

Transportation Committee

Meeting date: April 12, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of April 14, 2021

Subject: Travel Behavior Inventory – 2021 Transit On-Board Survey Notice of Award

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: 2040 TPP Work Program

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Division/Department: Metropolitan Transportation Services

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorizes the Regional Administrator to:

- Enter into negotiations and to execute a Subordinate Funding Agreement with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) funding the Travel Behavior Inventory (TBI) Transit On-Board Survey for an amount not to exceed \$1,140,000 and
- To enter into negotiations and to execute a contract with ETC Institute to conduct the Transit On-Board Survey for an amount not to exceed \$2,100,000.

Background

The Travel Behavior Inventory Transit On-Board Survey is a survey of transit riders in the region conducted every five years. A sample of transit riders are asked for demographic information and details about their trip (including the origin, destination, purpose, mode of accessing transit). The Survey will contribute valuable data to the region's Travel Demand Forecast Model, help planners understand key transit markets, and provide information to federally required before and after studies. The survey will provide data for riders on all fixed-route bus and rail service from all providers in the region. The survey work will take place in two phases in the fall of 2021 and the summer/fall of 2022.

An RFP was issued on January 11, 2021 and two addenda were issued. Two proposals were received. Five people served on the evaluation panel: one from Metropolitan Transportation Services, one from Metropolitan Council Research, one from MnDOT, one from the City of Minneapolis, and one from MnDOT. The evaluation criteria were: (1) Quality of the proposal, (2) Qualifications and experience of the proposer, (3) Key personnel experience; and (4) Cost of the proposal.

After evaluating the proposals, the evaluation panel recommended that ETC Institute be awarded this contract. ETC was the same firm contracted for this survey in 2016, which was widely lauded as a successful effort. The proposal demonstrated the necessary qualifications and experience to successfully complete this work, including survey work completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and surveys of weekend travel (one of the optional tasks requested in the RFP). The timeline proposed was reasonable and the proposal guaranteed a fixed number of valid and completed surveys. The proposal also demonstrated a detailed understanding of how to

control biases. The evaluation panel reached consensus that the proposal submitted by ETC Institute represents the best value to the Council.

Rationale

The TBI Transit On-Board Survey provides data for use by the Council and its regional stakeholders for improving the region's travel forecast models and providing information on how, where, and why people travel in the region and tracking how it changes over time. The 2016 Transit On-Board Survey, also conducted by ETC, was very successful in its sampling goals. The survey provided the data necessary to assist with regional travel modeling, transit planning and transit market research, while also satisfying requirements for Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Grants program funding and evaluation.

Because the 2016 survey was successful, few updates were made to the core of requested services when updating the 2021 RFP. The 2021 RFP was, however, expanded to respond to both COVID-19 and to changing data needs of stakeholders at Metro Transit and planners at Metropolitan Council. These changes include:

- **An expanded “pilot test” of the survey.** To determine effects of COVID-19 on ridership, and to be able to describe the demographic characteristics and travel behavior of the “core” of pandemic ridership, the RFP requested that surveyors collect data as soon as possible. To accomplish this sampling while controlling costs, the RFP suggested that the surveyor expand what would normally be a small “pilot test” of the survey to encompass ten or more of the highest-ridership routes in the metro area. ETC had experience in conducting surveys during the COVID-19 Pandemic while respecting transit operator regulations and considering the safety of passengers, positioning it well to do this kind of work. This expanded pilot test survey is planned to take place in Fall of 2021.
- **Sampling on weekends (Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays).** COVID-19 led to a dramatic decrease in peak-hour (9AM-5PM) weekday commute travel, while midday, weekend and afternoon travel was less affected. This trend has heightened interest in ways that transit can better support those who are traveling beyond “peak” commute hours, and to accommodate a greater variety of trip types. These trip types include off-peak commute trips, social and recreational trips, shopping trips, and errands. Weekend travel is not usually considered in On-Board surveys and was not sampled in the 2016 On-Board Survey. A better understanding of weekend travel will help transportation planners create transit service that is equitable, flexible and robust to future disruptions.

Thrive Lens Analysis

An understanding of how the transit system can better serve all residents will support the Council's agenda to advance equity, increase access to more sustainable modes of travel, and practice good stewardship of our transit system.

Funding

Funding for the Transit On-board Survey is available through the existing Travel Behavior Inventory program, which includes federal funding of \$1,140,000 and a Metropolitan Council contribution of \$960,000. The source of the Metropolitan Council contribution is MVST.

More about federal funds: Federal funds for the Travel Behavior Inventory program are administered by MnDOT, under a master agreement (16I073) between MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council. The master agreement covers all elements of the TBI and outlines the method to transfer funds from MnDOT to the Council and the conditions and obligations that must be followed. The master agreement

was executed by the Council and MnDOT on June 21, 2017. Additional subordinate agreements detail the scope and cost of each TBI task, of which the Transit On-Board Survey is one. The subordinate agreement for this project will only include the total amount of federal funds requested for the Transit On-Board Survey.

Known Support / Opposition

There is no known opposition.