

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Item 5

MEMORANDUM

From December 16 TPB Meeting

December 16, 2009

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Ronald F. Kirby
Director, Department of Transportation Planning

RE: FTA Grant Opportunity for Improvement of Bus Stops Serving Traditionally Disadvantaged Populations Throughout the Region

Background

On December 8, 2009, FTA released a Notice of Availability of \$150 million in discretionary funding for the "The Livability Bus Program", which provides capital funding to purchase and rehabilitate buses, vans, and bus-related equipment or to construct and rehabilitate bus-related facilities. At the same time, FTA also released another Notice of Availability of \$130 million for the "Urban Circulators Program," which provides capital funding for new fixed guideway projects or corridor-based bus projects. Both programs are part of the federal interagency partnership between the US Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), known as "The Livability Initiative," which will include interagency review of projects.

The Livability Bus Program has a clear regional focus through its requirement for MPO endorsement and WMATA as the required direct recipient. The program also has an emphasis on directing improvements to areas in economic need, as evidenced by the specific evaluation criteria of (1) demonstrated need for resources, (2) planning and prioritization at the local/regional level, (3) livability criteria, (4) sustainability, (5) leveraging of public and private investments, and (6) ready to implement upon receipt of award. Additionally, while there is no upper limit on the grant amount requested, it is clear that FTA is looking for scalable projects and will likely only fund a portion of the total request. The grant deadline is February 8, 2010.

While the TPB could help facilitate applications for the Urban Circulator Program, the focus of this memorandum is a proposal under the Livability Bus Program for a regional bus stop improvement program. Such a proposal offers potential for incorporating a significant number of individual bus stop projects throughout the region in a comprehensive regional program.

Identified Need for Improved Bus Stops in the Washington Region

The TPB Access for All Advisory Committee has advocated for improved bus stops for low-income communities and persons with disabilities for many years. In the letter from AFA Chair Cathy Hudgins to the WMATA Board dated December 7, 2009 (which can be found in today's Item 5 Letters Sent/Received) the AFA recommended that "WMATA continue to improve the accessibility of bus and rail services to provide an alternative to MetroAccess. Consumers with disabilities still face barriers in using fixed route services such as...inaccessible pedestrian infrastructure and bus shelters."

In addition, the AFA made the following specific recommendations in its 2006 report "Transportation Issues for Low-Income Populations: Findings and Recommendations"¹:

- Prioritize bus stop improvements in areas with the highest concentrations of poverty but where bus use is also high;
- Redesign existing bus stops in a way that safely accommodates the widest range of potential users, including people with disabilities and limited-English speakers; and
- Provide comprehensive information (i.e. maps and schedules) at bus stops that is easy to understand for both English and non-native English speakers.

The TPB will receive a briefing today on an update to the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan, which guides funding decisions for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom funds. The funding decisions are guided by unmet transportation needs for traditionally disadvantaged populations in the region which have been identified by the TPB's Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force. Unmet transportation needs in the Coordinated Plan include:

- Bus transit is not always accessible and reliable for people with disabilities and older adults;
- User friendly fixed route information is lacking, especially for those with limited English skills; and
- There is a need for improved pedestrian access and other infrastructure around bus stops, especially Route 1.

A wealth of data on bus stops that need additional amenities to make the region's bus service more accessible and easier to use is available from WMATA's Regional Bus Stop Inventory. WMATA and the local jurisdictions have a large database of bus stop information that identifies amenities (and

¹ National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board. Access for All Advisory Committee. "Transportation Issues for Low-Income Populations: Findings and Recommendations. July 19, 2006. <http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/committee-documents/o1pbX1w20060131154614.pdf>

the lack thereof) at bus stops that could be used to identify the bus stops that could be improved with the grant funds.

Potential for a Regional Bus Stop Improvement Program

The TPB and WMATA could work together to provide a concept framework for developing a scalable regional program of accessible and high quality bus stops/stations that is coordinated with other publicly or privately funded community development projects at the local level. Existing public or private funds already budgeted for bus stop or pedestrian improvements could be used for the required 20 percent match for the federal funds. Such a program could be used for developing a regional bus stop typology that could provide guidance on bus stop amenities for various ridership and usage characteristics.

Working with WMATA, a flexible “call for projects” document could be developed that includes grant criteria with specific location criteria such as:

- High concentration of people with limited incomes;
- Areas where economic development opportunities exist;
- Bus stops that have significant usage and/or transfers; and
- Areas that have previously been identified as having inaccessible bus stops.

A regional program of bus stop improvements developed for the new FTA Livability Bus Program could serve as a pilot for enhanced bus stops and stations throughout the region and potentially for other metropolitan areas as well.

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NEW FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION LIVABILITY PROGRAMS

In June 2009, the US Department of Transportation (DOT) joined with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and created an interagency partnership, known as "The Livability Initiative," to coordinate federal transportation, housing, and environmental protection investments.

On December 8, 2009, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced two grant programs under this Livability Initiative: The Livability Bus Program and the Urban Circulator Program. Through these programs, FTA will invest in projects that fulfill 6 principles of The Livability Initiative: provide more transportation choices; promote equitable, affordable housing; enhance economic competitiveness; support existing communities; coordinate policies and leverage investment; value communities and neighborhoods. Applications submitted for each of these program funds will be evaluated by FTA in coordination with HUD and EPA. The deadline for applications under both programs is February 8, 2010, and awards will be announced in early 2010.

FTA LIVABILITY BUS PROGRAM

Highlights

- \$150 million in unallocated Discretionary Bus and Bus Facilities funds for capital projects.
- 20% local match is required. FTA will not approve deferred local share. No floor/upper limit constraint.
 - FTA intends to fund as many projects as possible – applicants selected for funding may receive less than the amount originally requested.
- Projects must be ready to begin upon receipt of award.
- Projects must have a demonstrated need for resources.

Key Requirements

- Eligible Expenses: Capital Projects to purchase and rehabilitate buses, vans, and bus-related equipment (including ITS, fare equipment, communication devices), or construct and rehabilitate bus-related facilities.
- Eligible Applicant: WMATA (Direct Recipient, Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Program)
 - Eligible subrecipients are public agencies, private non-profit organizations, and private providers engaged in public transportation.
- MPO Role:
 - TPB must endorse project, indicating project is a regional priority (part of FTA evaluation criteria)
 - If awarded, project must be incorporated into TIP and CLRP

FTA URBAN CIRCULATOR PROGRAM

Highlights

- \$130 million in unallocated Discretionary New Starts/Small Starts Program funds available for urban circulator projects (eg: streetcars, corridor-based bus projects that meet six specific minimum requirements).
- At least 20% local match required. FTA will not approve deferred local share. Applicants must seek less than \$25 million in federal funds.
- Projects must have a schedule demonstrating construction can begin within 18 months of award.

Key Requirements

- Eligible expenses: New fixed guideway capital projects (including acquisition of real property, rolling stock, rights-of-way, and relocation). Projects must be based on results of alternative analysis and preliminary engineering.
- Eligible Applicant: Public bodies and agencies including states, municipalities, other political subdivisions of states, public agencies and instrumentalities of one or more states, certain public corporations, boards, and commissions established under State law and authorized to engage in public transportation.
- MPO Role:
 - No specific MPO endorsement required; applicants encouraged to notify MPO if funding will affect region
 - Projects must satisfy requirements for inclusion in TIP and CLRP before grant award.