

Hamilton Avenue Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Project
Cincinnati, Ohio
Small Starts Project Development
(Rating Assigned November 2025)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 8.8 Miles, 11 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$171.58 Million
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$137.27 Million (80.0%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2028):	\$12.56 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2025):	6,300 Daily Linked Trips 1,964,200 Annual Linked Trips
Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2045):	7,700 Daily Linked Trips 2,380,900 Annual Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium
Project Justification Rating:	Medium
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	Medium

Project Description: The Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) in cooperation with the City of Cincinnati proposes to implement corridor-based bus rapid transit (BRT) service that extends northwest from Cincinnati's Downtown district to the outermost Cincinnati neighborhood of College Hill and to the City of Mount Healthy. The project includes over seven miles of exclusive and priority bus lanes, including center-running bus-only lanes and curbside Business Access-Transit lanes. A fleet of 16 clean diesel buses is planned to operate 20 hours a day, every 10 minutes during the weekday peak and midday periods and every 15-30 minutes at night and on weekends. Stations include level boarding platforms, canopies, seating, station identification markers, real-time information displays, off-board fare collection equipment, and other features to maximize operational efficiency, passenger comfort and convenience, pedestrian connectivity, and full accessibility.

Project Purpose: The project is intended to improve transit service in the corridor, provide faster, more reliable, and more attractive bus transit service that connects the region's two largest employment and activity centers – downtown Cincinnati and Cincinnati's Uptown District (home of the University of Cincinnati and the region's major medical district). The project plans to share the Reading Road Corridor alignment between the Riverfront Transit Center and University of Cincinnati stations. The project serves the historically disadvantaged communities where there are significant concentrations of households below the poverty rate and are transit dependent with zero access to cars. The project plans to connect high-density residential communities in northwest Cincinnati with academic, medical, recreational, and entertainment centers, as well as connection to multiple transit services in the central business district.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: SORTA selected a Locally Preferred Alternative in January 2023. The project entered Project Development in June 2023. The project was adopted in the fiscally constrained long-range plan in September 2023. The sponsor anticipates NEPA completion in January 2026, receipt of a construction grant award in May 2026 and the start of revenue service in July 2028.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan		
<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal: Section 5309 CIG	\$137.27	80.0%
Local: SORTA Investment Funds Reserve	\$34.31	20.0%
Total:	\$171.58	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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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium

Supportive Zoning in Station Areas: Medium-High

- *Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations:* Zoning in most station areas appears to permit moderate to high residential and commercial densities, although height and setback requirements could limit densities in some districts. A mix of uses is permitted in most districts of the corridor although some of the more suburban station areas include single-use neighborhoods. Zoning for the more dense and mixed-use districts specifies low or zero maximum setbacks as well as additional requirements for pedestrian-supportive design. The City of Cincinnati implemented an overlay district along the entire Hamilton Avenue Corridor within the City to permit multi-family development by right, eliminate minimum lot areas per unit, and eliminate parking minimums.

Performance and Impacts of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* Comprehensive and neighborhood plans for the City of Cincinnati qualitatively support moderate to higher density, mixed-use, and walkable development in most of the station areas. Plans for the other three jurisdictions covering station areas range from slightly to very transit-supportive. Target densities are generally not specified. Local jurisdictions are adopting transit supportive initiatives, namely the Connected Communities initiative and the universal design standards, as well as committing to a TOD plan to investigate building more “missing middle” Housing options within the corridor.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* There have been some outreach efforts to support transit-supportive land use decision-making regionally and within the corridor. The primary adopted incentives are City of Cincinnati multi-family tax abatements and streamlined regulatory review for transit-supportive projects.
- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* There are a few examples of recent and proposed developments with transit-supportive design in the corridor, primarily found in two neighborhoods within the City of Cincinnati. Transit agency and the city is working proactively with investors by setting up the Metro Transit Infrastructure Fund as well as streamlining regulatory and permitting processes for TOD projects. The city also has an online dashboard that helps developers better understand the opportunities to develop within the community and what governments have done to prepare redevelopable land for future development.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* While the corridor is mostly fully developed, there is additional development/ redevelopment potential in some station areas. The anticipated population and employment growth in the region is modest.

Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing: Medium

- Assessments of affordable housing needs have been conducted regionally but not at the corridor level. Several non-profit and community development organizations focus on providing support for lower income residents including affordable housing. The City of Cincinnati has a development fund, trust fund, affordable housing leverage fund, and tax abatement programs to support affordable housing.
- Recently completed or planned projects providing units affordable to households earning 60 percent or less of area median income were identified in station areas, concentrated within the City of Cincinnati.

HAMILTON AVE BRT CORRIDOR

