



CITY OF NORMAN, OK STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 06/27/2023

REQUESTER: Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager

PRESENTER: Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works

ITEM TITLE: CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL, ACCEPTANCE, REJECTION, AMENDMENT, AND/OR POSTPONEMENT OF CONTRACT K-2223-164: BY AND BETWEEN THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA, AND RIVER NORTH TRANSIT, LLC (VIA TRANSPORTATION, INC.) IN THE AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$639,413, FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION OF A MICROTRANSIT PILOT PROGRAM, AS OUTLINED IN THE STAFF REPORT.

BACKGROUND:

Over the course of fiscal year 2021-2022 (FYE 2022), City staff presented and discussed many modes of transit which prompted a request from Council for a deeper understanding of "microtransit". This type of service is relatively new and intended to help fill gaps left between public fixed route bus service and the privatized taxi or rideshare services that many people are familiar with.

Microtransit typically uses cars, vans, or shuttles to provide on-demand or semi-fixed schedule/route services to areas with less population density that do not warrant a larger bus. There are many different ways to implement microtransit services including curb to curb service, corner to corner service, coverage zones for pickup with a specific hub destination, a specific hub origin and coverage zones for destinations, floating stops for fluctuating demand, and various integrations of public and private responsibility.

At the conclusion of FYE 2022, Council amended the FYE 2023 budget to include \$750,000 for a Microtransit Pilot program. In an effort to bring in expertise and fine tune what the service would look like, the City hired the consulting firm HNTB to better understand the goals of the City and explore alternative solutions within the microtransit industry that would meet those goals.

City staff and HNTB conducted two workshops with Council on October 18, 2022 and January 3, 2023 respectively. Following feedback from Councilmembers through those workshops, two recommendations were made. The first was for a microtransit pilot program consisting of turnkey microtransit service that would operate in the late evenings, Monday through Saturday either from 6pm-12am or 7pm-1am, as well as Sundays from 10am-6pm. The second recommendation was to invest in more robust software to improve existing paratransit service in partnership with EMBARK. The recommendation suggests this service be offered in a defined zone and limited

in size, which could be proposed by potential vendors as a response to a Request for Proposal (RFP).

City staff and HNTB then worked to create RFP-2223-59, seeking proposals for a Norman Microtransit Pilot Program. This RFP was issued on March 17, 2023 and included the following goals for the Pilot Program:

- Demonstrate the viability of microtransit to augment fixed route transit service in the City.
- Provide transit service during time periods not currently served by transit in the city.
- Enhance mobility for residents within the core area of the city.

RFP-2223-59 also provided details of what the City expected of the service, such as:

- A zone covering the downtown and University of Oklahoma main campus at its core and then expanding outward as the budget allowed.
- Days and times of service being Monday through Friday from 7pm-1am, Saturdays from 6pm to midnight, and Sundays from 10am-6pm with the understanding that this may change over the course of the pilot period.
- System operations such as average and maximum walking distance, passenger wait times, and pooled rides.
- Vehicles were to be owned and maintained by the vendor and seat at least 6 passengers with wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV) available for those that request them.
- Personnel were to be provided by the vendor to successfully operate the system. The vendor is to conduct appropriate background checks and testing, training, and ensure staff are knowledgeable of the ADA rules and regulations.
- Availability of a smartphone application to book rides and fully automate scheduling and dispatching. The customer facing component of the app is to include several features such as the ability to request accessible vehicles, accept payment, verify driver, and to see estimated wait/arrive time and vehicle location.
- Customer service provided by the vendor.
- Fares would be finalized after vendor selection with fare collection conducted by the vendor and decreasing the overall cost of the service to the City. Options for those that are unbanked should be proposed.

DISCUSSION:

Responses to RFP-2223-59 were originally due on April 21, 2023 but due to potential vendor requests during the question and answer period the deadline was extended to May 5, 2023. A selection committee made up of City and HNTB staff scored and ranked the proposals received in response to RFP-2223-59. A total of 3 proposals were received from the firms Freebee, Pantonium, and River North Transit. Proposals were scored by the selection committee using the evaluation criteria in the RFP which included: responsiveness to scope of work, past performance and references, cost, qualifications of project staff, qualifications of firm, and if the proposal included an Oklahoma-based firm or satellite office. At the conclusion of the evaluation process, River North Transit, LLC (a wholly owned subsidiary of Via Transportation, Inc.) was

selected as the most qualified proposer for the proposed Microtransit Pilot Program. River North Transit (Via) has extensive experience working with many different types of public agencies to operate microtransit programs that support local community needs. River North Transit (Via) will be joined by Anglin PR, a local disadvantaged business enterprise (DBE)-certified marketing and engagement firm, as a sub consultant assisting with public engagement.

The proposed, specific scope of services is shown in Exhibit A of K-2223-164 and meets all of the requirements of the RFP. It is expected that some of the specifics of the service, such as the zone or fare, may be altered during the pilot period as both parties understand the travel demands during these time periods. Some highlights of the scope of services are:

- The zone for the pilot is based on the pilot budget and expected high demand areas. The zone was initially proposed by the vendor and then slightly modified in some areas through discussions with City staff (an image of the proposed zone is in Exhibit A).
- Following discussions with the vendor, the fare is proposed to be a flat rate of \$2 per ride plus an additional \$1 per extra passenger accompanying the rider. Half fare will be available for seniors and those with disabilities.
- Nearly all rides will be offered on a corner-to-corner model, where the rider may be expected to meet the service vehicle at a specific location nearby. Those with disabilities will be offered a curb-to-curb service. All rides will be shared or grouped together as much as possible to make the service more efficient and cost effective.

The RFP also listed requirements for operating characteristics or metrics. Those are listed below and will be used as a part of the evaluation of the pilot program. It should be noted that the selected proposal estimates to meet or exceed each of these characteristics.

- Average walking distance: less than 0.10 miles.
- Maximum walking distance: less than 0.25 miles.
- Average wait time: less than 15 minutes.
- Maximum wait time: 20 minutes
- Percentage of on-time ride requests: 80%
- Average time added to shared trips: less than 8 minutes.

Funding for this service is available in the FYE 2023 budget in the Public Transportation and Parking Fund Misc. Services – Transit Operations account (27550277-44766). If the contract is approved, staff anticipates service to begin on or around the start of the University of Oklahoma fall 2023 semester, or August 21. This microtransit service will operate for 12 months or until August 2024. City Council may choose to extend the services as a part of the FYE 2025 budget process.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that City Council approve contract K-2223-164 by and between the City of Norman, Oklahoma, and River North Transit, LLC (Via Transportation, Inc.) in the amount of \$639,413 for implementation and operation of a microtransit pilot program as outlined in the staff report and in Exhibit A: Scope of Services.