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Fare Free Pilot Program for RTAs

MassDOT Fare Free Pilot Program for Regional Transit Authorities under Section 1595-6370 of the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Act, Chapter 126 of the Acts of 2022

Status Report

December 31, 2022

Introduction

Under Section 1595-6370 of the Fiscal Year 2023 Massachusetts Budget Act, Chapter 126 of the Acts of 2022, MassDOT Rail & Transit Division (RTD) was directed to award up to \$2.5 million in operating funds to Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) on grants for means-tested, discounted, or fare-free pilot programs. This competitive grant funding was available for RTA pilot programs that could demonstrate opportunities for increased ridership and prioritize low-income individuals.

Grant Application Process

RTD released the request for applications on September 19, 2022. Applications were accepted until October 7, 2022. RTD used the following grant criteria for the award selection process, with scoring based on a 100-point scale, with the potential to earn 5 bonus points:

- 1) The application details how the project addresses opportunities for increased ridership. (30 points)
- 2) The application details how the project prioritizes low-income individuals. (30 points)
- 3) A complete project scope, which, at minimum, contains a funding rationale, assets/technical resources to be used, and an implementation schedule. All established local, state, and federal requirements will be applicable to proposed scope. (20 points)
- 4) The project utilizes a methodology for tracking ridership and fare data for the pilot's duration. (20 points)
- 5) Bonus points can be earned for the following: A joint application with one or more additional RTAs that demonstrates joint benefits and/or can be more cost effectively achieved through a joint effort. (Up to 5 points)

Grant Applications Received

RTD received one (1) application submitted jointly by all 15 RTAs and requested the full \$2.5 million.

RTA	Project Description	Operating \$ Requested
All 15 RTAs	<i>Try Transit</i> – Free fixed route and ADA paratransit services offered by the Commonwealth’s 15 Regional Transit Authorities for the 2022 holiday season (approximately the last week of November through the end of December). <i>Try Transit</i> will allow riders to experience stress free travel during the holiday season, as well as support local economies and employment. A single PR template and logo will be tailored to each region to allow for a statewide media impact.	\$ 2,500,000

Successful Grant Applicants

Given that only one (1) application was submitted, RTD recommended that the *Try Transit* project be selected for award as proposed. The joint proposal met the grant requirements by demonstrating the proposed pilot could result in increased ridership by removing barriers for low-income individuals to use public transit and by reducing logistical hurdles to both the public and the transit agencies that administer the service. The proposal also prioritizes low-income individuals, as the majority of current or potential RTA riders are riding out of necessity. Furthermore, the pilot will enable the RTAs to attract new low-income customers and demonstrate how transit may work for them.

Using the funding rationale provided in the application, each RTA received the rounded dollar amounts exhibited in the table below. The allocation of funding was based on each RTA’s percentage of statewide farebox revenue in December 2019 (estimated or actual). RTD provided these funds to the RTAs on a contractual basis in November 2022.

RTA	Rounded	% of Total
BAT	\$ 294,776.00	11.79%
BRTA	\$ 89,450.00	3.58%
CATA	\$ 15,566.00	0.62%
CCRTA	\$ 106,117.00	4.24%
FRTA	\$ 9,457.00	0.38%
GATRA	\$ 93,210.00	3.73%
LRTA	\$ 99,486.00	3.98%
MART	\$ 88,231.00	3.53%
MVRTA	\$ 159,181.00	6.37%
MWRTA	\$ 103,230.00	4.13%
NRTA	\$ 4,343.00	0.17%
PVTA	\$ 744,523.00	29.78%
SRTA	\$ 241,102.00	9.64%
VTA	\$ 46,391.00	1.86%
WRTA	\$ 404,937.00	16.20%
	\$ 2,500,000.00	

Data Collection

The *Try Transit* fare free pilot program is underway. As such, there is no data on ridership or fare revenue to report. RTD is prepared to collect the necessary data following the close of the program to submit as a final report.

Quantitative data on fares and ridership will be extrapolated from the monthly service data reports submitted by the RTAs required by the FY2022-FY2023 SCA Performance MOUs. The monthly service data reports for November and December will not be reported to MassDOT until February 28, 2023. This information can be compared to previous months or years to track ridership and fare data. Such comparisons can be done using the historical data stored in the RTA Performance Dashboard, and therefore does not require additional data collection from the RTAs.

As stated in the October 28, 2022, award letter, each RTA will be required to submit a one-time progress report by January 31st, 2023, that provides the following information to further inform the final report:

- 1) Exact start and end dates for the fare free pilot
- 2) Qualitative assessment of the pilot program (e.g., identification of operational improvements or challenges, customer feedback received, etc.)
- 3) Optional: example PR materials

RTD expects the final report on the RTA fare free pilot program to be available by Spring 2023.