

Washington/Western Bus Rapid Transit

Albany, New York

Small Starts Project Development (Rating Assigned November 2019)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 8.5 Miles, 16 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$81.18 Million
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$60.89 Million (75.0%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2022):	\$2.90 Million
Existing Corridor Ridership (Warranted):	9,700 Daily Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium
Project Justification Rating:	Medium
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	Medium

Project Description: The Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) proposes to implement bus rapid transit (BRT) in the Washington/Western corridor that extends from the downtown Albany Bus Terminal, through the State University of New York at Albany and the Harriman State Office Complex, to the Crossgates Mall. The project includes limited stops, 16 uniquely branded buses, transit signal priority, queue bypass lanes, real-time bus arrival information, a one-mile semi-exclusive busway across the University campus, and bus maintenance garage expansion. Service is planned to operate seven days a week, with buses every seven to 10 minutes during weekday daytime hours and buses every 15 to 30 minutes during weekday evenings and weekends.

Project Purpose: CDTA's second busiest transit services operate in this corridor, where approximately 30 percent of the population does not own an automobile. CDTA is planning the proposed project to provide direct, frequent, quick, and more reliable transit service in the corridor. CDTA expects to attract new transit riders and to encourage transit and pedestrian-oriented revitalization in this corridor that serves major institutions, offices, colleges and universities, as well as retail and urban residential areas.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: CDTA selected BRT as the locally preferred alternative in December 2013, and had it adopted into the region's fiscally constrained long-range transportation plan in March 2014. The project entered Small Starts Project Development in July 2014. CDTA completed the environmental review process with receipt of a Categorical Exclusion from FTA in February 2015. CDTA anticipates receipt of a Small Starts Grant Agreement in late 2020, and the start of revenue service in spring 2022.

Significant Changes Since Last Evaluation (November 2018): The total capital cost increased from \$80.65 million to \$81.18 million due to changes made by CDTA to the project scope, including the removal of three stations that will be built independently of the project, and the inclusion of renovation of the Albany Bus Terminal to create a Downtown Albany Intermodal Center. The CIG share remained at 75 percent, but because of the project cost increase, the CIG amount requested increased from \$60.49 million to \$60.89 million.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan

<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal: Section 5309 Small Starts	\$60.89	75.0%
State: New York State Department of Transportation Cash Contribution	\$10.99	13.5%
Local: CDTA General Funds	\$9.30	11.5%
Total:	\$81.18	100.0%

NOTE: The financial plan reflected in this table has been developed by the project sponsor and does not reflect a commitment by DOT or FTA. The sum of the figures may differ from the total as listed due to rounding.

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LAND USE RATING: Medium-High

The land use rating reflects population density within one-half mile of proposed stations, employment served by the line, and the share of legally binding affordability restricted (LBAR) housing in the station areas compared to the share in the surrounding county.

- The average population density across all station areas is 7,303 persons per square mile, which corresponds to a Medium rating by FTA benchmarks. Station area employment totals 73,767 employees, corresponding to a Medium rating. The average daily parking cost in the central business district (CBD) of the City of Albany is approximately \$11.00, corresponding to a Medium rating. The proportion of LBAR housing in the project corridor compared to the proportion in the county through which the project travels is 2.93, which corresponds to a High rating.
- The project will connect educational institutions, offices, shopping centers, retail districts, and urban residential areas to downtown Albany, the Capital Region's largest CBD. The corridor comprises two "segments" - a densely developed, pre-automobile eastern segment, and an auto-centric western segment characterized by institutions which have pedestrian-oriented centers, but are surrounded by ring roads and parking lots.
- Much of the corridor has a complete network of pedestrian facilities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* Plans identify Washington and Western Avenues as mixed-use, transit-oriented corridors, and focus on creating transit-oriented station areas that support pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. Plans generally do not specify target development densities.
- *Supportive Zoning Near Transit Stations:* Mixed-use and dense residential and commercial zoning districts line much of the corridor. Most mixed-use districts do not prescribe a maximum residential density and some require first-floor retail. Albany's new zoning ordinance reduces required parking minimums and encourages increased density throughout the corridor and near transit stations. Some multi-family uses such as dormitories and townhomes have minimum bicycle parking requirements.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* The project sponsor has engaged developers on characteristics and benefits of transit-supportive development, and reviews major development projects to integrate bus stop infrastructure and pedestrian amenities. No evidence of financial development incentives was provided.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium-High

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* Corridor development has included new and in-fill projects that directly benefit from transit-supportive land use policies, including adaptive reuse and renovation, building upgrades and expansions, and new construction. Most of these developments are oriented to the street and encourage pedestrian access.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* There are substantial opportunities for development along the corridor, including urban infill and increased density at campus-style activity centers. The Albany area's economy is stable and the city's population is increasing after a few decades of decline.

Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing: Medium-Low

- Albany has an inclusionary zoning provision for large residential developments and provides height bonuses and reduced parking minimums for developments with at least 20 percent affordable units. Home acquisition assistance programs are available for low-income households. No evidence of measures to ensure long-term affordability was provided.

