



CITY OF NORMAN, OK STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 08/08/2023

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 AMENDMENT ONE TO CONTRACT K-2223-164: BY AND BETWEEN THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA, AND RIVER NORTH TRANSIT, LLC (VIA TRANSPORTATION, INC.) IN THE AMOUNT OF \$121,130.20, FOR A REVISED NOT-TO-EXCEED AMOUNT OF \$760,543.20 FOR EXPANSION OF THE MICROTRANSIT PILOT PROGRAM; AND BUDGET APPROPRIATION 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

EMBARC. 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 of 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 an 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.

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 and Council approved Contract K-2223-164 on June 27, 2023. River North Transit (Via) will be joined by Anglin PR, a local disadvantage business enterprise (DBE)-certified marketing and engagement firm, as a sub consultant assisting with public engagement.

The scope of services shown in Exhibit A of K-2223-164 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 gain better understanding of the travel demands during the pilot program. 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 requirements for operating characteristics and metrics listed below were included in the RFP and will be used as a part of the evaluation of the pilot program. It should be noted that the estimates from River North Transit's (Via's) proposal meets or exceeds 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.

Staff anticipates service according to the existing contract 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

DISCUSSION:

For many years the University of Oklahoma has offered a "SafeRide" program to students needing a ride between 10pm-3am on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. This initially began as a way to discourage drinking and driving. That program has evolved over the years from paper vouchers given to contract service providers to now having an app that students can use to book their rides. In addition, the University has found that some students use the service to go grocery shopping late at night or run other errands.

City and University staff have discussed the overlap of the service proposal between the City and Via and the historically provided SafeRide service offered. It was identified that there may be efficiencies in combining resources to have 1 late night transit service for the community. After more discussions, staff from both parties agreed that it would be beneficial to expand the City and Via proposed service to incorporate the University's SafeRide program.

The attached Amendment 1 to contract K-2223-164 shows the River North Transit, LLC (Via) agreeing to the expanded microtransit pilot program for an additional cost not to exceed of \$121,130.20. These are costs associated with incorporating an expansion of service hours, service area, and the need for an additional vehicle to meet the demand of the SafeRide program. Specifically those include:

- Expanding the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday end of service time from 1am to 3am.
- Expanding the zone slightly as shown in the attached agreement. Larger expansions are proposed to the east and southeast of the original proposed zone.
- Increasing the number of vehicles from 4 to 5.

Please note that this is a companion item to the proposed contract K-2324-50 between the University and the City. It is recommended that additional funds in the amount of \$121,130.20 be appropriated into the Transit and Parking Fund, Miscellaneous Services – Transit Operation Contract (account 27550277-44766) which would be reimbursed by the University.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Staff recommends that City Council approve Amendment 1 to contract K-2223-164 by and between the City of Norman, Oklahoma, and River North Transit, LLC (Via Transportation, Inc.) in the amount of \$121,130.20 for a revised not-to-exceed amount of \$760,543.20 for the expansion of microtransit pilot program as outlined in the staff report and in Exhibit A: Scope of Services found in K-2223-164.
2. Staff recommends that an appropriation of \$121,130.20 be made from the Public Transit Fund, Reimbursements – Other Intergovernmental (account 279-364238) to the Miscellaneous Services – Transit Operation Contract (account 27550277-44766) which will be reimbursed over the pilot period by the University if companion item K-2324-50 is approved.