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FRA Taking Steps to Advance Minority and Women Owned Business Participation in Federally Funded Rail Projects

Underscoring the Biden-Harris Administration's focus on promoting diversity and inclusion, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is conducting a first of its kind nationwide small, minority-owned and woman-owned business disparity study, seeking to determine whether the playing field is level for firms aspiring to win subcontracts from grantees receiving Federal funds administered by the agency.

"We are firmly committed to increasing equity across the American economy and ensuring that women and minority-owned businesses have a fair shot at contracting opportunities funded by federal dollars," FRA Acting Administrator Amit Bose said. "Assessing the current extent of DBE and WBE inclusion, and if any disparities exist, is necessary to accomplish this goal. We're asking all businesses and stakeholders who were selected to take this survey to respond as soon as possible. Doing so will help FRA and Congress fully understand the market and take steps to ensure it is both fair and open to all."

To promote and achieve safe, efficient and reliable railroad environments, FRA in 2020 awarded more than \$1 billion in grants for freight and passenger projects, through the numerous discretionary and competitive funding programs authorized by Congress.

The electronic, invitation-only survey, which takes an estimated fifteen minutes or less to complete, will determine the availability and use of small, minority-owned and woman-owned businesses in the publicly funded railroad landscape. FRA will submit the results to Congress in a report, allowing members to determine the need for a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program at FRA.

To perform the survey, FRA contracted with Jack Faucett Associates and the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center (NORC), which have distributed 22,000 surveys and expects to send an additional 8,000 surveys.

“These surveys will be critical to helping us understand if disparities exist and the nature of the disparities,” Bose said. “We’ll use these results to assess how many small and disadvantaged businesses we’re reaching and whether we can do a better job of working with all that aspire to be FRA contractors.”

To view two recent letters FRA issued inviting participants to complete the survey, please visit <https://railroads.dot.gov/disparity>.

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