

Strategic Initiatives: Multimodal Transportation – Public Transit

Background

As a result of the 2010 Census, the San Marcos Urbanized Area (“SM UZA”) was defined. San Marcos is one of the fastest growing cities in the country in its classification and is located in an emerging region characterized by rapid growth and strong economic development. Rapid urban growth is driving demand for the development of a diversity of mobility options, and local government is supportive and engaged in the process. The City of San Marcos (Hays County), part of the City of Martindale (Caldwell County), and the unincorporated area of Redwood (Guadalupe County), together make up the SM UZA.

The change in Census designation triggered state and federal processes governing funding and the identification of a grantee for funds. During this transition process, the San Marcos City Council supported the Capital Area Rural Transportation System (“CARTS”) in becoming the Direct Recipient (DR) of FTA funds on behalf of the SM UZA. Local and state processes were followed that involved holding Transportation Conferences, with the affected local governments as conferees. This included public hearings, formal meetings, and deliberations that resulted in the CARTS being designated as the urban transit district for the new SM UZA. Effective March 1, 2013, CARTS established a rural/urban transit district pursuant to state code, and the CARTS District combined its nine (9)-county rural district with the SM UZA. This included adding representation for the SM UZA to its governing board, with a member of the San Marcos City Council joining the district board. CARTS has operated general-public paratransit in San Marcos (and surrounding areas, and throughout its nine-county district) since the 1980s. CARTS introduced the San Marcos fixed route system in 1996 and following the 2014 Five Year Strategic Transit Master Plan, modified this fixed route system effective January 5, 2015.

CARTS provided more than 335,000 revenue miles and 23,500 revenue hours of service in 2017. Unlinked passenger trips for the fixed route and paratransit service combined was 75,899 for the same time period.

Texas State University (University) also operates a fixed-route public transit service known as Bobcat Shuttle. For fiscal year 2018, the Bobcat Shuttle operated approximately 65,500 revenue hours and approximately 788,000 revenue miles. Unlinked passenger trips for the fixed route service was 2,710,009.

The City and the University have long desired to combine the strengths and complementary characteristics of the two public transit systems. The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) assisted the City, CARTS, and the University by conducting research that established a baseline for developing strategies to achieve coordinated public transit services. The final findings were published in 2012. {Cherrington, L. “Findings of the Task Force for the Coordination of Public Transportation in San Marcos–Kyle, Texas, Phase 2,” Texas A&M Transportation Institute, College Station, TX. 2012}

Recently, the City and University completed the 2018-2019 Coordinated Transit Plan Study which provided recommendations for the City to become the Direct Recipient of state and federal transit funds for the San Marcos UZA, and for the City and University to seamlessly integrate the existing City of San Marcos and Texas State University public transit systems. Partnership between the City and University provides opportunities to leverage state and federal grant funding opportunities, increase operational efficiency, reduce costs, and increase transit access for the community. On August 18, 2018, the San Marcos City Council adopted Resolution No. 2018-148R, establishing the City as Direct Recipient of Federal Transit Administration funds. The transition of Direct Recipient roles and responsibilities from CARTS to the City will be complete on or before October 1, 2019.

2019 Five Year Strategic Plan for Transit Service

On February 5, 2019, following completion of the Coordinated Transit Plan Study, City staff provided Council an update with the Study's findings and recommendations. Council's direction to staff was to move forward and continue discussions with the University to form a coordinated transit system to serve the San Marcos UZA.

City and University staff began coordinating the effort with regional partners (CARTS and Texas Department of Transportation Public Transportation Division (TxDOT-PTN)). During these discussions, all parties concluded that executing the 2019 Five Year Strategic Plan for Transit Service prior to coordinating the two transit systems would provide significant advantages. The City and University agreed the Strategic Plan *would inform* the coordinated transit system interlocal agreement and the coordinated transit system request for proposal/third-party operating contract with needed planning outcomes (scheduled project completion: 12/31/2019).

Those include:

- Route planning recommendations for the coordinated route structure, including service expansion recommendations
- A five year capital improvement plan to include buses, facilities, infrastructure, and technology
- Public participation through stakeholder discussions, public outreach meetings and surveys (federal requirement for major transit service changes)
- A five year operating and capital budget to include a consolidated financial plan

Direct Recipient Transfer - Regional Partners

TxDOT-PTN:

On April 17, 2019, City and University staff met with Eric Gleason, director of the TxDOT Public Transportation Division. Staff provided Mr. Gleason and his staff with an overview of Council's multimodal strategic initiatives. The discussion focused on the transfer of the DR to

the City and the coordinated transit plan. TxDOT expressed support for the DR transfer, and interest in the opportunities the proposed coordinated system could provide for the community. TxDOT staff provided guidance for the formation of the San Marcos UZA Urban Transit District which will allow utilization of state transit formula funds by the City. Mr. Gleason informed staff that the TxDOT's letter of concurrence for the City to become the DR on October 1st had been finalized and sent to the FTA on April, 9 2019.

CAMPO:

On May 13, 2019, City and University staff met with Ashby Johnson, director of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. Staff discussed Council's strategic initiatives including the DR transition, the upcoming Strategic Plan, and the coordinated transit system. Mr. Johnson described CAMPO's role in the public transit planning process, and offered his assistance as the transition occurs.

CARTS:

City staff continues to meet with CARTS to discuss the transfer of the roles and responsibilities of the direct recipient to the City. On May 14, 2019, City staff met with CARTS to continue the DR transfer effort. Topics discussed included the coordination of finance staff between the organizations, amendment of the interlocal agreement for transfer of personnel funds, transfer and financial management of existing grant funds on October 1st, and the transfer of transit vehicles to the City. CARTS also committed to providing transit services for San Marcos in fiscal year 2020 through a revised interlocal agreement. This arrangement will allow the continuation of current services until the Strategic Plan and the procurement of a contract for the coordinated transit system are completed.

Direct Recipient Transfer – Next Steps

- Proceed with the Five Year Strategic Plan for Transit Service – (July – December 2019)
- Continue transfer of DR roles and responsibilities – (June – October 2019)
 - Draft and approve a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program
 - Train staff for new responsibilities
 - Format FTA grant management/reimbursement databases (TrAMS // ECHO)
 - Apply for FTA transit FY2020 formula grant funds
- Declare the Urban Transit District for the San Marcos UZA – (August – October 2019)
 - Staff to prepare a Council resolution for consideration
 - Seek TxDOT-PTN concurrence
 - Apply for TxDOT transit FY2020 formula grant funds

Definitions/Organizations:

Direct Recipient – An eligible entity authorized by a Designated Recipient to receive Federal Transit Administration (FTA) urbanized area formula funds. The City has undertaken the process to become the direct recipient for the San Marcos urbanized area (UZA). The current direct recipient is the Capitol Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS).

Designated Recipient – An agency assigned to receive funds from the Federal Transit Administration, and distribute them locally. The Texas Department of Transportation Public Transportation Division (TxDOT-PTN) is the designated recipient for the San Marcos UZA.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) – A Metropolitan Planning Organization is the policy board of an organization created and designated to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process. MPOs are required to represent localities in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000, as determined by the U.S. Census. The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) is the MPO for the San Marcos UZA.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) - is the agency within the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) that provides financial and technical assistance to local public transportation systems nationwide.

Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) – The FAST Act authorizes \$305 billion over fiscal years 2016 through 2020 for highway, highway and motor vehicle safety, public transportation, motor carrier safety, hazardous materials safety, rail, and research, technology, and statistics programs. The FAST Act provides all federal funding for FTA programs.

National Transit Database (NTD) – is the primary source for information and statistics on the public transit systems in the United States. Public transit providers report performance measures to the NTD. The FTA uses this performance data to apportion \$5 billion of FTA funds (FAST Act) to transit agencies annually.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) - The STIP is the state's four-year capital improvement program that includes the MPO and Rural TIPs, and contains all phases of transportation projects to be built during the four-year period. Projects must be consistent with the state and metropolitan long-range plans. In non-attainment areas (Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, Beaumont and El Paso), projects must conform to the State Implementation Plan.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) - A TIP is a capital improvement program developed cooperatively by local and state transportation entities. It includes a list of multi-modal transportation projects, such as highway, transit and bicycle, for example. The projects are drawn from and consistent with a rural long-range plan (statewide plan), or Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) long-range plans known as a Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTPs). The TIP serves as a short-term programming document that lists approximately four years of funded (committed from local, state, and federal sources) transportation projects. These projects are designed to construct, complete, implement, operate and maintain regional and statewide transportation systems in accordance with the recommendations of the long-range statewide transportation plan and/or an MPO's MTP.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) - A Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is an annual or biennial statement of work identifying the planning priorities and activities to be carried out within a metropolitan planning area. At a minimum, a UPWP includes a description

of the planning work and resulting products, who will perform the work, time frames for completing the work, the cost of the work, and the source(s) of funds. MPOs are required to develop UPWPs to govern work programs for the expenditure of FHWA and FTA planning funds.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects people from discrimination based on race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. The Federal Transit Administration works to ensure nondiscriminatory transportation in support of our mission to enhance the social and economic quality of life for all Americans. The FTA Office of Civil Rights is responsible for monitoring FTA recipients' Title VI programs and ensuring their compliance with Title VI requirements.

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program (DBE) - is a legislatively mandated USDOT program that applies to Federal-aid highway dollars expended on federally-assisted contracts issued by USDOT recipients such as State Transportation Agencies (STAs). The U.S. Congress established the DBE program in 1982 to:

- Ensure nondiscrimination in the award and administration of DOT-assisted contracts;
- Help remove barriers to the participation of DBEs in DOT-assisted contracts, and
- Assist the development of firms that can compete successfully in the marketplace outside of the DBE program.
- DBEs are for-profit small business concerns where socially and economically disadvantaged individuals own at least a 51% interest and also control management and daily business operations.
- African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific and Subcontinent Asian Americans, and women are presumed to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Other individuals can also qualify as socially and economically disadvantaged on a case-by-case basis.

Transit Award Management System (TrAMS) - FTA's platform to award and manage federal grants. TrAMS was created to provide greater efficiency and improved transparency and accountability. FTA deployed TrAMS in February 2016 to provide an efficient, user-friendly, and flexible tool to award and manage grants and cooperative agreements and to strengthen the integrity and consistency of our award and management financial and programmatic information. TrAMS replaced the Transit Electronic Award Management (TEAM) system which had been in operation since 1998.

Electronic Clearing House Operation (ECHO) - is a web application that allows FTA grant recipients to request payments from their grant awards.