

Reading Road Corridor BRT Project
Cincinnati, Ohio
Small Starts Project Development
(Rating Assigned November 2024)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 9.2 Miles, 13 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$166.79 Million
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$116.75 Million (70.0%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year (2027):	\$8.90 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2024):	5,900 Daily Linked Trips 1,817,500 Annual Linked Trips
Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2045):	7,000 Daily Linked Trips 2,140,600 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 a corridor-based bus rapid transit service from the downtown Cincinnati Riverfront Transit Center northeast to the Cincinnati neighborhood of Roselawn. The project includes approximately eight miles of exclusive and priority bus lanes including center-running bus-only lanes and curbside Business Access-Transit lanes; stations with large shelters, seating, real-time information displays, lighting, bicycle parking, and pedestrian access improvements; a park and ride facility at or near the northern terminus of the corridor; and the purchase of 12 zero emission articulated buses. The service is planned to operate from 5:00 AM to 1:00 AM with the buses running every ten minutes during weekday peak periods, every 10-20 minutes during weekday off-peak periods, and every 15-30 minutes on weekday evenings and weekends.

Project Purpose: The project connects the regions' two major employment and activity centers, downtown Cincinnati and Uptown, along with several commercial hubs and residential neighborhoods along the Reading Road. Downtown Cincinnati is home to several large employers including four Fortune 500 companies, and Cincinnati's Uptown District is home to the University of Cincinnati and the region's major medical district. The project serves a major arterial and a transit corridor with one of the highest ridership in the region. With implementation of the project, SORTA intends to improve transit experience in the corridor by providing frequent and reliable service.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: SORTA selected a locally preferred alternative (LPA) in January 2023. The project entered Small Starts Project Development phase in June 2023. The LPA was adopted into the regions' long range transportation plan in September 2023. SORTA anticipates completion of the environmental review process in September 2025, receipt of a construction grant in March 2026, and the start of revenue service in October 2027.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan

<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal: Section 5309 CIG	\$116.75	70.0%
Local: SORTA Investment Funds Reserve	\$50.04	30.0%
Total:	\$166.79	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 population density in station areas is about 6,600 persons per square mile, corresponding to a Medium rating by FTA benchmarks. Total employment served is about 96,000 jobs, corresponding to a Medium rating. The ratio of station area to county LBAR housing is 4.02, corresponding to a High rating.
- The project serves downtown Cincinnati, streetcar-era neighborhoods with a mix of uses, and large institutional and research developments. There are several major destinations in the project corridor, including sports, entertainment, cultural, and civic venues in the downtown area and adjoining neighborhoods; the University of Cincinnati; and medical institutions in the Uptown area.
- Sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities exist throughout most of the corridor.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium

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. Target densities are generally not specified.
- *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. 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 Reading Road Corridor to permit multi-family development, eliminate minimum lot areas per unit, and eliminate parking minimums.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* There have been a few outreach efforts to support transit-supportive land use decision-making regionally and within the corridor. The primary adopted incentives are multi-family tax abatements that are increased in transit corridors.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* There are a few examples of recent developments affected by transit-oriented policies as well as numerous examples of proposed development, mostly in the downtown and University of Cincinnati/Uptown areas. Renderings and descriptions show projects as mainly being multi-story with pedestrian-supportive design, and with many being mixed-use.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* The corridor serves primary regional economic generators. While the corridor is mostly fully developed, there is additional development/redevelopment potential in some station areas. For the most part this potential has not been quantified.

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

- 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, and tax abatement program 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 four station areas of the corridor.

READING ROAD BRT CORRIDOR

