

10. REGIONAL TRANSIT CONNECTIVITY AND SEAMLESS FARE INTEGRATION

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the High-Capacity Transit Task Force of the Transportation Policy Council (TPC) recommended development of a high-capacity transit network that would provide greater transit connectivity throughout the region. It also recommended a regional, seamless fare system to support this network.

In 2020, TPC allocated \$20 million in the 10 –year plan as a placeholder to show support for the project. To date, \$7.344 million of the original \$20 million has been transferred to METRO. \$256,000 was also allocated in the Unified Planning Work Program to cover assessments of each agency to better understand needs.

In 2021, METRO, H-GAC, and all nine of the region’s transit agencies entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the project. Now known as the Regional Transit Connectivity project, this effort seeks to establish a single fare system to make it easier and more cost efficient for vulnerable populations like veterans, those with disabilities, seniors, and students to access and pay for public transportation for any agency serving the eight-county region that chooses to participate in this project. METRO agreed to step up as project sponsor on behalf of the agencies for project programming purposes. The Regional Transit Coordination Subcommittee of the Transportation Advisory Committee also formed a workgroup to better assist and guide the project, with support from H-GAC staff.

CURRENT SITUATION

The initial assessments are now complete, providing stakeholders a stronger understanding of agency needs and project costs. Every transit agency expressed interest in participating, pending funding availability. Recommendations coming out of the assessments are to phase implementation of the program. The first phase will consist of the deployment of the regional data management system and automated fare collection system (backbone of the project), mobile ticketing system, and installation of validators on buses to allow riders to scan payments made by card, pass or mobile app, thus closing the data loop. Additional hardware, such as fareboxes and ticket vending machines, are anticipated to be included in a second phase. This approach allows the project to quickly realize connectivity benefits and assess implementation, before adding additional complexity. Fully implementing the initial phase of this project will require a total of \$40.3 million, inclusive of funds already allocated, with an expected Phase I completion date of 2026.

ACTION

For Information and Discussion.