



CITY OF NORMAN, OK STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 9/27/2022

REQUESTER: Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager

PRESENTER: Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works

TITLE: CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL, REJECTION, AMENDMENT, AND/OR POSTPONEMENT OF RESOLUTION R-2223-39 A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA, ACKNOWLEDGING AND APPROVING THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS TO SEEK COMMUNITY FEEDBACK REGARDING PROPOSED SERVICE CHANGES TO THE CITY'S PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICES.

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 recommendations in the Go Norman Transit Plan. A number of these projects are coming to fruition along a similar timeline, and current activities combine them into a single project to update the transit routes:

- 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 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 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. These renovations are expected to begin before the end of calendar year 2022 and be completed 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 Council's 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.

DISCUSSION:

The City of Norman (CON) is a direct recipient of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds and is required to submit a Title VI Program once every three years to document compliance with Title VI regulations as given in Title 49 CFR part 21. Council approved the City's first Title

VI Program on January 28, 2020. As an appendix to the overall Title VI Program, the City of Norman Public Transit Public Participation Plan was created. This plan requires that a public participation process be conducted in the event of a proposed fare increase or a major change in service.

The City of Norman Public Transit Public Participation Plan lists five circumstances that require a public hearing, with the relevant circumstance being 'a proposed system-wide alteration of 10% or more in revenue hours which leaves an area no longer served or poorly served'. While it is true that altering the route network would discontinue bus service in some areas, it will also add service in other underserved areas, simplify the routes making them easier to understand and allow for future expansion, as well as shift the service from a single directional loop system to a bidirectional spoke system which will increase both the number and frequency of service to stops along the new routes.

As a member of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG), City of Norman supplements and strengthens its Public Participation Plan by also engaging with ACOG's Public Participation Plan. There are five principles included in ACOG's Public Participation Plan that outline goals shared by both ACOG and City of Norman Public Transit. These five principles of public participation are:

1. Inform and educate the public to allow for meaningful input
2. Reach out and build connections
3. Engage the public and encourage continued participation
4. Use input to shape policies, plans, and programs
5. Evaluate the public participation process periodically

While the City's Public Transit Public Participation Plan requires that a minimum of two public hearings be conducted, staff are planning to host three public hearings to take place on differing days and at differing times. The public hearings will take place in person, at ADA accessible locations, and may include an option for virtual involvement as available. This is intended to provide variable options and attendance that is more inclusive for Norman's diverse community. Additional requests for special accommodations due to a disability will also be accommodated as needed in accordance with the City's Non-Discrimination Policy.

City of Norman Transit staff will work with the Chief Communications Officer and EMBARK to advertise both the public hearings and the opportunity to provide feedback. Notice of the topic, timing, and location of the hearings will be advertised at least 15 days in advance of the first hearing. The notice will also include contact information for submitting feedback and questions if individuals are unable to attend a meeting. All public comments received prior to, during, or following (up to 15 days after the last public hearing) the public hearings will be documented as part of the record of the public hearings, and will be considered when finalizing the planned service changes to present to Council for approval.

During the public hearings, staff plan to organize presentations explaining the proposed changes to the City's transit service and the research used to develop them. These presentations will be used at the public participation hearings and throughout the process to inform and educate the public.

While not required by the City's Public Transit Public Participation Plan, staff thought it would be ideal to bring the proposed Public Participation Process to Council for review and approval to ensure Council remains informed. Staff recognizes that what is proposed are major changes to the City's transit system and staff are working to go above and beyond in terms of transparency, hence proposing to have three public hearings instead of the required two.

What is required is Council's final approval of the service changes, which will be brought to Council for review and approval by resolution after feedback from the community is gathered through the aforementioned process. Staff are planning to host the public hearings in October and/or November 2022. After receiving community feedback, staff anticipates final proposed service changes will be presented to Council for review and approval in November or December 2022. If Council passes the final, proposed service changes, staff will then begin working on implementation of the service changes, which are expected to be completed by July-August 2023.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of Resolution R-2223-39 acknowledging and approving the proposed Public Participation Process to seek community feedback regarding proposed service changes to the City's public transit service.