



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

May 4, 2024

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) for Supplemental Appropriations #24-78
AccelerateMC Regional Infrastructure Accelerator

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #24-78 AccelerateMC Regional Infrastructure Accelerator has the potential to advance racial equity and social justice as it creates a framework for considering transit inequities in the evaluation and development of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor changes. Implementation of the framework will have a direct bearing on the extent to which the project can help reduce transit inequities that impact access to jobs, education, healthcare, and other opportunities in the County.

- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #24-78 AccelerateMC Regional Infrastructure Accelerator is to allocate \$2,000,000 from a United States Department of Transportation Build America Bureau grant for the creation of a new Capital Improvements Program (CIP) project that implements the Regional Infrastructure Accelerator (AccelerateMC). According to memoranda accompanying the supplemental appropriation request, AccelerateMC will “develop strategies for

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improving the efficiency and effectiveness of implementing the County’s high-priority Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) program”¹.

The Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Demonstration Program² is designed to assist entities in developing improved infrastructure priorities and financing strategies for the accelerated development of a project that is eligible for funding under the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program³. The CIP project description indicates that AccelerateMC will:

Evaluate innovative funding strategies, including project bundling as strategy to accelerate delivery and secure federal funds, and crowd funding for disadvantaged communities;

- Develop a financial strategy, including preparing the County to apply for federal TIFIA loans and determining how to leverage funding streams committed to the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) program;
- Evaluate delivery methods and conduct risk assessment for projects within the BRT program, including opportunities to deliver a bus depot as a public private partnership;
- Advance programmatic third party agreements with the State, municipalities, developers, utility companies, and other stakeholders;
- Develop a strategic approach to accelerate the acquisition and lower the cost of right-of-way;
- Explore ways to develop the workforce and resources necessary to manage and advance the program; and
- Share experiences, strategies and lessons learned regionally through knowledge transfer strategies such as transit roundtables, technical papers, presentations and engagement of students.

The number and diversity of activities is varied, however from ORESJ’s analysis of available information it appears that most immediately the project will enable planning and studies for future BRT corridors in the County. The department provided preliminary information about how studies and evaluations of BRT projects could operationalize the use of a racial equity lens throughout planning and implementation.

¹ Memo from Marc Elrich, County Executive, Office of the County Executive to Montgomery County Council President, Andrew Friedson on March 5. Subject: Amendment to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program and Supplemental Appropriation #xx-xx to the FY24 Capital Budget. Montgomery County Government. AccelerateMC Regional Infrastructure Accelerator (CIP No. XXXXXX), \$2,000,000.

² <https://www.transportation.gov/buildamerica/technical-assistance/regional-infrastructure-accelerators-program>

³ The Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program provides Federal credit assistance in the form of direct loans, loan guarantees, and standby lines of credit to finance surface transportation projects of national and regional significance.

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/finance/tools_programs/federal_credit_assistance/tifia/#:~:text=The%20Transportation%20Infrastructure%20Finance%20and,of%20national%20and%20regional%20significance.

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- III. **ANALYSIS** The department completed a CIP Budget Equity Tool (CBET)⁴, the responses to which provide concrete next steps for applying a racial equity lens to corridor selection processes. Available information suggests initial ways the department plans to apply a racial equity lens to future project planning:
- Conduct analysis of corridors using the basis of the CIP Budget Equity Tool (CBET) to aid in project selection
 - Engage Regional Service Center Directors on community-specific needs.
 - Commit to evaluating all candidate projects on the following indicators (aiding in project selection):
 - Safety
 - Transportation needs (Transit dependency)
 - Planning's Equity Emphasis Areas (use of; Racial Equity Profile, Defining EEAs)
 - Mirror Transit Center's Transit Access to Opportunity measures as a metric

In addition to outlining these steps and criteria, the department acknowledges potential unintended consequences, noting that specific consequences are project dependent and could include changes to an existing bus route service characteristics to provide connection to the proposed facility, land use changes in response to the facility, or changes in ridership level activity that require service level changes.

Overall, the information provided by the department suggests a willingness to revisit corridors proposed in the 2013 BRT Master Plan to determine whether they should be modified in response to the County's racial equity and social justice goals. The department's proposed use of data and community outreach will help DOT evaluate individual corridors to identify racial disparities or inequities that may be impacting riders or residents along the corridor and assess whether the proposed improvement would increase or reduce these disparities or inequities.

While the full impact of this supplemental appropriation will depend on project implementation, DOT has begun incorporating transit inequities into its consideration of next steps. ORESJ has conducted a number of transportation-related racial equity impact assessments (REIAs) that provide insight into the context and racial disparities that create transit inequities and barriers to opportunity in the County. The following REIAs highlight considerations for grant-funded transportation research and the role of community engagement in cocreating transit solutions with the greatest potential of reducing inequities:

⁴ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ORE/Resources/Files/GuidanceManualFY25CBET.pdf>

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- Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriations (SA) #24-38 Accelerating Innovative Mobility Challenge Grant (AIM Grant).
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/24-38.pdf>
- Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #22-9: COVID-19 Department of Transportation Research Demonstration Grant.
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-9.pdf>
- Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) FY23-28 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Special Appropriation #23-53 FY23 Capital Budget Montgomery County Government Department of Transportation Bus Rapid Transit (BRT): US 29 Phase 2 (CIP No. 502201)
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-53.pdf>

At this early stage of the project, it appears DOT has referenced and incorporated information from these REIAs and ORESJ's analysis of other transit-related CIP projects. Investing resources in continually revisiting this information and expanding analysis to include community engagement will be critical for centering racial equity in future BRT corridor planning and selection.

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Office of Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive
Chris Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation