

**City of Port Aransas, Comprehensive Plan, Transportation Element
Draft: April 2008**

1.0 TRANSPORTATION

1.1 OVERVIEW

This section provides an overview of existing transportation conditions in the City of Port Aransas and its regional setting. Several different subject areas are addressed, including roadways, public transit, pedestrian and bicycle mobility, parking, municipal airport, and development standards relating to all the above.

Like many destination tourist cities of similar size (that also are experiencing sprawl away from the core business centers), Port Aransas' present transportation system is dominated by the automobile. While the City has a relatively well-developed interior roadway network, we are limited in the number of routes that provide access into the City and traffic congestion, at certain times of the year, can be a quality of life issue for some residents. With current development trends, coupled with the fact that the majority of our streets are aged and failing, the City is moving in the direction of costly road widenings and rebuilds that will primarily be funded by the tax payer.

Several agencies are working to address transportation issues in Port Aransas and the surrounding areas, including the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and the City of Port Aransas staff in coordination with its City Council, and Planning and Zoning Commission. The MPO is the lead transportation planning agency in the region and though servicing only those transit projects within the City of Corpus Christi, their role is vital in that they have planning oversight on all projects leading into our City via South Padre Island Drive and State Highway 361. The RTA, unlike the MPO, services an area not limited to the city limits of Corpus Christi but extends into bordering municipalities and the county, thus providing public transportation needs for Port Aransas. TxDOT is responsible for planning, designing, building, operating and maintaining the state's transportation system in cooperation with local and regional officials and having stewardship over the only two access corridors into our City will have the most direct role to play in implementing any transportation policies regarding the two routes (State Hwy 361 & the Ferry).

Hurricane evacuation oversight is through a conglomerate of agencies including: The Department of Public Safety through the Governor's Office Division of Emergency Management and the Highway Patrol Captain in charge of establishing and monitoring 'contra flow,' TxDOT for highways and the ferry system, City of Corpus Christi's Mayor, Nueces County Judge, and City of Port Aransas Mayor for calling evacuations, and the City Managers of Corpus Christi and Port Aransas for Emergency Management Administration.

The following goals and policies build upon current transportation initiatives while linking to and supporting other adopted Comprehensive Plan goals and policies for topics such as land use, economic development, thoroughfare plan, and pedestrian and bicycle mobility.

1.2 GOALS AND POLICIES

Overall Transportation Goal:

Develop and maintain a safe, efficient, and environmentally sound transportation system that provides convenient choices for accessing destinations throughout Port Aransas and the immediate region, including a range of well-integrated transit, pedestrian, and bicycle linkages.

1.3 Roadways



Roadway Policy: Maintain a roadway network that safely and efficiently accommodates vehicular traffic while supporting other community objectives defined in various elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

Issue #1 In the past, the City has lacked short term and long range transportation planning. (Note: for the first time in the City's history, the City has adopted a Thoroughfare Plan, and a Pedestrian/Bicycle Mobility Plan.)

Policy #1 Support the implementation of the adopted Thoroughfare Plan to identify and prioritize roads targeted for capacity increases, identify intersection studies, identify transit concepts, and identify new roads or road realignment concepts such as the need for more parallel roads or frontage roads that along State Highway 361. The plan defines the system of major roadways needed to support future land use and population in the City. This flexible plan can be modified at the City's discretion (thru Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council) to accommodate future needs that have not yet been placed on the map. These projects should be reflected in the city-wide street inventory and maintenance program listed in Issue #2 below.

Issue #2: Due to a lack of road maintenance in past years, a high percentage of the City's roads are in need of repair ranging from simple pothole or utility patch repairs to complete road failure where a rebuild is required.

Policy #2: Create and implement a city-wide street inventory and maintenance program that prioritizes and categorizes needed repairs, expansions, and maintenance. City Administration and City Council will identify a potential funding source for each year's construction projects that will need to be built in order to meet the programs schedule, ensuring the preservation of our infrastructure investments.

Issue #3 Few options remain for new roads and realignments to improve traffic flow or that could provide access to inaccessible parcels. For example, there area a number of undeveloped, inaccessible parcels of beach front property located south of Oceanside Addition and a number of parcels at the southern terminus of 6th street that are in need of road access.

Policy #3 As new development increases on vacant land or redevelopment occurs, opportunities will arise to realign or build new road links. City staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and City Council should use every development, platting, and re-platting review to examine for these possibilities. As often is the case, smaller new roads or realignments may not necessarily appear on the Thoroughfare Plan, and will need to be accommodated as development or platting is completed.

Issue #4 Population growth and development trends are applying more pressures to the two entry/exit routes to our City. Outside regulatory agencies are responsible for most of the funding and long range planning of these facilities, including hurricane evacuation procedures, leaving the City with some vulnerability.

Policy #4 With City Council's support, the City Manager and staff shall continue to coordinate with outside regulatory agencies regarding all short and long

term planning, and hurricane evacuation procedures, in regards to these facilities.

Issue #5 Maintain and expand current traffic management programs to maximize the safety and efficiency of the existing infrastructure.

Policy #5 City Manager and staff to continue to coordinate with TxDOT on improvements to information for travel conditions that is provided to the public via remote video broadcast on the internet and remote electronic signage. Through the implementation of the Thoroughfare Plan, monitor/study identified intersections.

Issue #6 City-wide traffic calming program over the years has included the use of mis-placed stop signs and the hodge-podge placement of an assortment of glue-downs and speed bumps.

Narrative: Traffic calming refers to physical or operational measures to reduce vehicular speeds or volumes of traffic, especially on local streets and with respect to trips with origins and destinations outside the neighborhood. In general, it is the design of the roadway itself, not the presence or absence of police patrols, that determines the driving speed thereon. A variety of traffic calming techniques have been used in Port Aransas, most notably the glue-down “rumble strips.” Other examples of traffic calming techniques include neighborhood speed watch groups, textured pavements, raised crosswalks, on-street parking, mid-block street narrowings aka “chokers”, and speed bumps. There are also several locations within the City where the stop signs are used for traffic calming, although this is widely frowned upon by most traffic specialists.

Policy #6 City Engineer shall develop a Traffic Calming Plan, either for city-wide use or for a specific area, that will review existing traffic calming that is in place and make recommendations. The plan should investigate new ways to manage vehicle speed, volumes, and safety in and around sensitive areas be them neighborhoods, retail centers, schools, parks, or beach access roads thru the use of physical measures, education, and or operational policies (police enforcement).

Issue #7 As development ideas have evolved to meet the latest housing trends, our City’s Code of Ordinances has failed to keep pace with roadway design concepts. (Note: the City has asked for a development code rewrite proposal for Chapters 21 & 25, this item will be addressed in early 2008)

Policy #7 Rewrite the City’s development codes to consider more flexible design standards for roadway alignments and cross-sections, where appropriate (i.e., where demonstrable benefits are not offset by negative safety or economic impacts). These could include: Reduced design speeds,

narrower lane widths, planted medians and roadside landscaping, tighter curve radii, alternative on-street parking, and traffic calming techniques.

1.4 Public Transit



Transit Policy: Support short and long-term transit planning and implementation that will develop an economical transit system that links neighborhoods (within our city limits and outside) with employment, shopping, schools, and services.

Narrative: All of the City's current transit efforts are coordinated and run through the RTA. Presently, they provide local transit service within the City of Port Aransas (the Trolley and Ferry Shuttle) as well as seasonal and year-round service to destinations in North Padre Island, Flour Bluff, and the City of Corpus Christi (the Flexi-B and Padre Island Connection).

Their mission statement, "The Regional Transportation Authority was created by the people to provide quality transportation in a responsible manner consistent with its financial resources and the diverse needs of the people. Secondary, the Authority will also act responsibly to enhance the regional economy."

Financially, the City of Port Aransas' contribution to the RTA is one-half (1/2) cent of our sales tax (for the upcoming 2008 year, the contribution will be approximately \$437,500.00. Port Aransas also contributes approximately 15 to 20 hours per month in administrative functions. The City's benefit, are the RTA run services that include:

1. The Flexi-B: Is a “ by reservation only” bus that provides ridership service from Port Aransas to points within Corpus Christi. Callers can arrange for custom trips at least one day in advance, and trips to special events are on a first come, first served basis. Monday through Thursday there are two departures servicing Del Mar College, medical, and other appointments. Friday also has two trips, the second trip services shopping malls, and the bay front destinations. Saturday there is only a single trip to the bay front. All passengers are .50 cents each way. Students are .25 cents each way.

2. The Ferry Shuttle: Commuters from Aransas Pass, Rockport, Ingleside, Portland, and Gregory, can park their vehicle on the Harbor Island side and ride across the ferry avoiding long traffic waits. The shuttle awaits them on the Port Aransas side and will take them to various employment centers around town. Tourist and bicycles are welcome. Services are provided seasonally, from mid-May through mid-September, and for spring break, seven days a week, mornings then afternoons. Fare is .25 cents for each one way trip.

3. The “B” (the trolley): The smooth riding trolley is a fixed route service that operates 362 days a year, seven days a week. Riders can board anywhere along the route that provides access to shops, restaurants, the beach, recreation facilities, and more. The service is exclusive to our City and has a fare of .25 cents each time you board.

4. The Padre Island Connection: Commuters wishing to access North Padre Island, and Port Aransas (including stops in between), can do so on the “65”. Services are provided seasonally, from mid-May through mid-September. Fares are \$1.25 for each way.

Approximately \$221,866.00 runs these programs and includes service personnel (drivers), fuel, vehicle maintenance, and administration cost. RTA also contributes approximately \$20,000.00 to \$50,000.00 (per year) in cash to the City for street repairs that are on the bus routes. The bottom line...The City of Port Aransas pays a substantial amount of dollars into the RTA, we should have great services.

Issue #1 Lack of ridership, that can lead to cancelled programs.

Policy #1 The City, Chamber of Commerce, and RTA should actively promote transit use through a media campaign to businesses and the general public. To improve rider numbers, the programs should be flexible enough in nature to accommodate the various individuals and work forces that are employed in our city.

Issue #2 Passengers complain about “too lengthy” trolley routes.

Policy #2 Review trolley rider ship and determine if the southern most portion of the route, Gulf Waters RV on HWY 361, could be removed from the route. This would shorten the overall trolley route from sixty (60) minutes to forty (40) minutes.

Issue #3 Poor street conditions (Beach Street and 11th Street) are causing significant mechanical damage to the trolleys.

Policy #3 Fix the roads. Look into the possibility of teaming up with RTA to provide additional street repair funding over and above the \$20 - \$50K yearly allotment.

Issue #4 Numerous mechanical issues with trolleys. When a trolley is sent to the RTA facility for repair, the trolley is returned with not all of the listed mechanical problems fixed. All of our buses are required to be ADA compliant and the ADA lifts on the trolleys experience persistent malfunctions.

Policy #4 Support RTA plans to replace trolleys with buses decorated to mimic the trolley. This will allow for more manageable maintenance, better ride, and reliability.

Issue #5 City staff lacks time to focus on transit issues.

Policy #5 Set aside time to review transit system. Maybe have a “Transit Week”. Explore avenues to improve services including, ridership, use of smaller vehicles where ridership will not support large buses, route reviews for flexibility, passenger waiting areas, and clean fuel buses. Continue working with RTA to encourage systems analysis.

1.5 Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility



Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Policy: To identify safe mobility alternatives for pedestrian and bicycle traffic within the City of Port Aransas (from the adopted Pedestrian/Bicycle Mobility Plan, adopted May 2005).

Narrative: The City's adopted plan calls for primarily building multi-purpose, concrete paths as Port Aransas' standard trail wherever feasible by incorporating Pedestrian/Bicycle routes into identified and future capital improvement projects (CIP), new development, and specific route projects. As the City grows and builds new infrastructure, opportunities to incorporate Pedestrian/Bicycle routes will surface and allow the City to take advantage of this opportunity.

Collaboration of this plan should occur with other efforts within the City such as the Thoroughfare Plan, Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan and other improvement plans to aid in funding as well as multi-use facilities.

Issue #1 In the past, the City has lacked short term and long range transportation planning. (Note: for the first time in the City's history, the City has adopted a Thoroughfare Plan, and a Pedestrian/Bicycle Mobility Plan.)

Policy #1 Support the implementation of the adopted Pedestrian/Bicycle Mobility Plan to identify and prioritize safe routes targeted for construction. Funding opportunities exist through Park Dedication Fees, grant

programs, CIP's, and civic development (Safe Routes to Schools) that can allow routes to be constructed to provide the overall system.

Issue #2 The shared use of our roadway corridors by automobiles, transit vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians creates life safety issues for all users.

Policy #2 Support the implementation of the adopted Pedestrian/Bicycle Mobility Plan. The plan should be used for identifying how to integrate pedestrian/bicycle system improvements with more standard capital improvements and park additions. The plan also helps private developers include routes and linkages to connect to the City-wide system. To the extent that separate bicycle and pedestrian facilities can be developed, they should be provided in lieu of shared use paths on heavily traveled streets.

Issue #3 Currently many sidewalks are discontinuous, and improvements are needed to provide residents and visitors with the option of walking to local destinations. In addition, persons with disabilities find many of the City's facilities lacking in curb ramps or obstructed with parking, signage, and/or utilities.

Policy #3 Despite the existence of our current pedestrian/bicycle mobility plan, there is the need to further refine the plan and develop a strategy for continuing implementation. As the City is progressing with the reconstruction of its road inventory, comparison reviews with the existing plan must take place at the time of road design in order to facilitate new possible routes. All new plans and retrofits must promote accessibility for persons with disabilities. Some shortfalls of the plan include: Protection of alleyways for future trails, expanding the types of allowable facilities such as "bike lanes," and policy addressing the use of electric or motorized bikes and carts on our paths.

Issue #4 Lack of funding for pedestrian/bicycle facilities.

Policy #4 Administration and engineering staff should continue to stress to council the importance of including pedestrian/bicycle facilities into CIP's. Grants, although their strict guidelines are at times tough to accommodate, should be targeted every year. A "Safe Routes to School" plan needs to be written so that the City can target its funding source.

1.6 Parking



Parking Policy: Conduct a full review of the City's current parking requirements.

Narrative: Parking continues to be a major concern in the older parts of town where redevelopment and infill are taking place on properties that have existing non-conforming parking issues. Inconsistencies from use to use exist within current parking codification.

Issue #1 Current regulations are rigid and do not take into account what the "use" of a property is.

Policy #1 The City should undertake a comprehensive review of the current parking standards to ensure that they are consistent with smart growth concepts and specify the minimum amounts necessary to support different land uses. Included in the review should be the various residential uses within the R, TR, and C districts.

Issue #2 There are no provisions in our existing code for "off site" parking allowances.

Policy #2 The City should investigate "Shared Parking" arrangements" and "Off-Site Parking" arrangements (e.g., parking lots serving school use during the day and church use on the weekends) that would encouraged development to minimize the amount of land required for parking. Each proposal would be reviewed case-by-case. These capabilities would

promote infill development and alternative travel modes in our more urban areas where limited land is available for parking.

Issue #3 Lack of parking support from City (there are no municipal parking lots).

Policy #3 City or the private sector could look into temporarily leasing key vacant properties in the business districts that are currently undeveloped. Improvement of these sites would greatly alleviate parking shortages.

1.7 Airport



Airport Policy: To promote aviation and foster economic development by strategically planning, developing and operating the safest and most effective airport system for the City of Port Aransas.

Issue #1 Current acreage of leased lands from the General Land Office (GLO) is insufficient for future airport expansion. The existing lease permits non-commercial uses only.

Policy #1 The City should continue its efforts in negotiations with the GLO to expand the City's lease into the 28 acres of GLO properties fronting State Highway 361. Staff should also continue efforts in negotiating a new GLO lease that allows for commercial activities. This will greatly improve the potential for federal CIP grant funding.

Issue #2 The City has not actively participated in applying for Federal/State Capital Improvement Project funding.

Policy #2 Coordinate efforts between City staff, the Airport Board/Manager, and City Council to identify a priority list of CIP's (large projects). Once identified, the staff should work with TxDOT Aviation for inclusion on the State's CIP list.

Issue #3 The grass tie-down area is at risk to being permanently abandoned due to parked aircraft are located too close to an active runway.

Policy #3 Annually, the City receives TxDOT Aviation funding for small ramp grant projects and for the last two funding cycles we have targeted expansion of the transient parking tie-down area. Coordinate efforts between City staff, City Engineer, the Airport Board/Manager, and City Council to identify a permanent location that will address the safety issues and improve adequate space and access for current and future tie-downs.

Issue #4 Airport budget is insufficient to fund facility maintenance upgrades and airport expansion on its own.

Policy #4 Continue current direction of City staff, the Airport Board/Manager, and City Council in exploring public/private partnerships that will provide a continuing revenue source and cost savings incentives to the City.

Issue #5 In the past, airport operations have been tasked out to various City staff and has proved to be cumbersome and inefficient.

Policy #5 The City has hired an Airport Manager that will take on various airport duties with the goal of making the airport operations operate more efficiently. These duties include, the AV gas system, A.W.O.S., F.O.D., greeter, staff liaison to airport board, and F.B.O. manager . As the new manager becomes more familiar with the operation, hanger leases, vehicle parking and reserve vehicle parking oversight will be transitioned over from the current staff.

Airport issues to be address:

- Lease expansion.
- Private/public partnerships.
- Re-designate airport classification, basic to utility.
- Airport Layout Plan update.
- Getting CIP's on the state/federal CIP list.
- Identify next "small" ramp grant ideas.
- Set long term airport goals.

1.8 Ferry



Ferry Policy: Strive to make the ferry operate as efficiently as possible and to meet the present and future demands of the City.

Narrative: Though the ferry is not a City facility (it is owned and operated by TxDOT), it is a critical component for our transportation network and we are involved in many of its issues regarding expansion, efficiency, funding, future ownership, tolling, and more.

Issue #1 Current stacking methodology places a burden on the center turn lanes of Cotter Avenue and Cut Off Road, congesting traffic patterns and impeding businesses.

Policy #1 The City should continue its efforts in creating a stacking lane area as depicted in the 2005 Priority Boarding Lane (See photo above). Though the program concept has been dropped, its stacking lane concept remains as a viable option to aid in our stacking woes. In this scenario, we would keep the existing loop open and add the proposed staging area. The City and TxDOT would target Federal funding sources for design and construction funding to avoid tolling as a capital recovery method. More stacking could be accomplished if ferry offices/maintenance was moved to the Harbor Island side. Begin negotiations with TxDOT to implement this.

Issue #2 The ferry lacks a “long term” study that would identify current and future growth issues. A previous attempt at an ‘in-house” study by Texas Traffic Institute (sponsored by TxDOT) was not an “all encompassing” study and targeted mainly existing traffic modeling for a priority stacking lane design.

Policy #2 As indicated on the recently adopted Future Land Use Map, a ferry study has been identified as a future project. The City would prefer this to be a collaborative effort between the City and TxDOT, hiring a third party “ferry” consultant specialist.

Some study topics to review:

- TxDOT, shrinking funding issues?
- Traffic counts, they’ve been shrinking since 2005, why?
- Impacts of the recently completed JFK Causeway.
- RMA (Regional Mobility Authority), this is a legislative tool that would allow the City to take over portions of the ferry operations (for example: the fleet of ferry boats), tolls would be collected as a funding source for operations that the City controlled. Pros = more control for the City in ferry operations. Cons = Risky. What if tolls made people drive around, then the City’s funding source might not cover expenses?
- Revisit priority boarding lanes.
- Park and Ride expansion.
- Efficiency of loading/unloading, types of boats, stacking.
- Is a new ferry landing needed? If so, where?

Ferry Updates:

1. RTA Ferry Shuttle funding has been renewed for the upcoming 2008 season. The shuttle will provide limited service during spring break in March and service throughout the summer ending after Labor Day.
2. The new 28-car ferry is going to construction bid in 2009. Funding for one vessel is currently secure (combined TxDOT and Federal dollars).
3. Ferry Web Cams are operational and running smoothly. There are four web cams, three on the Port Aransas side pointing in various directions, and one on the Harbor Island side. You can find them on the home page of the City’s web page.