



2017 Program Excellence Award Nomination Form – Descriptive Narrative

Strategic Leadership and Governance

Program Title: PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: MOBILITY OPTIONS FOR ALL

Public transportation is vital to a thriving community. In order to promote Economic Development, the City of Balch Springs opted to use the 1% sales tax offered by the State of Texas to establish an Economic Development Corporation instead of joining the regional transportation system. However, as the population grew, so did the need for public transportation. Originally, the need for public transit in Balch Springs was birthed from conversations with seniors that needed transportation to and from their medical appointments. As word spread about the possibility of transportation in Balch Springs, it became apparent the need was not limited to just seniors. Through resident surveys and town hall meetings, City administration realized that public transportation was needed to accommodate its workforce. Administration also realized that public transportation is vital for economic growth. The City recognized the need for a cost effective public transportation system would not only benefit residents but also appeal to prospective businesses looking to develop in the City.

The City of Balch Springs is a growing city. The population of as of the 2010 census was 23,728. However, according to our last estimate, the population is just over 25,000. Balch

Springs is located within the southeastern section of Dallas County in the DFW metro area at the convergence of three major highways including I-20, I-635 and US 175. In May 2013, the city completed a five year Strategic Plan that identified implementation goals, strategies and recommendations to guide the city's growth including transportation improvements. The City began looking at different transportation opportunities and eventually developed a partnership with STAR transit. The City and STAR Transit sponsored a transportation visioning charrette meeting in February 2014 to engage residents and seek public input on preferred transportation services and needs.

May 1, 2014 marked the beginning of an important milestone achieved by the City of Balch Springs. For the first time Balch Springs residents had access to public transportation. Residents needing a ride to the store, their doctor, work or to run errands now had a way to do so without having to rely on the kindness of others.

On May 1st, 2014 STAR Transit launched the on-demand, curb to curb service available to all Balch Springs residents. In 2014, City Council funded the on-demand bus service at an annual cost of \$71,000. In the first eight months, the service provided over 1,170 rides and to date 6171 rides. STAR Transit continues to promote this service in city publications, social media and other traditional marketing methods such as print media and events. These actions are helping the growth of this service.

As on-demand service grew so did the requests from residents wanting access to the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) rail station, a transportation goal the Balch Springs City Council wanted to reach. This was based on feedback they received in the previous surveys where

Balch Springs residents communicated that in order to access the DART system they had to walk miles to the nearest DART bus stop. On June 15, 2015, with the support of the Balch Springs City Council and the Balch Springs Community Economic Development Corporation Type B Board, STAR Transit launched the Commuter Demand Response Route known as the Balch Springs Midtown Express. The partnership between the City of Balch Springs and STAR Transit provided Balch Springs residents direct access to the DART transportation system. This was a major milestone and one of the first as a DART non-member city within Dallas County.

STAR Transit in conjunction with the City of Balch Springs and the North Central Council of Governments (NCTCOG) planned a route with stops in the most populated areas in the city. The route circulates within Balch Springs with on-demand trips to the DART station on Buckner Road in Dallas. The route has nine stops and runs once each hour, Monday – Friday, 5:00 am – 10:00 am and 2:00 pm – 7:00 pm. Bus signs indicate stops and scheduled times. The split schedule accommodates those commuting to and from Balch Springs to the DART station, fulfilling requests from citizens. This Commuter Demand Response Route has proven to be very successful. In the first seven months, over 2,365 rides were provided. That number continues to grow month over month. In addition to the traditional methods of marketing, word of mouth has been extremely helpful in promoting this service.

In 2015, City Council funded the Midtown Express bus a cost of \$86,500 annually. In 2016, the Balch Springs Community Economic Development Corporation Type B began funding both the On Demand and Mid Town Express programs at an annual cost of \$141,600.

The success of both of these programs is due in part to the cooperation between the City of Balch Springs city staff, City Council, the EDC Type B Board as well as STAR Transit and its funding partners including NCTCOG. This group found a solution that gives not only seniors but all residents the independence they desire, including access to goods and services within the community. City administration found a way to provide job access to working residents; preventing unemployment due to the lack of reliable transportation.

Since the implementation of the transit services, there have been growing pains and lessons have been learned. Bus routes have been added and modified as needed. Route service times have been readjusted to accommodate busy commute times. In an effort to continuously improve transportation service to the residents of Balch Springs, monthly meetings between city staff and STAR transit are held to discuss ridership, possible issues, and improvements. Both STAR Transit and the City take advantage of marketing opportunities by publicizing in weekly newsletters, marketing in city events, voting polling locations etc.

Improvement starts with vision for betterment. However that vision must have leadership, team dedication and a common goal in order to achieve implementation. By working together, the City of Balch Springs, Balch Springs Economic Development and STAR Transit created two programs benefiting the greater good in providing transportation service in an unmet area. Since its implementation in the City of Balch Springs, STAR Transit has used this system as a model to service other cities. Further, several surrounding cities have since contracted with STAR transit to provide transportation to their residents.

The City of Balch Springs. Growing Community.



Mayor, City Council, staff and residents at the Mid Town Express kickoff



Mayor, City staff, and residents help advertise STAR Transit