



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Office of the Commissioner

S. Duke Storen
Commissioner

July 15, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Janet D. Howell, Chairperson
Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chairperson
House Appropriations Committee

Daniel Timberlake, Director
Department of Planning & Budget

FROM: S. Duke Storen 

SUBJECT: Report on Virginia Transit Association Projects

Pursuant to the 2020 Appropriation Act, Item 356 (S), attached is the report on the use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds for Virginia Transit Association competitive grants. Please contact me with any questions.

SDS:kc
Attachment

Implementation of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Funded Projects by the Virginia Transit Association

Report Mandate

Item 356 (S) of the 2020 Appropriation Act

S. Out of this appropriation, \$1,000,000 the first year and \$1,000,000 the second year for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant shall be provided to the Virginia Transit Association to offer competitive grants for public transportation (as defined in Virginia Code §33.2-100) and public transportation demand management service fare passes. The Virginia Transit Association shall report on annual program performance and outcome measures contained in the memorandum of understanding with the Department of Social Services. The department shall report on any performance and outcome data collected through the memorandum of understanding by July 1 of each year. This report shall be provided to the Governor, Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance committees.

Implementation

In 2017, the Virginia General Assembly, in Item 356 (S) of the budget bill, appropriated TANF block grant funds to the Virginia Transit Association (VTA) for competitive grants for transportation projects. VTA awarded funds to the following grant applicants: City of Charlottesville Office of Economic Development (GO Ride Expansion and Regional On-Demand Transit Coalition), Fredericksburg Regional Transit (Transit Supports Working Families), Hampton Roads Community Action Program, Inc. (Navigating Wealth Building in Hampton Roads), and Harrisonburg Rockingham Social Services District (Harrisonburg Transit TANF Grant). The four grant subrecipients initiated their programs in October and November 2020; however, ridership has been very low. This was due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on public transit ridership, including potential riders staying at home due to employment site restrictions and increased child care responsibilities, and transit agencies were still operating fare-free in response to COVID-19.

The contracts are reimbursement contracts and funds are only spent to reimburse the cost of provided rides. Because the rides were being provided fare-free, there are no expenditures to be reimburse.

All four subrecipients succeeded in developing program capacity for implementation by the end of the reporting period, despite the fact that enrolling eligible participants proved more challenging. The grant subrecipients' geographic regions, community size, and demographics vary widely, but all four subrecipients have faced common obstacles. Due to these obstacles

and the fact that most, if not all, were facing public transportation that was operating fare-free, there is very limited data for these projects. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the number of participants to be extremely low for each of the programs.

Charlottesville Office of Economic Development (OED) - GO Ride Expansion and Regional On-Demand Transit Coalition

OED continued promotional outreach with efforts to expand its stakeholder network and the release of an educational video through targeted social media (the video also aired on local television for several weeks). The long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to suppress demand for services and Charlottesville Area Transit continues to operate fare-free. OED noted a decrease in demand attributed to an increasingly suppressed job market and a shortage of individuals seeking jobs due to increased unemployment benefits. Additionally, TANF eligibility restrictions have impacted the participation of some potential applicants (i.e. men without children). Since Charlottesville Area Transit was operating fare-free, there was little demand for TANF-funded transportation services. A total of 43 on-demand bus trips were provided.

Harrisonburg Rockingham Social Services District (Harrisonburg SSD) - Harrisonburg Transit TANF Grant

Harrisonburg SSD continues to struggle with the suppressed demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local transit will continue to operate fare-free through June 30, 2021. Harrisonburg SSD specifically noted the dramatic reduction of active VIEW participation because of the state's suspension of enforcement of work requirements. Since fare-free services were available in Harrisonburg, there was no demand for TANF-funded transportation services. No TANF-funded transportation services were provided.

Fredericksburg Regional Transit (FRED) - Transit Supports Working Families

FRED continues to face lack of demand for services. The repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to influence the job market and job-seeking activities for TANF eligible individuals. FRED leveraged their existing partnership with Healthy Generations Area Agency on Aging to potentially extend information about the transit program to related eligible participants. They have maintained close communication with their region's local DSS agencies, but inquiries did not yield eligible participants whose needs matched FRED's service. Since area transit services were operating fare-free, there was no demand for TANF-funded transportation services. No TANF-funded transportation services were provided.

Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) – Navigating Wealth Building in Hampton Roads

HRCAP expanded outreach initiatives to raise stakeholder awareness and understanding of their program's services, build support, and increase rider recruitment. This included direct individual contact with 200 DSS local agency workers, collaboration with the eastern region's VIEW and TANF consultant to provide a brief to 86 agency workers, and targeting financial aid services at community colleges. Since fare-free services were available in Hampton, there was little demand for TANF-funded transportation services. A total of 47 TANF-funded transit passes were issued.