



May 9, 2024

To: Transit Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: 2024 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program and Call for Projects

Overview

The Orange County Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program offers grant opportunities to non-profit organizations and local public agencies to help meet the transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities. The program augments existing OC Bus fixed-route service, OC ACCESS service, and the Senior Mobility Program in Orange County. Updated program guidelines and request to issue the 2024 call for projects are presented for review and approval.

Recommendations

- A. Approve the guidelines for the 2024 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program.
- B. Authorize staff to issue the 2024 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program call for projects.

Background

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 (FTA 5310) Program is intended to improve mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities by removing barriers to transportation service and expanding transportation mobility options. In prior years, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) worked with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the California Transportation Commission, and FTA to provide FTA 5310 funding through Caltrans to non-profit organizations and public agencies for the purchase and replacement of paratransit-type vehicles and related equipment to help meet the transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

In 2015, through the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, FTA 5310 statute was updated, and in 2016, OCTA began receiving the Orange County share of FTA 5310 directly. Consistent with OCTA's State and Federal Programming Guidelines, the FTA 5310 funds were directed to support OCTA's OC ACCESS paratransit services. In addition, starting with the 2018 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (EMSD) call for projects (call), the OCTA Board of Directors (Board) approved the use of local funds in lieu of federal FTA 5310 funds for the EMSD Program to eliminate the need for local public agencies and non-profits that seek these funds to adhere to complex federal requirements during project delivery.

The Orange County EMSD Program was developed to mirror the goals and general structure of the FTA 5310 Program. The EMSD retains valuable components of the FTA 5310 Program such as ensuring that projects are consistent with the current Orange County Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan (Coordinated Plan). This plan is updated every four years, and the most current edition was approved by the Board in November 2020. Consistent with FTA 5310 program requirements, at least 55 percent of the EMSD Program funds are used for capital projects. Once projects are awarded, OCTA provides oversight and monitoring for the projects approved through the EMSD Program. The most recent prior EMSD call took place in 2021 and the Board awarded \$2.7 million to eight non-profit agencies for 14 projects.

Discussion

The 2024 EMSD Program Guidelines (Guidelines) have been developed with consideration to the needs, goals, and priorities identified in the current Coordinated Plan as well as ongoing feedback from eligible applicants on funding needs. The funding level is determined by the federal apportionment that OCTA receives from FTA 5310. For this cycle, the funding target is \$8.5 million.

To date, staff has presented information on the EMSD to the OCTA Accessible Transit Advisory Committee, has held scheduled discussions with several Coordinated Plan stakeholders, and held a workshop on April 17, 2024 to identify funding needs and collect feedback on the existing EMSD Program.

Generally, the recommended 2024 EMSD call guidelines will continue to support vehicle and equipment acquisition, operating assistance, and mobility management. Guideline revisions are based on stakeholder feedback, and include significantly simplifying the application, clarifying program requirements, and providing flexibility in vehicle acquisition requirements based on the current vehicle market.

Major revisions to the program include:

- Maximum total funding requests for applications from any single applicant has increased from \$600,000 to \$1.5 million, and maximum funding requests for each application type have been increased as detailed in Attachment A.
- Funding priorities have been revised consistent with identified program need:
 1. Capital projects,
 2. Operating projects, including operating assistance for existing services and mobility management projects.
- Allowance for purchasing and leasing used vehicles, as long as they meet certain requirements.
- Implementation of an accountability measure in the evaluation criteria, deducting five points from application scores in the event of past poor project delivery or mismanagement of funded awards.
- Incorporation of state and federal requirements, including agency drug and alcohol program reporting, driver training reporting, and vehicle maintenance reporting.

EMSD program applications will be evaluated based on consistency with the program goals, applicant experience, implementation plans, program performance indicators, and coordination and outreach efforts. The updated and recommended Guidelines are included as Attachment A.

Key milestones for the 2024 EMSD call are as follows:

Milestone	Date
Board consideration of 2024 Guidelines and issuance of call	May 28, 2024
Eligible applicant agencies office hours with OCTA staff	June 3-7, 2024
Applications due by 4:00 p.m.	June 27, 2024
Project eligibility reviews and evaluations	June – August 2024
EMSD funding recommendations presented to the Board	Fall 2024

Next Steps

With Board approval, OCTA will issue the 2024 EMSD call and notify eligible agencies. Staff has planned a program information session pending Board approval of the Guidelines and the call and will also be available to meet with eligible applicants. Once the eligible applicants submit project nominations, OCTA staff will evaluate applications, and return to the Board in the fall with funding recommendations.

Summary

Staff is recommending Board approval of the Guidelines and authorization to issue the 2024 EMSD call.

Attachment

- A. 2024 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (EMSD) Grant Program, Call for Projects Program Guidelines

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