



## Skyrocketing use in Collin County spurs TAPS bus service to expand



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Published: 13 July 2014 11:09 PM

Updated: 13 July 2014 11:21 PM

**MCKINNEY** — When Texoma Area Paratransit System wheeled into Collin County last summer, demand for public transportation totaled about 2,280 rides per month.

A year later, the agency says the number of trips countywide has skyrocketed to about 9,910 per month.

That number includes the fixed-route bus service in McKinney and Allen plus on-demand trips countywide and connections to Plano's northernmost light rail station.

TAPS is responding to increased demand by expanding the intracity bus routes in McKinney from two to seven. The tentative start date for the new lines is August.

"The service has grown tremendously; it's just leaps and bounds," TAPS CEO Brad Underwood said about the programs in Collin County. "It really doesn't show any signs of stopping."

McKinney and Allen are the only cities in Collin County where TAPS provides fixed routes. The agency began serving Allen in November, a few months after McKinney.

Intended mainly for low-income workers, the McKinney and Allen bus lines loop along areas where hotels, restaurants and shops cluster. Routes in McKinney include stops at apartments.

The buses connect to hubs that send commuters to and from the DART Parker Road Station in Plano.

But an estimated two-thirds of TAPS' customers in this area use the curb-to-curb service. Last year, Collin County commissioners picked Sherman-based TAPS to replace nonprofit Collin County Area Regional Transit as its provider of public transportation.

Many customers are elderly or have disabilities and use the service to get to appointments, recreation centers and other places.

Underwood said adding more fixed routes in McKinney will diminish the need for on-demand rides. That is expected to free up more buses that can join the fixed routes.

To draw the new lines, TAPS identified popular destinations in the city and pockets where many residents use the service. Those who want a ride on demand have to schedule it a day in advance.

"It enables them to go more often," Underwood said of the new fixed routes. "They don't have to call and wait on hold and tell us when they want to go and that kind of stuff. They can just feel free to go up to the bus stop and jump on a bus."

Another perk for riders? Shorter wait times, Underwood said.

TAPS, which is funded with local money plus state and federal grants, is not planning to ask for more funding from McKinney this year,

Underwood said.

McKinney pays the agency \$100,000 a year, said Gary Graham, the city's transportation engineering manager. It also allows TAPS to use a city parking lot for park-and-ride to Plano — an in-kind donation of \$250,000, he said.

Currently there are no plans to expand the service in Allen, but officials are monitoring the demand, said Eric Ellwanger, assistant to the city manager.

So far, Allen and McKinney officials said they're pleased with the TAPS partnership.

"CCART was a well-kept secret," Graham said about the former public transit provider. "TAPS has been out there trying to let folks know that there are services out there."

James Stinson of McKinney attended a public meeting in June to give feedback about the new proposed routes. He said he will consider riding the bus if the times are right and if it stops closer to Raytheon, where he works. Currently he drives his Ford pickup there.

Stinson said he didn't know TAPS offered rides to a DART station in Plano. Many of his colleagues come from outside of McKinney, he said.

"I would really like to see this take off," Stinson said. "I really would."

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