

**Department of Transportation
Response
Case # 23-0032-I**

CITY OF BALTIMORE
BRANDON M. SCOTT, MAYOR



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Corren Johnson, Director
417 E. Fayette Street, 5th Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

September 26, 2023

Baltimore City Office of the Inspector General
100 N. Holliday Street, Suite 635
Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: OIG Case No. 23-0032-I Outstanding Permit Invoicing

Dear Inspector General Cumming:

This serves as the Department of Transportation's (DOT) response to the OIG case referenced above. After conducting a comprehensive review of records and conducting interviews, our agency is taking both immediate actions to improve our workflow and developing a long-term strategy for resolution. We have identified the need for a modification to the agency's Temporary Use of Right of Way (ROW) application. We also recognize the importance of implementing measures to enhance efficiency and accuracy in our billing process when a third party applies for a permit on behalf of another entity responsible for payment.

The DOT Right of Way (ROW) Division began invoicing applicants rather than collecting payment at the time of permit pickup due to operational changes prompted by the COVID Pandemic. The Division initiated efforts to return to pre-pandemic operations in February 2023 and finalized the shift in May 2023. Additionally, in January 2023, DOT proactively reached out to the Department of Finance (DOF) and has since maintained ongoing coordination and meetings to address billing and invoicing procedures. Additional discussions have involved [REDACTED] staff to address their specific issues.

As one of the billing issues investigated was related to third-party permitting, we have initiated immediate changes in our workflow. Specifically, the DOT ROW Division has sent notice to all permit expeditors that effective November 1, 2023, payment is required at the time of permit pickup. This allows expeditors time to notify their clients and make modifications to their procedures to account for this change.

High-volume utility companies to include [REDACTED] are the only exceptions to this payment at time of permit pickup approach. For these permittees, the DOT ROW Division sends a list of permits and associated fees to the DOF at the end of each month. They then create an invoice and bill the customer. These entities were invoiced pre-pandemic as well.

Additionally, we are currently exploring the feasibility of creating a dashboard for improved tracking and management of these permit related invoices. As part of our ongoing efforts, we are establishing a monthly reconciliation meeting, which we are referring to as InvoiceStat. This meeting will include the following key activities:

- Reviewing a list of invoices by customer
- Assessing individual invoices
- Analyzing the total amount collected
- Evaluating outstanding balances

In line with the recommendations outlined in the report, our DOT ROW Chief is continuing efforts to revise the language governing permits for telecommunications and utility companies. The agency anticipated issuing new permit language earlier in the year however due to public feedback regarding utility work notifications, Maintenance of Traffic, and other concerns, the agency has been working to better address this feedback and resolve any other permit language concerns. It's worth noting that as we began the process of updating the language for the blanket permit with [REDACTED] the existing blanket permit has been extended on a monthly basis.

Lastly, it was determined that the current permitting system lacks the capability to interface with Workday or Paymentus. We are actively collaborating with the Baltimore City Office of Information and Technology (BCIT) and the DOF to evaluate and procure a new system that will facilitate seamless integration of all systems. We anticipate that the new system will significantly reduce billing inaccuracies, allow for an improved reconciliation process, and allow for transparency across the enterprise.

We sincerely appreciate your diligence in bringing this matter to our attention. If you have any inquiries or require further information, please feel free to contact me or Mrs. Laetitia Gardener, Deputy Director for Administration, at Laetitia.Gardener@baltimorecity.gov.

Sincerely,



Corren Johnson
Director

cc: Faith Leach, City Administrator
Simone Johnson, Deputy City Administrator
Ebony M. Thompson, Acting City Solicitor
Marvin James, Mayor's Interim Chief of Staff
Laetitia Gardner, Deputy Director of Administration, DOT
Veobia Akilo, Chief of Staff, DOT
Tavon Braxton, Deputy Director of Operations, DOT
Adam Cloud, Chief of Right-of Way Division, DOT