



Board Report

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Agenda Number: 27.

OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE NOVEMBER 21, 2024

SUBJECT: LOW INCOME FARE IS EASY (LIFE) PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR SERVICES AND TAXI VOUCHER FUND REIMBURSEMENT

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION

AUTHORIZE the Chief Executive Officer to:

- A. AWARD a firm fixed price Contract No. PS121478000 to International Institute of Los Angeles (IILA) to provide the Low Income Fare is Easy (LIFE) Program administration services for all regions in Los Angeles County and Not-to-Exceed (NTE) in the amount of \$9,569,484 for the three-year base period, \$3,545,396 for the first option year, and \$3,694,533 for the second option year, for a total combined NTE contract value of \$16,809,413, effective on January 1, 2025, subject to the resolution of properly submitted protest(s), if any;
- B. PASS-THROUGH the payment of up to \$5,345,624 for taxi voucher reimbursements over the three-year base period and two, one-year options. These pass-through costs shall be payable under Contract No. PS1214178000, for a total combined NTE contract value of \$22,155,037; and
- C. EXECUTE individual contract modifications within the Board approved contract modification authority.

ISSUE

In April 2024, staff issued a Request for Proposals to acquire community-based organization(s) or firm(s) with administrative and outreach experience, to oversee and manage more than 150 non-profit and governmental partner agencies within assigned service areas to support Metro's LIFE program. The LIFE program provides transportation subsidies to low-income individuals within Los Angeles County in the form of either a 20-ride benefit option, discounts on 15 transit agency partners, or in certain circumstances, a 4-ride bus/rail card or taxi service provision through LIFE Limited.

The current contract for the LIFE Program Administrator Services expires December 31, 2024. The authorization of this professional services contract is necessary to support the ongoing and seamless administration of the LIFE program and serve program beneficiaries.

Additionally, each year, the LIFE Program provides transportation subsidies, such as taxi vouchers,

to individuals with short-term and immediate need for transit services who are otherwise unable to use fixed route transit. Taxi vouchers and their required reimbursements to taxi providers are managed by the LIFE Program Administrator and are distributed to the rider through approved agencies such as hospitals and shelters to provide trips categorized by mobility or health limitations, urgency, or safety.

Board approval will allow the continued funding of the LIFE program's taxi transportation voucher component and services in Los Angeles County by providing reimbursements to the LIFE program Administrator who administers the vouchers.

BACKGROUND

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have played a pivotal role in administering and providing transportation assistance to those most in need throughout Los Angeles County. Since the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, CBOs like FAME Assistance Corporation, partnered with Metro's predecessor, Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, to launch Operation Food Basket, to provide \$7 dollar taxi coupons to residents in hard hit areas. In 1993, the Metro Board approved community-based service goals, which included that "the MTA will work with community and other groups to plan and develop community-based services. These services will be defined as improving mobility options at the community level or providing opportunities for community groups to participate in the provision of transportation services in an entrepreneurial manner." CBOs went on to administer in 1993 the Immediate Needs Transportation Program (bus tokens) and in 2008 the Rider Relief Transportation Program (discounted weekly and monthly passes).

In 2017,) the Metro board approved a recommendation for a new low-income fare subsidy program, the Low Income Fare is Easy Program (LIFE), to replace the Rider Relief Transportation Program (RRTP) and Immediate Needs Transportation Program (INTP). The consolidation and expansion of these two fare subsidy programs would ultimately increase subsidies and transit benefits to our low-income riders who need it the most. In May 2017, LIFE was approved by Metro's Board of Directors to provide transportation assistance to low-income and transit dependent riders in Los Angeles County. In 2019, Metro awarded two competitively procured contracts to FAME Assistance Corporation and the International Institute of Los Angeles (IILA) to administer LIFE program services and manage partner agencies within their respective areas.

For the last five years, each organization's responsibilities included securely distributing transportation subsidy vouchers, screening for patron eligibility, record keeping, training, outreach, and establishing procedures for distributing transportation subsidies (taxi coupons, 4-Ride tickets). There are approximately 500 non-profit and governmental agencies participating in the LIFE network, working with the LIFE Program Administrators. Individuals can apply at any of the participating agencies in their area and, once they meet the established low-income criteria, start receiving their subsidy. The subsidies are provided via the following options: 90-day pass for new participants, monthly 20 regional rides, discounts on 15 participating transit agencies, and in some instances, 4-Ride or taxi coupons to individuals with short term and immediate needs, which are distributed to riders through approved agencies, such as hospitals and shelters.

In September 2021, the Metro Board approved Motion 40 that requested the expansion and enhancement of the LIFE Program to alleviate financial impacts on low-income riders. From October

2021 through December 2022, Metro and LIFE Program administrators employed strategic actions that led to streamlining and enhancing the LIFE Program, increasing enrollments, and furthering access to public transit for low-income riders. This included partnering with LA County agencies, like Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), conducting monthly pop-up events, marketing, and increasing the number of non-profit and governmental agencies in the LIFE network. In November 2022, as a result, the Program met its enrollment goal to double participants and increased the program to 182,172 participants. Today, there are 396,123 total LIFE participants. Administrators continue to implement a robust public outreach program that ensures Metro increases enrollments into the Program yearly.

DISCUSSION

The LIFE program is a means-tested fare subsidy program premised on the concept of Metro partnerships with community-based organizations to identify and enroll individuals eligible for reduced fare discounts or other transit subsidies. The LIFE program is a consolidation of Metro's prior programs, including the Independent Rider Relief Transportation Program (RRTP) and the Immediate Needs Transportation Program (INTP).

The LIFE Program Administrator's Role

The LIFE Program Administrator, acting on Metro's behalf, is responsible for ensuring that their partner agencies are following established eligibility verification, validation, and enrollment guidelines, as well as the documentation, security, and inventory management of any and all Metro-provided fare media. They are also responsible for enrolling new customers. Finally, they are required to provide support for the implementation of Metro's marketing and outreach plans within their respective regions.

All regions in Los Angeles County are expected to include 150 partner non-profit or governmental agencies that will contract with the administrator to provide the "ground level" support of Metro's LIFE program.

The administrator will regularly provide Metro with program data and is responsible for implementing any program revisions based on Metro input, as well as implementing special or demonstration projects requested by Metro. They must also recruit additional partner agencies.

In FY24, the LIFE Program administrators and agency partners enrolled 112,877 customers into the program. Enrollments average around 2000 per week with administrators processing over 250 daily applications (online portal, customer centers, DPSS, mail, events). Additionally in FY24 they have distributed more than 35,000 taxi vouchers to residents throughout Los Angeles County. The total value of the taxi vouchers is \$11 per ride or an up to \$100 variable value voucher for special circumstances that must meet program requirements. Riders have expressed appreciation for this assistance to close the first/last mile gap to help them get to medical appointments, shelters, food banks, and government appointments (social security, Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), etc.

International Institute of Los Angeles

For over a century, International Institute of Los Angeles (IILA) has served residents of Los Angeles County through essential social services and contributed to the strength and diversity of LA communities. IILA was initially founded in 1914 as a branch of the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) to assist immigrant women and girls with adjusting to life in the United States. After becoming its own non-profit organization in 1936, IILA expanded its services to address the wider needs of immigrant families and LA County residents at large. The agency has since grown to offer immigration legal services, case management for refugees and survivors of human trafficking, nutrition and childcare for preschool-aged children, and job placement assistance.

Since 1992, IILA has partnered with LA Metro to help Angelenos access public and subsidized transportation services, empowering thousands with the mobility needed to grow and thrive in Los Angeles. Today, IILA serves over 55,000 clients each year (within the several programs) and collaborates with many community-based organizations to meet the changing needs of Southern California. IILA currently has offices in El Monte, South LA, and Glendale. They intend to open an office in the Northeast San Fernando Valley.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Metro Board adoption of these staff recommendations would have no adverse impact on Metro or the regional transit system's safety.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The funding of \$3,161,427.11 for LIFE Program administrative services is included in the FY25 Budget in Cost Center Number 2315, LIFE Program, under Project Number 410021, LIFE Program.

Since this is a multi-year contract, the cost center manager and Chief Customer Experience Officer will be accountable for budgeting the cost in future years.

Impact to Budget

The sources of funding are Proposition C 40%, Measure M 2% Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit/Metro Discounts, and Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) federal grant. Proposition C 40% is eligible for bus and rail operating or capital expenses while Measure M 2% ADA Paratransit/Metro Discounts and JARC are earmarked for paratransit operations, fare subsidies for seniors, students, and eligible low-income individuals.

EQUITY PLATFORM

Reduced-fare transit programs, like LIFE, are Metro's investment in social mobility and an important tool to assist in the fight against income and health inequality. These programs, which include enrollments, outreach, partnerships with Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and taxi vouchers for individuals with short-term/immediate transit needs, make Metro more accessible to riders facing financial and other barriers, while providing financial relief from the ever rising cost of living.

If awarded, the contract will ensure the program continues to maintain the level of services to reach

and enroll marginalized riders across Los Angeles County in the LIFE Program, especially in Equity Focus Communities. It also aligns with Metro's Equity Platform Framework, Pillar 3 "Focus and Deliver", by removing barriers and increasing access to opportunity for all. Proceeding with this change will greatly benefit some of our most high need riders' mobility and access to opportunities. In addition, it would prevent any program disruption and increase equitable service to a large geographical region of LA County, and boost enrollments, outreach, partnerships with CBOs, and LIFE boardings.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Adoption of staff recommendations supports Strategic Plan Goal 3 to: Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could choose not to award a contract to IILA for LIFE program administration. Staff does not recommend such an action as it would negatively impact LIFE Program participants in the all regions of Los Angeles County. In order to achieve Board directed goals to continue to enhance and expand services, as well provide a level of service for all of Los Angeles County, the program administrator contract should be adopted. As a non-profit CBO, IILA does not have the capital resources to sustain this increased level of effort without appropriate commitment from Metro.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval by the Board, staff will execute Contract No. PS121478000 with IILA to provide LIFE Program administration services for all regions of Los Angeles County. Staff will also coordinate with the LIFE Administrator on providing knowledge and trainings to existing and new CBOs on administering the LIFE program.

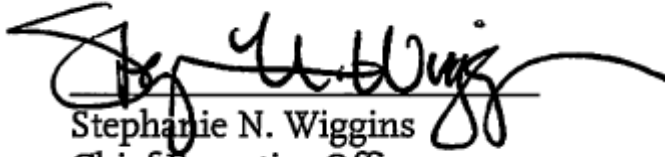
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Procurement Summary

Attachment B - DEOD Summary

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