

13. COMMUTER AND TRANSIT PILOT PROGRAM UPDATE

BACKGROUND

The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Commuter and Transit Pilot Program is designed to develop services that reduce vehicle emissions and vehicle miles traveled in the eight-county Metropolitan Planning Area. H-GAC has worked with transit agencies, management districts, cities, and counties since 1999 on various commuter and transit projects. A significant result of the program has been the growth of regional commuter services, which started with CMAQ pilot projects and were sustained over time, resulting in increased intercity mobility for the region.

Pilot projects normally last three years; after the pilot is completed, other funding sources are used if the service is sustainable. H-GAC and the project sponsor work through a Call for Partners to develop, fund, and implement new regional transit services.

Federal funding is provided through the CMAQ program via Advanced Funding Agreements (AFA) with TxDOT, which are used to underwrite pilot projects. H-GAC staff reviews proposals to determine whether they meet CMAQ guidelines and are deemed feasible and sustainable.

Due to the CMAQ, a network of regional commuter transit services is operating. Eight commuter routes are in revenue service, with six having completed the pilot program and are operating with fares, federal funding, and local support. Transit services have experienced serious operational challenges due to COVID-19, workplace changes, the transit industry supply chain, and driver staffing, but they have continued service.

CURRENT SITUATION

Two projects are in the program's pilot stage, and one is in its third year (The Woodlands Township to the Energy Corridor District). It is the first suburb-to-suburb commuter service in the region. In its sixth month of operation, the Fort Bend Transit to Downtown Houston service has experienced outstanding early results and a positive community response.

The CMAQ Program can continue to develop new commuter transit services in the region. New technologies also offer potential for innovative transit services, such as on-demand microtransit. A pilot project for on-demand microtransit with the City of Sugar Land has a tentative late 2024 start date. Additional pilot programs are envisioned in the next few years.

ACTION REQUESTED

For information and discussion.