



2016 Program Excellence Award Nomination Form – Descriptive Narrative

Community Partnership: The City of Balch Springs and STAR Transit
Program Title: Balch Springs Midtown Express & Demand Response Transit Services

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: MOBILITY OPTIONS FOR ALL

May 1, 2014 marked the beginning of an important partnership between the city of Balch Springs and STAR Transit. For the first time Balch Springs citizens 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.

The City of Balch Springs is a growing city with a population just over 25,000 located within the southeastern section of Dallas County within 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 in partnership with STAR Transit held a transportation visioning charrette meeting in February 2014 to engage citizens and seek public input on preferred transportation services and needs.

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. This was confirmed after the city conducted citizen surveys and held public meetings.

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

As the on-demand service grew so did the requests from citizens 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 citizens communicated that in order to access the DART system they had to walk miles to the nearest DART bus stop. So on June 15, 2015, with the support of the Balch Springs City Council and the Balch Springs EDC 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 was able to grant Balch Springs citizens direct access to the DART transportation system which at its time 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. As of result of citizen ridership and feedback from the demand response service, City Council funded the Midtown Express bus starting in 2015 at a cost of \$86,500 annually for operation cost. As part of the partnership agreement between STAR Transit and Balch Springs, STAR Transit agreed to secure grant funding from NCTCOG to cover the cost of a second bus for operation of the Midtown Express service to offset any additional cost by the city for operation of a second bus service.

This Commuter Demand Response Route has proven to be very successful. In the first seven months, over 2,365 rides have been provided and that number continues to grow month over month. The City of Balch Springs and STAR Transit continue to promote this service in city publications, social media as well as other traditional marketing methods such as print media and attending grass roots level events. However, word of mouth seems to be helping this service as well.

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 citizens the independence they desire, including access to goods and services within the

community. The partners 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 are some minor lessons learned that will prove useful as the partnership of Balch Springs and STAR Transit strives to provide reliable transportation service to the citizens of Balch Springs. Such improvements that will be sought to improve service include conducting educational workshop or sessions to encourage and educate patrons on the awareness of riding public transportation. Also there is room for capitalizing on missed marketing opportunities to notify residents of the city's public transportation system such as at city events, voting polling locations etc. By working together this team created two programs benefiting the greater good in providing transportation service in an unmet area.

Inserts: STAR TRANSPORTATION BUS SERVICE-Route Opening for Launch Midtown Express Service, June 15, 2015.

