

# 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted September 23, 2020



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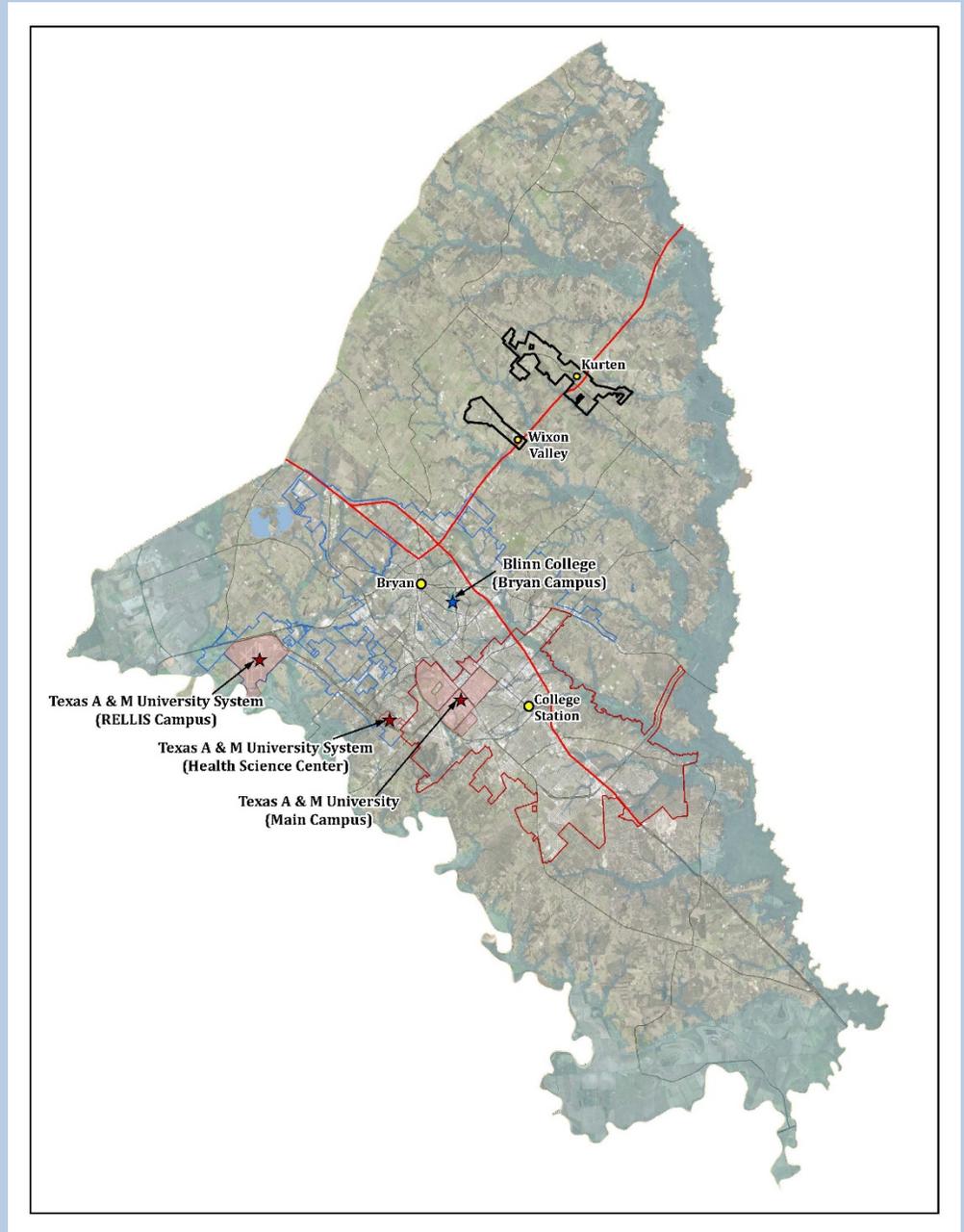
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# Introduction

The Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) was established by the Brazos County Commissioners Court in December of 2019 as the state’s newest RMA. The organization operates under Chapter 370 of the Texas Transportation Code which establishes requirements for Regional Mobility Authorities in Texas and represents the Legislature’s vision to allow local communities greater flexibility in meeting their transportation needs. In essence, the Brazos County RMA serves as its own Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) District within the Bryan TxDOT District.

Pursuant to Section 370.261 of the Texas Transportation Code, the RMA must develop a Strategic Plan every two years to reflect the organization’s priorities for the next five fiscal years. This plan will consider the challenges and opportunities facing the transportation network in Brazos County and will outline a set of goals and strategies the organization will employ to achieve its vision of enhanced mobility and economic opportunity through a citizen driven multi-modal approach.

Brazos County formed an RMA to strengthen its ability to fund needed transportation projects, gain more control in determining which projects will be funded and show federal and state funding partners that we want to leverage local resources. The RMAs priorities are to: 1) establish predictable funding sources that allow us to function; 2) develop a process for implementing MPO identified projects; and 3) pursue the implementation of other projects that would be beyond the purview of the MPO.



## Vision and Guiding Principles

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In February of 2020, the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Brazos County RMA, in association with 14 planning partners, established a transportation vision and guiding principles for Brazos County. The document was co-signed by all 16 planning partners to show that all organizations that address transportation issues in Brazos County are united and working together to offer innovative solutions to transportation issues.

The transportation vision for Brazos County is:

**Through community consensus, plan, develop and operate a quality transportation system for people and goods that promotes safety, enhances quality of life and supports economic opportunity throughout Brazos County.**

The guiding principles to help achieve this vision are:

### Plan and Develop

- Provide access to, through and within Brazos County that is safe, efficient and reliable, and offers mobility options.
- Recognize and respect the different missions, roles, and responsibilities of agencies, organizations, and groups, as well as the private sector, in Brazos County.
- Ensure that citizens, state and local governments coordinate with the Bryan/College Station MPO and Brazos County RMA to develop plans and programs that reduce the potential doubling of our congestion by 2030.
- Provide multiple opportunities for citizen engagement that ensure transparency throughout the discussion of public transportation alternatives.



Plan and  
Develop



Partnerships



Funding

## Partnerships

- Collaborate with colleges and universities to use Brazos County as an incubator for transportation innovation and new mobility technologies.
- Develop partnerships between the public and private sectors to mitigate the impacts of rapid growth on our transportation network.
- Work with local governments and the private sector to encourage innovative zoning and redevelopment that enhances transportation-land use connections and reduces congestion.
- Coordinate with all freight and telecommunication providers to allow for the safe and efficient movement of goods and services.

## Funding

- Enhance community awareness that most transportation improvements cost millions of dollars and can take many years to design and complete.
- Leverage and maximize the use of available public and private resources.
- Engage state and federal elected officials to explore additional local funding options.



# Challenges Facing the Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority

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As a new RMA, the organization faces a number of start-up challenges. Numerous citizen surveys show that transportation issues and congestion are a top concern of residents. Brazos County is home to the flagship campus of Texas A&M University, one of the nation's preeminent research institutions, home to 60,000+ students and brings more than 100 medium and large events to our area each semester. Increasing demand on our transportation network means the RMA must explore all viable transportation options and deliver a quality transportation network. Some specific challenges that must be the primary focus of this strategic plan are:

- Establishing equitable dedicated funding streams. Texas Legislative members often have differing views on how transportation projects should be funded. Those differences have limited the ability of local policymakers to establish traditional funding sources as local option gas taxes, parking fees and the like. The RMA believes equitable funding means all users should share in the financial burden of transportation infrastructure proportional to the requirements they place upon that infrastructure. The RMA should participate in a study on current funding sources and amounts as the beginning of a conversation about how all users can contribute an equitable share to financing the transportation network. The RMA should continue to pursue legislative action for a local option vehicle registration fee.
- Since the RMA is new, awareness of the organization's existence and its charge is not known by citizens. The RMA needs to seek clarity of direction from a community that desires the goal of equitable revenue sharing by those who use the transportation network but appears against "use based" revenues which most directly accomplishes that goal. The RMA also needs to make a case for the transportation network and services that meet public needs, identify the projects and funding required, and spend its money wisely for projects and programs that are supported by Brazos County residents.



- The emergence of new transportation technologies continues at a rapid pace. These technologies will change the way citizens perceive what mobility looks like. Technologies such as connected vehicles, self-driving cars, increased electrification of vehicles and the rise of ridesharing and teleworking all of which are becoming within reach of a much broader cross section of citizens means the RMA shall be adaptable to ever-evolving mobility challenges.
- The 2020 Census may change how transportation network priorities, project selection processes and funding for alternative modes is done in Brazos County. If the urbanized area population in Brazos County exceeds 200,000, the community will be designated as a Transportation Management Area. This means that a congestion management process must be followed where the emphasis is on reducing transportation demand before increasing roadway capacity. It will also impact Brazos Transit District funding as federal and state contributions will drop from 100% to 75% reimbursable. The funding gap will have to be closed using funds from local resources. To address citizen congestion concerns the RMA must identify and efficiently use all the tools in its toolbox and promote broader use of all transportation alternatives.
- Covid-19 has had a massive negative impact on the economy and transportation funding. With stay at home orders and the closing of many businesses to abate the rise of the pandemic, local governments and businesses have turned to technology to allow employees to work and meet remotely. The popularity of remote working will change the way employers look at traditional office settings. This means that vehicular travel and some congestion will be reduced. While that has short-term positive impacts on traffic, the primary funding source for transportation is the gas tax, which means that paying millions of dollars for transportation improvements is becoming less feasible. The means by which the RMA balances the new transportation future with traditional transportation modes is critically important.
- Ensuring the coordination between the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Brazos County RMA is crucial. The MPO is responsible for prioritizing transportation projects in Brazos County and then ensuring that projects selected are both important for the region and can be funded with limited state and federal funds. As a result, many of the region's most important projects don't get constructed because they are unaffordable. The RMA will assist in implementing the MPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan by finding funding sources to support MPO prioritized projects. The state gas tax has lost almost half of its purchasing power since it was last increased in 1991; and the purchasing power is expected to continue to diminish. Clearly, relying simply on MPO funding for transportation projects is not a solution.

- As the RMA is in its initial stages and the Board is not yet able to hire an Executive Director nor any full-time staff, several of these strategies may need to be implemented later in the five-year cycle. As financial resources become available to engage in studies and other research initiatives the RMA can better position itself to be a thought leader on ways to mitigate traffic congestion and to fund high priority projects identified by the MPO. To become the implementation organization many have envisioned will take time and patience.

## Opportunities for the Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority

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While the RMA is new, there are a few opportunities that the organization can take advantage of in its formative stages. From an internationally recognized transportation research institute within Brazos County to exploring funding streams to cultivating existing relationships, the RMA is positioned for success if we can take advantage of these opportunities. Some specific opportunities that must be the primary focus of this strategic plan are:

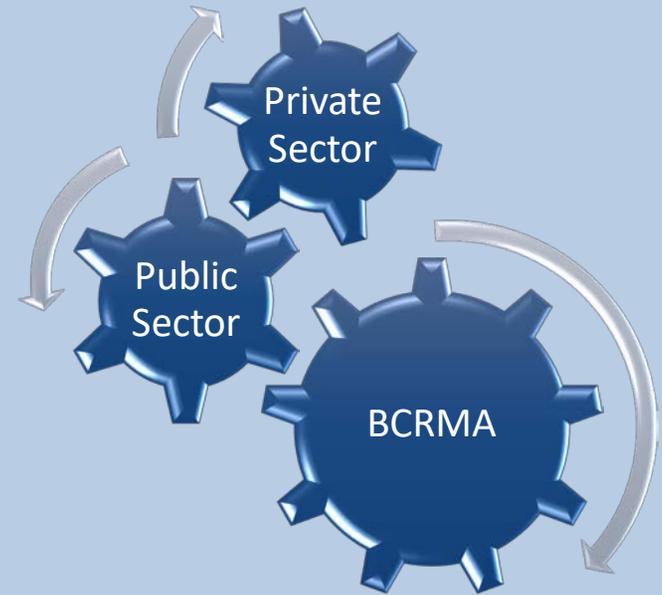
- The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) has always had a strong local community focus. As a result of this focus, the city, county, state and university transportation groups in Brazos County have been a laboratory for testing new transportation technologies and transportation innovation. The RMA needs to leverage the knowledge and innovations made available by TTI to bring these transportation advancements to Brazos County. In light of the long-term impacts of Covid-19, it is anticipated that our transportation network and systems will evolve quickly in the coming years. With the assistance of TTI, the RMA can be a leader in the testing and adaptation of new innovations.

- Brazos County has two distinct transit operations, (Brazos Transit District and Texas A&M Transportation Services) providing services to two distinct customer groups. Brazos Transit District is a public transportation system offering fixed route, paratransit and demand and response services to the general public and is funded by both the federal and state governments. It offers a variety of transit services in multiple counties and cities in East Texas. Texas A&M Transportation Services operates a private fixed-route and paratransit system primarily for university students, faculty and staff and is funded by student fees and parking revenues. If it was a public transportation system, it would have the seventh largest ridership in the State of Texas. As Brazos County approaches Transportation Management Area status, the RMA is positioned to participate in a regional discussion on how to eliminate barriers to seamless transit services and how new and innovative transportation providers (Uber, Lyft, etc.) may augment traditional mass transit models. In addition to making the two services effective for all of Brazos County, the community needs to identify what kind of public transit system(s) it wants and needs, how much such a system(s) will cost, and how the system(s) will be funded.



- There are numerous ways the RMA can finance both its operations and its transportation projects, and the RMA needs to examine innovative funding sources. As has been seen at the national and state level, a reliance on only one funding source leads to diminishing returns. Until the impacts and financial contributions of all users on the transportation network are studied and understood, equitable user-based revenue generation will be difficult to obtain. The RMA should concurrently seek and provide information on how all users contribute to the transportation system and introduce legislation in the 2021 Texas Legislature that would allow Brazos County to collect a \$10 vehicle registration fee subject to voter approval. The RMA should explore a range of funding streams in a dialogue with local stakeholders to determine the methods to equitably fund and deliver transportation projects.

- Brazos County is served by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Bryan District, the Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation (BVEDC) and the Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce. All three organizations have fostered a climate of open communication and strong desire that we all cooperate in developing and delivering an effective and efficient transportation system. The RMA needs to continue its efforts in being part of these communication and cooperation efforts. The TxDOT Bryan District has taken a leadership role by providing planning services for projects that the Brazos County community has identified as important. The TxDOT Bryan District has also engaged the Texas Transportation Commission to secure much needed funding for local priority projects. The Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation has tapped local transportation experts to serve on an Infrastructure and Transportation Committee and provided seed funding for the RMA. The Vice-Chair of the RMA is currently one of the Chairs of this BVEDC committee. The Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce has a Transportation Committee that regularly (monthly) draws the largest attendance to discuss local transportation issues and projects. The Chamber Committee meetings are attended by RMA Board members and the Committee Chair has signaled a willingness to allow the RMA the opportunity to raise its local profile and conduct civic engagement as necessary.



# COLLABORATION



## The Role of the Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority

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The Brazos County RMA, with its unique positioning and broad charter, has an opportunity to address a wide range of mobility issues and deliver multimodal solutions that extend beyond roadways. The RMA must work with city, county, state and university transportation groups to maximize the use of our existing infrastructure, employ best practices that we learn from our partners at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, and embrace new technologies to provide a transportation network that will serve Brazos County for years to come. As responsible partners, the RMA will engage stakeholders and advance community values. The Brazos County RMA will creatively and strategically provide efficient, flexible and effective transportation options to the citizens of Brazos County.



## Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority Goals and Strategies

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To fully realize our role, the Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority Board has determined that establishing the following goals and strategies will help achieve the community's shared vision.

### Goal 1: Develop public awareness, interest and participation in the Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority

- Strategy One: With the cooperation of the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, develop a corporate logo and a functioning website.
- Strategy Two: To encourage civic engagement, develop a public presentation on current agency funding, spending, and the role of the RMA and its projects and make the presentation to local groups such as Kiwanis, Rotary and Lions Clubs, the Chamber Transportation Committee and local governments.
- Strategy Three: Continue to participate in local transportation committee meetings, including the MPO Policy Board, MPO Technical Advisory Committee, BVEDC Infrastructure and Transportation Committee, Chamber Transportation Committee, and the City of College Station Transportation and Mobility Committee.
- Strategy Four: Determine how the RMA can be accountable and transparent to the citizens of Brazos County and ensure that the RMA efforts align with community goals and priorities.
- Strategy Five: In partnership with the MPO, become an organization that begins transportation conversations, provides thought leadership and leads civic engagement.
- Strategy Six: Conduct outreach through advertisement and notifications to engage the public in discussions about the RMA, its functions, projects, programs and funding sources.

## Goal 2 – Identify “approvable” avenues of funding for the RMA and pursue funding

- Strategy One: Identify current transportation funding streams and all additional transportation funding sources allowed by law and determine their viability in Brazos County.
- Strategy Two: Study all roadway users (including residents, visitors and higher education students) impact on the Brazos County transportation network and determine if residents, visitors and students are making equitable contributions to transportation solutions.
- Strategy Three: Pursue any viable funding stream identified as part of Strategy One and Strategy Two.
- Strategy Four: Continue to pursue, through the Texas Legislature, an annual \$10 add-on vehicle registration fee in Brazos County.
- Strategy Five: When supported locally and consistent with state policy, the RMA will take the lead in assessing toll road feasibility in Brazos County.

## Goal 3 – Pursue all effective and innovative modes as solutions to regional mobility issues

- Strategy One: Through civic engagement and in coordination with Brazos Transit District and Texas A&M Transportation Services, determine the nature, scope, technologies and funding sources for a preferred seamless regional transit network that best serves Brazos County.
- Strategy Two: Identify and invest in transportation projects that strengthen the interconnections between all modes of transportation.
- Strategy Three: Evaluate existing relationships and develop potential partnerships with transportation providers who connect Brazos County with other regions in the state and nation.
- Strategy Four: Identify strategic emerging transportation technologies and identify locations within Brazos County where these innovative solutions can conduct pilot projects/testing to enhance and improve seamless mobility.

## Goal 4 – Work to identify needed Mobility Projects (beyond University Drive)

- Strategy One: Request appointment as a member to both the MPO Policy Board and the MPO Technical Advisory Committee.
- Strategy Two: Use the MPOs priorities identified in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) to determine which projects the RMA will pursue for implementation.
- Strategy Three: Using the ranked transportation improvements, determine which projects provide the biggest returns for the lowest possible cost and identify ways to fund them.
- Strategy Four: Work with citizens and local elected officials to educate them that low cost solutions revolve around such projects as incident management, signal timings, transportation demand management (rideshare, telework, etc.) and access management.

- Strategy Five: As allowed by statute, identify and implement important community projects that are beyond the MPOs purview but can improve the local and regional transportation network.
- Strategy Six: Continuously review regional transportation data, growth projections, local government “area” plans, and identified areas of potential development to determine where future transportation investment can get ahead of land development.

## Goal 5 – Support Regional Businesses and Regional Economic Development

- Strategy One: Utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) technologies, overlay the ranked projects from the MTP and the Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation’s prime economic development areas to identify transportation projects that could best assist employment retention and recruitment efforts.
- Strategy Two: Identify financial strategies and investment opportunities that will maximize the effectiveness of the RMAs partnerships with local economic development organizations.
- Strategy Three: Through the RMAs partnership with the Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce and the MPO, discuss and work to implement projects that support the needs of the local business community.
- Strategy Four: Have an RMA representative participate on the Chamber’s State and Federal Legislative Action Plan Committees.