



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

April 22, 2025

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) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #25-73 Statewide Transit Innovation Grant (STIG) Program

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that *Supplemental Appropriation #25-73 Statewide Transit Innovation Grant (STIG) Program* is likely to advance racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County. In all, the training bus simulator could improve both the safety and reliability of transit service for riders as well as job quality for bus operators. Because of structural inequities, these groups are more likely to be made up of people of color. Therefore, the STIG project could help to advance racial equity and social justice by both enhancing service—reducing transit inequities—and improving transit operator well-being—reducing health disparities and gaps in job quality. The full extent of the STIG project’s impact will depend on the extent to which bus operators were involved in formulating the training bus simulator request and the processes for prioritizing training opportunities (and the routes and riders that experience the benefits of operator’s enhanced safety training).
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #25-73 Statewide Transit Innovation Grant Program is to allocate \$263,000 in Maryland Transit Administration Statewide Transit Innovation (STIG) grant funds to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) for the acquisition of a driving simulator and the development of a training program that prepares bus operators to better handle challenging traffic and road conditions for safety improvement. The STIG supports local projects to “improve transit reliability, improving access and

connections to activity centers, and improving transit mobility options. The program seeks to fund cost-effective public transportation projects that reduce delays for people and improve connectivity between regional and economic population centers. Projects may incorporate bus, rail, or other transit modes.”¹ According to the grant agreement², the procurement and implementation of bus driving simulators will include: 1) the design and procurement of simulators; 2) contract award for bus simulator vendors; and 3) simulator build, delivery, and implementation. MCDOT will also be responsible for the preparation of quarterly status reports and final reports as requested by MTA.

Additional information about the impetus for the bus simulator project was not readily available at the time of this analysis. Responses to the following questions would help in determining to what extent the project was prompted by the identification of a specific transit inequity, either for the transit bus operator workforce or for riders who rely on the County’s transit system to fill gaps in transportation access.

1. What service-level data (including bus operator and rider feedback) were analyzed to determine the need for additional training?
2. How were transit bus operators engaged in determining training needs and proposing the bus simulator intervention?
3. What case studies or evidence from other jurisdictions were used to inform the proposed bus simulator training? Did any of that evidence include identification of and/or efforts to address inequities?

III. **ANALYSIS:** Efforts to augment or improve the transit system in Montgomery County are likely to disproportionately benefit those who most rely on the system to access employment, education, healthcare, and other necessities. According to the 2023 Ride On Public Participation Plan³ People of color, low-income people, and people for whom English is not their primary language are disproportionately represented among Ride On ridership. Below is an excerpt from the Plan describing the demographics of Ride On ridership compared to the County overall:

¹ <https://www.mta.maryland.gov/grants>

² Grant Agreement By and Between Maryland Transit Administration and Montgomery County Department of Transportation

³ Appendix D: Public Participation Plan. Table 4, page 38. Available here:

[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/Resources/Files/titleVI/Ride%20On%20Title%20VI%20Program%20Update%202024-2026 Adopted Signed.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/Resources/Files/titleVI/Ride%20On%20Title%20VI%20Program%20Update%202024-2026%20Adopted%20Signed.pdf)

- *While Montgomery County already has a high minority population, comprising 57.5% of county residents, Ride On's ridership has a significantly higher proportion, with 78.5% identifying as part of a racial or ethnic minority.*
- *6.9% of County households are in poverty, while 27.3% of Ride On riders reported a household income of less than \$20,000 per year.*
- *15.4% of the county's population speaks English less than very well (or not at all), while 26.9% of Ride On riders indicated this.*

These disproportionalities result from long-standing economic inequities, which have created racial disparities in measures of financial security (which afford choice and proximity to the inputs for well-being, i.e., school, jobs, grocery stores, green spaces, etc.) and access to a private vehicle.

In addition to riders, transit bus operators are likely to benefit from additional training available through the bus simulator. These benefits, while not explicitly stated in the grant agreement, may include increases in job quality that lead to lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction. Relying on bus operator demographic data highlighted in ORESJ's REIA of supplemental appropriation #22-26 *Transit Service Bus Operators*, almost three-quarters of transit bus operators are Black⁴. This is because long-standing inequities, such as occupational segregation, excluded Black people, women (and other marginalized groups) from equally accessing employment and educational opportunities, which led to higher concentrations of these workers in industries and sectors where lower job quality is common. Therefore, interventions that improve job quality could help advance racial equity and social justice because they disproportionately benefit Black workers, who, because of structural inequities (including workforce-related risks/hazards), also are more likely to have fewer resources to manage work-related stress and related health challenges. In all, the bus simulator could improve both the safety and reliability of transit service for riders as well as job quality for bus operators. Because of these likely benefits, this could help to advance racial equity and social justice by both enhancing service, reducing transit inequities, and improving transit operator well-being, reducing health disparities.

Ultimately, the outcomes related to the STIG project will depend on processes related to how the bus simulator training is rolled-out. This includes which bus operators will gain access to the training first, and how that will affect safety and reliability on the road, and which routes may experience the benefits first. While it is clear that the STIG project anticipates a universal benefit of enhanced safety and reliability, an equitable or targeted approach would prioritize bus operators who have experienced

⁴ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-26.pdf>

challenging driving/rider situations as well as routes where accidents or disruptions have been concentrated.

cc: Christopher Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation
Tricia Swanson, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive