



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Office of the Commissioner

Danny TK Avula MD, MPH
Commissioner

November 16, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Glen Youngkin
Governor of Virginia

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

The Honorable Barry D. Knight
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Michael Maul
Director, Department of Planning & Budget

FROM: Danny TK Avula MD, MPH

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DTK", written over the printed name of the sender.

SUBJECT: Annual Report on TANF Funds for Virginia Transit Association Projects

This report is submitted pursuant to Item 356.S. of the 2022 Appropriation Act, which states:

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.

Please contact me should you have questions at (804) 726-7011.

DA:kc
Attachment

cc: The Honorable John Littel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources

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

July 2022

Report Mandate

Item 356 S. (Special Session I, 2021)

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 2021, the Virginia General Assembly, in Item 356.S. of the appropriations act, 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 sub-recipients initiated their programs in October and November of 2020; however, ridership was 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. Additionally, some of the sub-recipients, like most transit agencies across the Commonwealth, were still operating fare-free to adhere to safety standards.

For fiscal year 2022, the VTA awarded \$1 million of its \$2 million appropriation of funds in the 2020-2022 biennium Virginia budget in competitive grants to the following sub recipients: Hampton Roads Community Action Program, Inc. or “HRCAP” (*Navigating Wealth Building in Hampton Roads*), OmniRide (*TANF Commuter Bus Pass Program*), Giles Health and Family Center (*Giles County Access to Community Transportation or “GCACT”*), and Greater Roanoke Valley Transit Company or “Valley Metro” (*Zero Transit for Working Families*). HRCAP was the only returning sub-recipient. These four sub-recipients initiated their respective programs in July 2021. Unfortunately, the highly-transmissible Omicron variant of COVID rapidly spread, impacting ridership again. The risk of illness, coupled with temporary returns to remote learning for students, limited the demand for transportation.

All four sub-recipients continued to engage in program capacity and rider recruitment efforts. HRCAP continued to serve a steady, but modest, number of riders and GCACT provided a small number of rides, as well.

Giles Health and Family Center –

Giles County Access to Community Transportation (GCACT)

Giles Health and Family Center is the only rural area sub recipient, and its program goal focus of on-demand bus trips reflects its geographic and cultural characteristics. GCACT gained traction during the second quarter and began serving riders in December 2021.

The program director collaborated with the local department of social services and their eligibility staff to use a release of information form that has expedited approval and referral of program participants. A primary obstacle to providing service is the significant number of residents in need of employment who are overcoming addiction and must travel to a methadone clinic. This adds distance and time to transportation routes and conflicts with employment shift schedules.

As in other regions, GCACT also encounters significant transportation needs among low-income residents outside of the program eligibility target.

- On-demand bus trips – 10
- Value of fares provided - \$50

Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) –

Navigating Wealth Building in Hampton Roads

HRCAP has the largest service area (seven localities), is the most mature program, and has the most measurable program outcomes. HRCAP and its private partner, consultant InteracVAULT, Inc., continue to bolster, expand, and fine-tune their efforts to reach eligible participants.

HRCAP has partnered with Hampton Roads Transit and focused on outreach to all local departments of social services to inform benefits and eligibility staff about the program and cultivate referral networks.

- Transit passes provided: 1,009
- Value of passes provided - \$2,293

OmniRide –

TANF Commuter Bus Pass Program

OmniRide has had limited ridership. Forty-five individuals did receive a one-month voucher book, but none have utilized those vouchers. OmniRide attributes lack of demand to the ongoing work-from-home policy for the federal work force.

OmniRide's program is devoted to commuter service to the Washington, D.C. urban core because local service is already fare-free. Approximately 85-90 percent of their commuter ridership has belonged to the federal workforce, which caused their commuter ridership to fall to 20 percent of pre-pandemic levels before rising to the current level of 35-40 percent of historical levels. By contrast, local ridership is back to 70 percent of pre-pandemic levels. Through December 2021, there has been no TANF funded program participation.

**Greater Roanoke Transit Company (Valley Metro) –
*Zero Fare for Working Families***

Valley Metro has also had limited ridership. They note that local departments of social services tend to use their own funding for transportation and they prioritize other transportation options for individuals who might otherwise be potential program participants.

Valley Metro consistently operates at a capacity that is down 40 percent from pre-pandemic levels and continues to be short-staffed with employees leaving to enter retail service or job seekers opting for employment without the requirements of transit. Valley Metro also notes that the transportation needs of residents often fall outside of service hours, particularly Sundays and second shift. Through December 2021, there has been no TANF funded program participation.

Conclusion

The ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact the demand for transportation. The number of TANF participants engaged in employment and training programs has fallen and likewise reduced the need for transportation to employment and training activities. Other contributing factors include the increase in remote work and challenges with child care. An end to the public health emergency is anticipated and the reinstatement of fully operational employment and training programs will lead to increased demand for transportation.