

Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

Date of Meeting: May 19, 2009

Date Submitted: May 6, 2009

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Johnny Williams, County Administrator
Farnita L. Saunders, Community Development Director

Subject: Approval to Select Big Bend Transit as the Transit Provider for the Gadsden Express (Service from Gadsden County to Tallahassee)

Statement of Issue:

This agenda item seeks the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approval to select Big Bend Transit as the service provider of transit services from Gadsden County to Tallahassee.

Background:

As a follow up to Governor Crist's visit to Gadsden County, projects in the County have been given special recognition and priority by his administration. Because of the Governor's commitment and direction to all state departments to assist Gadsden County in meeting and overcoming its most pressing needs, the FDOT met with staff to discuss transportation challenges encountered by the Gadsden County residents traveling to Leon County to work, medical needs or for other reasons. Also, as gas prices continue to increase, travel has become an economic challenge for many citizens forcing them to find a balance between transportation costs and paying for some of their basic household needs.

Approximately four years ago, Big Bend Transit, Inc. provided shuttle service to Tallahassee from Gadsden County, funded by FDOT's demonstration grant program. However, this express service, with stops at Tallahassee Community College and C.K. Steele Plaza (Star Metro's downtown transfer station) lacked ridership and was eventually terminated.

During the March 18, 2008 BOCC meeting, the County Manager requested the BOCC's approval to apply for a transit service development grant from the FDOT to reestablish the Quincy to Tallahassee shuttle and to explore opportunities for Park and Ride facilities for commuters to park their vehicles and take advantage of the shuttle service. Upon BOCC approval, staff submitted an application request for funding in the amount of

\$130,000 to the FDOT and on June 23, 2008, the FDOT informed Gadsden County of the approval of the funding in the amount requested.

Analysis:

To further leverage the \$130,000 applied for by Gadsden County, it was determined that there would be a possibility to not only reestablish the service, but also combine funds with Star Metro's \$130,000 matching grant to provide expanded transit service totaling \$260,000. Star Metro successfully obtained funding for the Gadsden County transit project, but decided not to bid on the service for budgetary reasons. Therefore, staff met with the Department Transportation and the Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency to determine the most feasible way to proceed with the service without StarMetro. It was determined that the County should bid the project to obtain bids from other providers. The bid was opened and closed on April 17, 2009. Only one service provider submitted a bid by the deadline and one proposal was submitted but not received after the deadline.

Staff was then directed by the County Administrator to meet with transit representatives to review the bid to determine if the services and costs proposed were reasonable. The Community Development Director met with Star Metro, Commuter Services of North Florida and the Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency to review the proposal. It was determined that the proposal was considered reasonable for the cost and recommended the County proceed with the provider's bid as outlined in Route #3.

As the bid package requested, Bid Bend Transit submitted three routes:

- **Route #1** – Chattahoochee via U.S. Highway 90 to Quincy, via U.S. Highway 90 to Midway, via county Road 159 to Havana, via U.S. Highway 27 to Tallahassee to CK Steele Plaza/Terminal for a cost of \$162,540 annually.
- **Route #2** – Quincy, via U.S. Highway 90 to Midway, via county Road 159 to Havana, via U.S. Highway 27 to Tallahassee to CK Steele Plaza/Terminal for a cost of \$116,100 annually.
- **Route #3** – Quincy, via U.S. Highway 90 to Midway, via U.S. Highway 90 to Tallahassee to CK Steele Plaza/Terminal for a cost of \$92,880 annually.

Route #3 is recommended as the initial service route. This allows for the monitoring of the service to see if the ridership is sufficient to continue or expand the service to other areas. Additionally, with the \$260,000 allocated to the project, this allows for two years of transit services at \$185,760, funds for marketing and to subsidize bus passes possibly for students and seniors.

Fiscal Impact:

The Florida Department of Transportation has provided grant funds under its Service Development Grant Program in the amount of \$130,000 to provide this service.

Although Star Metro did not bid on the project, the remaining \$130,000 is available from the Federal Transit Administration and will be allocated by Star Metro. The total amount of funds available for the project is \$260,000. The Office of Management and Budget will prepare a budget amendment to establish budget authority for this amount to be managed by the Community Development Department. Funds from the federal funds must be encumbered by June 15, 2009. With the selection of the provider, staff can proceed with the next steps including negotiating a contract and marketing the service to Gadsden County residents.

Options:

- Option 1: Approve the selection of Big Bend Transit as the provider for transit services from Gadsden County to Tallahassee and authorize staff to begin contractual negotiations.
- Option 2: Do not approve the selection of Big Bend Transit as the provider for transit services from Gadsden County to Tallahassee.
- Option 3: Provide other direction.

Recommendations:

- Option 1: Approve the selection of Big Bend Transit as the provider for transit services from Gadsden County to Tallahassee and authorize staff to begin contractual negotiations.