

Expo Center Bus Rapid Transit Project

Austin, Texas

Small Starts Project Development

(Rating Assigned November 2020)

The rating reflected in this profile was based on the information provided by the project sponsor in the fall of 2020. Subsequent to the completion of FTA's evaluation, the sponsor increased the total capital cost and Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program share request. Those changes cannot be reflected in the project profile until FTA receives a complete revised submission from the sponsor so the rating can be updated accordingly.

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 12 Miles, 23 stations total (22 new stations)
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$35.62 Million
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$17.81 Million (50.0%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2023):	\$9.48 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2020):	5,000 Daily Linked Trips 1,494,100 Annual Linked Trips
Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2040):	11,200 Daily Linked Trips 3,322,200 Annual Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium-High
Project Justification Rating:	Medium
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	High

Project Description: The Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro) proposes to implement a corridor-based Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project between downtown Austin and the Exposition Center, located in northeast Austin. The Project includes near-level boarding stations, shelters, shade panels, banners, benches, trash cans, solar lighting, totem shells, platforms, bus pads, off-vehicle fare collection equipment, transit signal priority, mobile ticket validators and the purchase of 10 40-foot electric buses and four 60-foot articulated electric buses. The service is planned to operate for 23 hours on weekdays, 21 hours on Saturdays, and 18 hours on Sundays. Buses are planned to operate every 10 minutes for most of the day on weekdays with buses every 15 minutes during early morning and late-night hours. On weekends service is planned to operate every 15 minutes for most of the day with buses every 20 minutes during early morning and late night hours.

Project Purpose: The Project corridor includes several major employment areas and key activity centers, including downtown Austin, the University of Texas at Austin, Dell Seton Medical Center, St. David's Medical Center, Dell Children's Medical Center, LBJ High School, and the Travis County Expo Center. The Project is expected to improve mobility by providing high capacity transit with fast, frequent, and reliable service to these major activity and employment centers and connections to at least 45 CapMetro fixed-route services. The Project is one of the first steps in implementation of the Project Connect program, a long-term transit vision plan that would institute high capacity transit throughout the region.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: CapMetro adopted a preliminary locally preferred alternative (LPA) in June 2020. The Project entered Small Starts Project Development in August 2020. The LPA was adopted into the fiscally constrained long-range transportation plan in November 2020. CapMetro anticipates completion of the environmental review process with receipt of a Categorical Exclusion from FTA in Spring 2021, receipt of a Small Starts construction grant in Fall 2021, and the start of revenue service in Summer 2023.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan		
<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal: Section 5309 CIG	\$17.81	50.0%
Local: City of Austin Property Tax	\$15.41	43.3%
CapMetro Sales Tax	\$2.40	6.7%
Total:	\$35.62	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

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 population density in station areas is about 5,000 persons per square mile, corresponding to a Medium-Low rating by FTA benchmarks. Total employment served is about 147,000 jobs, corresponding to a Medium-High rating. The average daily parking cost in the central business district is \$28, corresponding to a High rating. The ratio of station area to county LBAR housing is 2.05, corresponding to a Medium rating.
- Aside from downtown and areas near the University of Texas at Austin campus where density is more transit supportive, land use in the project corridor is primarily single-family residential with small pockets of multi-family residential.
- The pedestrian network is well-connected in the Downtown area, but becomes more disconnected as the corridor extends to its northeastern destination. In the Colony Park area, where development is ongoing, sidewalks are nearly non-existent.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium-Low

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* The City of Austin and institutional stakeholders adopted transit-supportive corridor plans and policies but do not establish density targets for development along the Expo Center BRT corridor. Adopted plans link land use and transportation priorities to support transit-oriented development (TOD), specifically along BRT corridors. Small area and neighborhood plans are transit-supportive but do not focus on the corridor station areas.
- *Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations:* The City of Austin zoning moderately or strongly supports TOD in some station areas. The Austin Land Development Code includes TOD zoning, a vertical mixed-use overlay, a special corridor zoning regulation for the Campus, Inner Manor, and Mueller areas, and accessory dwelling units.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* The City of Austin and CapMetro conducted extensive public outreach as part of citywide planning efforts, held design workshops with developers to include TOD elements in developments, and created a *TOD Priority Tool* (2016) guidebook to attract and assist in the development of TOD. The City offers a TOD Development Bonus for projects in the Martin Luther King TOD District, which includes the Alexander and Airport Boulevard station areas.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium-Low

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* Since early 2019, over nine million square feet of commercial development and nearly 700 residential units have been proposed in the corridor. Many of the projects are mixed-use with ground floor retail and upper level residential and most are downtown.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* There are almost 1,000 acres of land considered to have a high likelihood of redevelopment along the corridor, with the highest potential areas being Colony Park, Inner Manor, and downtown. However, existing plans do not clearly support redevelopment in these areas.

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

- The City has conducted analyses that indicate the need for 135,000 new affordable units by 2027 to meet housing demand. The City has objectives to develop affordable units for very low-income households. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint recommends 25 percent of affordable housing created or preserved be within 1/4-mile of high-frequency transit.
- The City has several financing tools to preserve or increase affordable housing, including: housing bonds to support developments; development bonus programs; Homestead Preservation Districts, including reinvestment zones, land trusts, and land banks; and anti-displacement funds.
- Developers are including affordable units in a few of the new planned developments.

Project Location - Expo Corridor

- Expo Stations
- Expo Corridor
- Water
- Park and Open Spaces
- Activity Centers

Source: CapMetro, 2019

