FTA

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

REPORT SUMMARY

Promoting Employment in Transit Construction Projects by Members of Minority and Low Income Communities

Background

Equity in the provision of public transit services is a major public policy objective. Rail transit investments are financed by federal, state and local subsidies; therefore, the equity impacts of these investments is worthy of examination. Rail transit projects are justified, in part, by their direct and indirect employment impacts, and federal legislation calls for collaboration among governments and other interested parties in leveraging their training and other resources to increase local participation in the construction of transportation projects. As the federal agency that provides financial and technical assistance for local public transit systems, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) shares responsibility for ensuring that the goal of achieving equity in transit investment is met.

Objectives

The purpose of this project was to research, identify, and highlight strategies that promote employment in transit construction projects for members of minority and low-income communities. Two basic questions are addressed in this report: 1) To what extent do low-income and minority community members participate in the employment and other benefits of transit capital projects? and 2) How might their share be increased? These questions were through four in-depth case studies of rail transit construction projects around the U.S.: Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) Vasona Light Rail, Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Green Line, St. Louis Metro St. Clair Extension, and Los Angeles Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension. These cases were selected to represent different local labor market environments, the extent of minority and low-income population, geographic region, and other criteria.

Findings and Conclusions

A complex interplay of size and activity of transit agency, demographic profiles and trends within metropolitan areas, contracting methods, and the relative integration of regional construction labor markets and, or unions, influences who gets the jobs in light rail construction.

It was estimated that in three of the four cases examined, local minority and low-income workers obtained a fair proportion of the construction jobs generated by the projects. In one project, the St. Louis Metro St. Clair Extension project, even though it met FTA requirements, it was estimated that local minority and low-income workers did not obtain a fair share. It was concluded that a complex interplay of size and activity of transit agency, demographic profiles and trends within metropolitan areas, contracting methods, and the relative integration of regional construction labor markets and, or unions, influences who gets the jobs in light rail construction.

Through the case study research and literature review, several areas of concern and opportunity for best practices in minority and local hiring in transit projects were identified: contracting mechanisms, outreach to ensure disadvantaged business enterprises (DBE) participation in transit projects, financial assistance for DBE firms, ensuring contractor compliance with DBE programs, and agency leadership. Organized under these categories, 14 best management practices (BMPs) were identified, and a manual for transit agencies was prepared. For each of the BMPs, the background for the practice is discussed, followed by the rationale for the practice and examples. In addition, the research support for each of the practices is documented.

Benefits

Transit agencies and FTA can use the conclusions of this research to improve programs that promote employment in transit projects by members of minority and low-income communities. The manual can be used by agencies to identify promising practices and provide documentary support and illustrations of cases where the practice has been successfully implemented.

Project Information

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