OCTA

June 16, 2026

To: Transit Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: 2026 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 nonprofit organizations and local public agencies to help meet the transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities. The program provides funding to augment existing OC Bus fixed-route service, OC ACCESS service, and the Senior Mobility Program in Orange County. Board of Directors' approval of updated program guidelines for the 2026 call for projects and issuance of the call for projects is requested.

Recommendations

A. Approve the guidelines for the 2026 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program.

B. Authorize staff to issue the 2026 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. Prior to 2015, Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) coordinated with the California Department of Transportation to provide FTA 5310 funding to nonprofit organizations and public agencies supporting transportation services of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

In 2015, through the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, the FTA 5310 statute was updated, and in 2016, OCTA began receiving the Orange County share of FTA 5310 funds 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, beginning with the 2018 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (EMSD) call for projects (call), the 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 nonprofits that seek these funds to navigate the 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 and retains valuable key program components, including consistency with the Board-approved Orange County Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan (Coordinated Plan) which identifies transportation needs and priorities for seniors and individuals with disabilities throughout Orange County. This Coordinated Plan is updated every four years, and the most recent plan was finalized following Board direction in November 2024. 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 project oversight and monitoring. The prior EMSD call took place in 2024, and the Board awarded $8.623 million to 12 nonprofit organizations and six public agencies for 22 projects.

Discussion

The 2026 EMSD Program guidelines (guidelines) have been updated 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 $5.85 million programmed across fiscal years 2026-27, 2027-28, and 2028-29.

To date, staff has presented information on the EMSD Program to the OCTA Technical Advisory Committee, Accessible Transit Advisory Committee, the Senior Mobility Program Roundtable, has held scheduled discussions with several Coordinated Plan stakeholders and interested EMSD applicants and held a guidelines development workshop on May 6, 2026, to collect feedback on the existing EMSD Program.

The recommended 2026 EMSD Program call guidelines will continue to support vehicle and equipment acquisition, operating assistance, and mobility management.

Proposed guideline revisions are based on stakeholder feedback, and include significantly simplifying the evaluation criteria, clarifying program requirements, and providing flexibility in vehicle acquisition requirements based on the current vehicle market.

Major revisions to the program include:

- Revised maximum funding limits per applicant and per application type, as detailed in Attachment A.
- Streamlined the application and evaluation criteria.
- Transitioned to a three-year call cycle, allowing for grant periods of up to 36 months, contingent upon federal reauthorization and the availability of future FTA 5310 apportionments.
- Clarified and refined program language.
- Revised program goals to align with the 2024 Coordinated Plan.
- Provided clarity on pre-award project start.
- Streamlined drug and alcohol reporting.

EMSD Program applications will be evaluated based on consistency with the program goals and the current Coordinated Plan, applicant experience, implementation plans, program performance indicators, and coordination and outreach efforts. The updated and recommended 2026 EMSD Program guidelines are included as Attachment A.

Key milestones for the 2026 EMSD call are as follows:

Milestone	**Date**
OCTA Board consideration of 2024 EMSD Program guidelines and issuance of call	June 22, 2026
Eligible applicant agencies office hours with OCTA staff	July 13-24, 2026
Applications are due by 4:00 p.m.	August 28, 2026
Project eligibility reviews and evaluations	August – November 2026
EMSD funding recommendations presented to the OCTA Board	December 2026

Next Steps

With Board approval, OCTA will issue the 2026 EMSD Program call and notify eligible agencies. Staff has planned office hours pending Board approval of the guidelines and the call and will also be available to meet with eligible applicants before the application due date. Once the eligible applicants submit project nominations, OCTA staff will evaluate applications and return to the Board in December 2026 with funding recommendations.

Summary

Staff is recommending Board approval of the 2026 EMSD Program guidelines and authorization to issue the 2026 EMSD Program call.

Attachment

A. 2026 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Disabled Grant Program Guidelines Call for Projects

Prepared by:

Victor Mireles
Transportation Funding Analyst
(714) 560-5025

Approved by:

Rose Casey
Executive Director, Planning
(714) 560-5729