



CITY OF NORMAN, OK STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 12/13/2022

REQUESTER: Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager

PRESENTER: Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works

TITLE: CONSIDERATION OF ADOPTION, REJECTION, AMENDMENT, AND/OR POSTPONEMENT OF RESOLUTION R-2223-69: A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA, APPROVING PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE BUS TRANSIT SERVICE FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN AUGUST 2023.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Norman took over the operations of the City public transportation system on June 1, 2019, from the University of Oklahoma. Since then, staff has worked diligently to maintain operation of the service and to evaluate how to better serve Norman's citizens. This work has included collaborating with EMBARK for day to day operations, pursuing grant opportunities to maximize local funding, and developing and implementing the Go Norman Transit Plan.

During the education campaign for the Public Transit Sales Tax in September-November 2019, staff heard from the community and Council about the need to update our long-term vision for the transit system in Norman since the City took over operations.

Using RFQ-1920-60, City staff solicited proposals to update the City's Long Range Transit Plan. The following key objectives were proposed in RFQ-1920-60:

- Actively engage the public and major partners throughout the process.
- Assess the current hub/spoke system and looped routes for fixed route service.
- Provide recommendations on a new transfer station location/area and recommend route changes to accommodate the new location/area.
- Find innovative ways to serve underserved areas.
- Integrate an understanding of the connections between land-use and transit.
- Develop a detailed plan to guide service changes and capital investments.

An evaluation committee made up of City staff, stakeholders, and community members scored and ranked the proposals received in response to RFQ-1920-60. At the conclusion of the evaluation process, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc. (Nelson\Nygaard) were selected as the most qualified firm for the proposed project. Nelson\Nygaard has extensive experience working with municipalities, universities, public agencies, elected officials, and community stakeholders to envision, develop, and improve transit systems that support local

community needs. Nelson\Nygaard partnered with Anglin PR, a local DBE-certified marketing and engagement firm, as a sub consultant assisting with public engagement.

Project kickoff occurred in August 2020 and following an 11-month process of evaluation, including receiving community and stakeholder feedback, the Go Norman Transit Plan was developed. The finalized plan, which was unanimously adopted by Council on June 22, 2021, serves as a guide for improving Norman's public transportation system in the immediate, near, and long term. Along with evaluations of the existing route system and fare analysis, the plan made recommendations for location of a new transit center, route changes and expansions, bus stop locations, and capital replacement. An adopted, current plan also makes the City more competitive with securing grant funding for improvements.

The City has made progress on multiple projects that work towards the initial recommendations in the Go Norman Transit Plan, which include:

- Application for, and award and acceptance of, an Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) Small Grant in the amount of \$120,000 (which will be matched with \$40,000 of local funding for a total of \$160,000) to assist with funding new bus stops associated with the recommended route changes. Council approved a grant contract with ACOG on March 8, 2022.
- Evaluation and acquisition of property at 320 E Comanche St to be renovated as the new City Transit Center. Council approved the purchase sale agreement on January 19, 2022 and the City assumed ownership on March 4, 2022. Council then approved a contract with McKinney Architects to provide Architectural and Engineering services for the property on May 10, 2022. Staff are currently working with the architect to finalize designs to refit the building to provide restrooms and a breakroom for operators, as well as a restroom and indoor waiting area for the public (with access to vending machines and water). Exterior modifications would include making sure the drive through and parking areas are accessible for the large buses, proper site circulation for pedestrians, and amenities such as trashcans, benches and shelters. Staff expect that the bid for remodeling the property will be solicited in the next couple of months, with construction starting at the beginning of calendar year 2023 and ending in July-August 2023.
- In order to integrate the property at 320 E Comanche St into the recommendations of the Go Norman Transit Plan, a contract amendment with Nelson/Nygaard was proposed and approved by Council on March 8, 2022. This work included updating the system and route maps to realign with the new property, develop transit center bus bay requirements and transfer matrix, develop a new downtown transit center map, and to assist with identifying potential transit center amenities. This work was completed and presented to Councils Community Planning and Transportation Committee on June 23, 2022. Separate from this amendment, Nelson/Nygaard continues to provide technical expertise to the architect for the transit center renovations.

Lastly, the City also needed to solicit feedback from the public and seek Council's final approval on the initial, proposed route changes as recommended in the Go Norman Transit Plan. The Discussion section below covers this effort in more detail.

DISCUSSION:

Staff have been working diligently on proposed changes to the fixed route bus service to better serve Norman residents and improve the efficiency of bus transit service in our City. As part of that process, and in accordance with the City's Public Transit Title VI Plan and Public Participation Plan, staff conducted a public participation process to gather feedback from the public about the proposed changes to the service as recommended in the Go Norman Transit Plan. Council passed a resolution acknowledging and approving this process at their September 27, 2022 Council meeting. The public comment period occurred from October 30, 2022 to November 21, 2022.

Attached you will find the Public Engagement Summary for the proposed changes. While the attachment shows in more detail the efforts that staff took to glean feedback on the proposed changes, some of those efforts are listed below.

- Provided options for submitting comments outside of public meetings, which included an online form, phone, email, and postal mail.
- Created a dedicated webpage for the service changes, which included a recorded presentation, the public notice posters (in English and Spanish), the Go Norman Transit Plan, and the online comment form.
- Created and sent out a press release on October 28, 2022 announcing the public comment period, information about the public meetings, and the project website.
- Created posters in English and Spanish displaying the public notice, advertising the public meetings, and detailing how to submit comments outside of the meetings. The posters were posted on all vehicles in the transit fleet as well as at City Hall and the Brooks Street Transfer Station.
- Hosted 3 public meetings, 1 virtually and 2 in person. Event pages were created and posted to the City's Events and Meetings webpage. In total, 21 non-City staff members attended the 3 meetings which occurred:
 - November 15, 2022. Virtual meeting via zoom from noon-1pm.
 - November 16, 2022. In person meeting at Norman Central Public Library from 2:30-3:30pm
 - November 17, 2022. In person meeting at City Hall Council Chambers from 6:30-7:30pm.

Outside of the discussions and comments received at the public meetings, approximately 10 comments were submitted via the various other options provided. All feedback received is recorded and available for review in the attached Public Outreach Summary.

Now that public feedback has been received on the proposed transit service changes, Council's review and approval is required. If Council approves the proposed service changes, staff will move forward with working on implementation, which are expected to be completed by July-August 2023.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of Resolution R-2223-69, approving proposed changes to the bus transit service for implementation in August 2023.