack of transportation.
  - No vehicles, funds to support a system.
  - Inadequate systems.
  - School bus transportation.
  - Inclement weather is a problem. When it rains, the children do not attend school.
  - Bus driver cannot go into colonias after rains because of safety issues due to lack of paved roads. This forces children to walk through muddy roads to reach bus.
  - Extracurricular activities are not available. Children cannot participate because of lack of transportation.
  - Students cannot take remedial classes, etc. due to lack of late bus for colonias residents.
  - No / few rural routes.
  - Residents are stranded.
  - Medical transportation service is limited in scope and availability.
  - Need more medical routes.
- Get water to colonias.
- How to get to a school or college for classes.

- Lack of potable water / city services of water
  - Creates major health problems
  - Financial burdens, etc.
• Education
  o Drop-out rate 90% for colonias children.
  o Underemployment.
  o Hope for improvement in quality of life.
  o Numerous obstacles to having kids stay in school go to college, etc.
  o Health education / information for families.
  o The need to know about social and health services.
  o Need more resources to get this information to families.

Potential Solutions – Use of Funding

1. Hire a bus driver and use promotoras for the skills they have to work with families.
2. Need more vans for resolving the lack of transportation issues.
3. Develop working groups to address the disconnect. Write a white paper that describes this problem and possible solutions. Get key people involved to foster communication links between city and county. Formulate possible solutions to various problems instead of ignoring the colonias. Gather together representatives
from stakeholders – educators, colonia residents, economic development, health providers, workforce development, promotoras / colonias program, etc. Partnerships over the years are now providing the relationships needed to start these working groups. Goal – to prevent the splintering and coalesce those who want to be involved in a more organized and fruitful fashion.

BREAK-OUT GROUP 2

Critical Issues

- Hauling water.
- Private roads vs. county owned.
  - No legal plat for property. There are no public roads without a plat.
  - Educating residents on benefits of deeding right-of-way to county.
  - Roads can only be maintained with an emergency order from the county attorney / most often only in case of heavy storm or other event that has made the road impassable.
- Health (primary services).
- Domestic violence.
- Drug abuse.
- Child abuse.

Potential Solutions – Use of Funding

1. Use for new self-help center in Laredo or to provide additional services to current self-help centers.
2. Find sources to assist residents in paying for plats and educating residents about the benefits of deeding ROW.
BREAK-OUT GROUP 3

Critical Issues

• Availability of water.
• Water / roadway and infrastructure in colonias.
• Road program for colonias is a good start. This program provides state funding for paving roads. However colonias need to be platted before the program can be implemented.
• Identify / coordinate ALL transportation.
  o Resources and services available to colonias residents.
• Accessibility to educational programs.
• Solid waste disposal services and costs.
Potential Solutions – Use of Funding

1. Inventory and document all of the available services and service providers that can assist the colonias residents. Create a forum to establish communications between the providers and the residents. Also create a forum to educate the residents about the various services.

2. Create an incentive program, perhaps in the form of bus tokens or other tangible rewards, that encourages children to stay in school and get good grades.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

After a presentation of critical issues and potential funding usage by each breakout group, workshop members reconvened as a whole to discuss general recommendations and findings. The following issues were set

- There is a general disconnect between involved entities – overall message has to do with those making the decisions and those impacted by them
  - All people need to come to the table.
Need all stakeholders and key players.
The regions have different needs and different agencies have specialties and different roles.
Getting people to the table is the challenge.
How to organize and be successful.
Service provider luncheons:
- Once a month,
- 50+ people each month,
- Past/current/future partners,
- Took turns giving presentations,
- Use it to recruit partners,
- Providing lunch was the key to success,
- Opportunities to share commonalities,
- Invite folks wanting to share programs and efforts,
- People causing effect and those being effected,
- Learn to partner with others and share resources with common goal to help underserved, and
- Make more connections with other agencies that can provide available services to Colonias residents.

Promotoras:
- Outreach to agencies,
- Educators and trainers,
- Leaders in own community,
- Build capacity in colonias,
- Drivers are needed,
- Centers bring residents and service providers together, and
- Residents want educational programs / training / computer skills.
Figure 12. Webb County Self-Help Center.

Figure 13. Promotoras from Various Colonias.
• The key to solving many problems that colonias residents face is water.
  o Contract for deed conversion program only available if you have water and sewer.
  o 58 colonias in the Laredo area (Webb County); only 3 have water.
  o Bringing water and sewer to property adds value to the property.
  o County doesn’t want to it make the necessary investment in providing water because.
    - Seen as helping the developer.
    - Matter of economics.
    - Politics.
  o Short-term water line is feasible. The colonias would like a 2” water line.
  o Long-term solution is what the county wants to provide is very expensive: 6”-8” line which would be needed for fire service and future development.

• The second key is communications and the need to promote successful programs.
• Involvement of politicians and policy-makers in process of finding solutions to the problems of the colonias is crucial. In order for this to happen the top administration and higher political groups must be involved for the issue to be seen as a priority.

**SUMMARY**

As evidenced by the sections noted above, there was an overall consensus that the lack of water and sewer services is the primary obstacle to efficient transportation. However, the innovative advocates in the region have found ways to provide transportation in this challenging environment. The workshop attendees provided critical insight into the challenges residents face and highlighted potential solutions to help them face those challenges on a daily basis. The research team will utilize the information provided during this workshop to develop a handbook to help local agencies and advocate groups meet the transportation needs of the residents or provide services that can be accessed within the communities without the need for transportation. The ultimate objective is to help these residents improve their quality of life within the State of Texas.
APPENDIX A: WORKSHOP FLYER
Workshop to Assess Innovative Solutions to Transportation Needs in the Colonias

August 24-25, 2004
Texas A&M International University
5201 University Blvd
Student Center Room 120
Laredo, TX

Sponsored by the Texas Transportation Institute and the Southwest Region University Transportation Center, this workshop is intended to gather advocates for the colonias and other individuals who work with these communities to help assess and document innovative, affordable, and cost-effective methods for meeting some of the unique transportation challenges facing residents of the colonias.

Travel expenses and lodging will be covered for all attendees and space is limited. For more information, contact Oscar Munoz in Laredo at 956-728-0210, omunoz@bizlaredo.rr.com or Beverly Kuhn in College Station at 979-862-3558, b-kuhn@tamu.edu. We look forward to your attendance.
An estimated 500,000 Texas residents, most of whom are legal citizens of the United States, currently live under poor conditions in colonias along the Texas-Mexico border.

They are challenged daily with the simple tasks of seeing their children off to school, going to work, obtaining water for daily use, buying groceries, obtaining quality health care, and having their trash removed.

A major link in all of these basic needs is sufficient and affordable transportation. While many areas are gradually working to provide desperately needed infrastructure to these communities, the process is slow and expensive.

Innovative and cost-effective solutions are needed to solve immediate transportation needs to help support these Texans in daily life.

Local Hotels

For those of you traveling from out of town, we have assembled a list of local hotels that should be able to meet your needs. Please contact them directly to make reservations.

**Hampton Inn Laredo**
7903 San Dario Avenue
Laredo, TX
(956) 717-8888

**Courtyard by Marriot**
2410 Santa Ursula Avenue
Laredo, TX 78040
(956) 725-5555 or 800-321-2211

**Fairfield Inn & Suites**
700 W Hillside Road
Laredo, TX 78041
(956) 722-4533

**Holiday Inn-Civic Center**
800 Garden Street
Laredo, TX 78040
(956) 727-5800 or 800-465-4329

**La Posada Hotel/Suites**
1005 Zaragoza Street
Laredo, TX 78040
(956) 722-1701 or 800-444-2099

Travel expenses and lodging will be covered for all for attendees based on State of Texas Travel Laws. The maximum nightly hotel rate allowed is $80 exclusive of taxes, and the maximum daily meal allowance is $30. Mileage is reimbursed at 35¢ per mile.
Innovative Solutions

This workshop will gather numerous individuals from across Texas who are key decision-makers in cities and counties along the Texas-Mexico border and others involved in working with the colonias for a 1 day meeting to discuss the issue at hand.

The intent will be to work with the TTI research team to assess and document innovative, affordable, and cost-effective methods for meeting some of the unique transportation challenges facing residents of the colonias.

The results will be used to help develop a handbook that is both informative and useful which documents potential innovative transportation solutions that can assist local decision makers.

The overall approach is to provide resources to help improve the quality of life for these citizens by meeting their transportation needs on a daily basis.

Event Sponsors

A number of organizations are responsible for bringing this workshop to Laredo. We appreciate their support for this endeavor.

Registration

Name
Organization
Address
City/State/Zip
Phone
Fax
E-mail

I am an employee of the State of Texas.

Send registration forms to:

Beverly Kuhn
Texas Transportation Institute
The Texas A&M University System
3135 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-3135
Phone: (979) 862-3558
Fax: (979) 845-6001
E-mail: b-kuhn@tamu.edu

For More Information:

Laredo
Oscar Munoz
(956) 728-0210
omunoz@bizlaredo.rr.com

College Station
Beverly Kuhn
(979) 862-3558
b-kuhn@tamu.edu
APPENDIX C: MEETING AGENDA
# Workshop to Assess Innovative Solutions to Transportation Needs in the Colonias

## Workshop Agenda

### Tuesday - August 24, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:00 pm to 1:30 pm</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
<td>Oscar Munoz, Center for HUD’s Colonias Program</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Beverly Kuhn, Texas Transportation Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 pm to 3:00 pm</td>
<td>Group Discussion - Assessment of Transportation Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00 pm to 3:15 pm</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:15 pm to 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Break-out Sessions - Identification of Potential Solutions</td>
<td>Debbie Jasek, Texas Transportation Institute</td>
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<td>Beverly Kuhn, Texas Transportation Institute</td>
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<td>Oscar Munoz, Center for HUD’s Colonias Program</td>
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<td>6:00 pm</td>
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### Wednesday - August 25, 2004

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<th>Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>8:00 am to 10:00 am</td>
<td>Break-out Session Reports</td>
<td>Debbie Jasek, Texas Transportation Institute</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Beverly Kuhn, Texas Transportation Institute</td>
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<td>Oscar Munoz, Center for HUD’s Colonias Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 am to 10:15 am</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15 pm to 12:00 pm</td>
<td>Development of Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 pm</td>
<td>Adjourn</td>
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</tbody>
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APPENDIX D: WORKSHOP ATTENDEES
Workshop to Assess Innovative Solutions to Transportation Needs in the Colonias

Workshop Attendees

Mr. Jose Adame  
Los Altos Colonia Resident  
Larga Vista Community Center  
5401 Larga Vista Dr.  
Laredo, TX 78043

Mr. Peter Arredondo  
Planning Officer  
South Texas Workforce Development Board  
1701 E. Hillside Rd.  
P.O. Box 1705  
Laredo, TX 78044

Ms. Sara Buentello  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
601 Concord Hills Blvd.  
Laredo, TX 78046

Mr. Dock Burke  
Director  
Southwest University Transportation Center  
Texas Transportation Institute  
College Station, TX 77843-3135

Mr. Omar Cantu  
Public Transportation Coordinator  
Texas Department of Transportation  
1817 Bob Bullock Loop  
Laredo, TX 78043

Ms. Norma Cruz  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
5401 Larga Vista Dr.  
Laredo, TX 78043

Ms. Liz Elizalde  
Program Coordinator  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
Del Rio/Eagle Pass Community Center  
P.O. Box 1705  
Del Rio, TX 77841

Ms. Joan Engelhardt  
South Texas Environmental Education and Research Program  
UTHSCSA-Laredo Campus Extension  
1937 E. Bustamante  
Laredo, TX 78401

Ms. Sylvia Garcia  
Rio Bravo Community Center  
1600 Orquedia  
Rio Bravo, TX 78046

Ms. Rosalia Guerrero  
Asociacion Pro Servicios Sociales, Inc.  
406 Scott  
Laredo, TX 78040

Ms. San Juanita Gutierrez  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
601 Concord Hills Blvd.  
Laredo, TX 78040

Ms. Debbie Jasek  
Associate Research Specialist  
Texas Transportation Institute  
3135 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77845-3135
Workshop Attendees (Continued)

Dr. Beverly Kuhn  
Division Head  
Texas Transportation Institute  
3135 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-3135

Mr. Paul Martinez, III  
Program Performance Administrator  
Webb County Economic Development  
1000 Houston St.  
Laredo, TX 78040

Mr. Oscar Munoz  
Regional Coordinator  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
Center for Housing and Urban Development  
601 Concord Hills Blvd.  
Laredo, TX 78046

Mr. Javier Murillo, P.E.  
Project Engineer  
Texas Department of Transportation  
1817 Bob Bullock Loop  
Laredo, TX 78046

Mr. Jorge Negrete  
Coordinator, Colonias Initiatives Program  
Office of the Secretary of State  
1110 Washington, Suite 305  
Laredo, TX 78040

Ms. Maria Ramirez  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
Quad City Community Center  
917 N. Main Ave.  
Mirando City, TX 78369

Ms. Valarie Rivera-Soto  
Border Field Officer  
Texas Department of Housing and  
Community Affairs  
Office of Colonia Initiatives  
1110 Washington, Suite 305  
Laredo, TX 78040

Ms. Hilda Soliz  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
Bruni Community Center  
303 12th Street  
Bruni, TX 78344

Ms. Patricia Torres  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
Cenizo Community Center  
3519 Cecilia Lane  
El Cenzio, TX 78046

Ms. Elvira Torres  
Texas A&M University Colonias Program  
Penitas Community Center  
5401 Larga Vista Dr.  
Laredo, TX 78043