

East Main Street BRT
Columbus, Ohio
Small Starts Project Development
(Rating Assigned November 2024)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 13.6 Miles, 18 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$385.00 Million
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$149.99 Million (39.0%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2029):	\$11.52 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2023):	4,200 Daily Linked Trips 1,288,400 Annual Linked Trips
Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2045):	6,100 Daily Linked Trips 1,905,300 Annual Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium-High
Project Justification Rating:	Medium
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	High

Project Description: The Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) proposes to implement a bus rapid transit between downtown Columbus to the east serving Columbus, Bexley, Whitehall, and the City of Reynoldsburg. The project includes 8.7 miles of exclusive bus lanes, 14 specially branded zero-emission or electric vehicles, on-route vehicle charging, near-level boarding at stations, off-board fare collection, complete streets improvements, transit signal priority, an end-of-line layover facility with enhanced safety and security, and a new park and ride transit center with 75 to 90 parking spaces. The service is planned to operate from 5:00 AM to 12:00 AM, seven days a week, with buses running every 10 minutes during the weekday peak periods, every 15 to 20 minutes during weekday off-peak periods, and every 10 to 20 minutes on weekends.

Project Purpose: The corridor is currently served by COTA's highest ridership fixed route bus service and connects nearby neighborhoods to several key activity centers including medical facilities, education, shopping centers, recreation, and the Central Business District. The project is planned to provide high-capacity transit with greater reliability and service in the corridor. A high percentage of the population in the station areas fall below the poverty threshold. COTA believes that the project will better connect underserved communities to essential community services and will improve their access to jobs and economic opportunities.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: The project entered Small Starts Project Development in October 2021. COTA selected the locally preferred alternative in May 2024, and it was subsequently included in the region's fiscally constrained long-range transportation plan that same month. COTA anticipates completing the environmental review process with receipt of a categorical exclusion by 2025, receiving a construction grant in 2026, and starting revenue service in 2029.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan		
<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal:		
Section 5309 CIG	\$149.99	39.0%
FHWA Flexible Funds (Surface Transportation Block Grant)	\$18.20	4.7%
State:		
Ohio Department of Transportation – Transportation Review Advisor Council (ODOT TRCA) Major New Capacity Program Funds	\$22.80	5.9%
Local:		
FY2024-28 COTA CIP FUNDS	\$94.00	24.4%
FY2025-2026 COTA bonds repaid by sales tax revenue grants and interest income	\$100.00	26.0%
Total:	\$385.00	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 4,900 persons per square mile, corresponding to a Medium-Low rating by FTA benchmarks. Total employment served is about 91,500 jobs, corresponding to a Medium rating. The ratio of station area to county LBAR housing is 2.25, corresponding to a Medium-High rating.
- The project spans a diversity of neighborhoods ranging from high-density office, civic, residential, and institutional development in downtown Columbus; to older, walkable neighborhoods with street-fronting commercial and a mix of single and multi-family housing; to mid to late 20th century auto-oriented commercial and lower-density residential areas. Sidewalks are present on streets in most station areas.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium

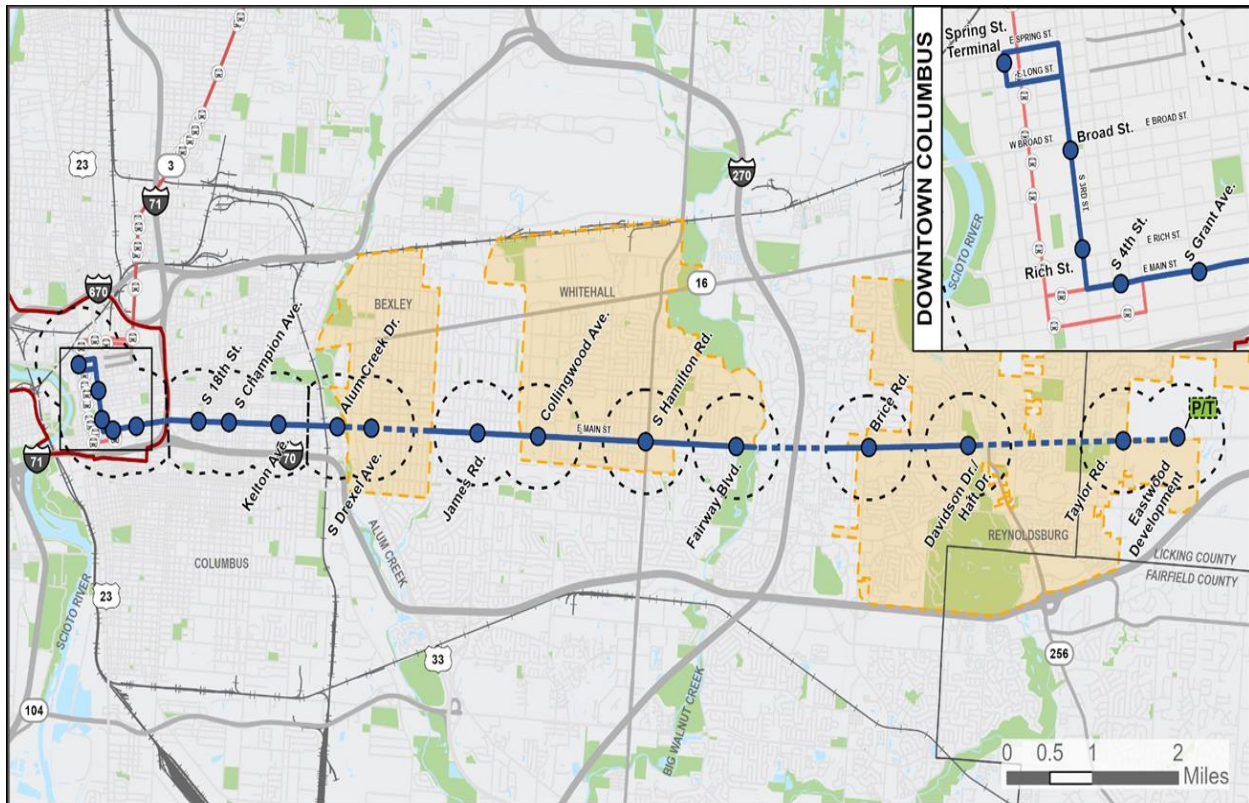
Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* Regional and municipal plans support focusing growth in transit corridors, including the East Main Street corridor. Comprehensive and neighborhood plans recommend transit-supportive densities in most of the station areas, and also support mixed-use development and improved walkability along almost the entire corridor.
- *Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations:* The corridor municipalities having almost universally implemented zoning directly along the East Main Street Corridor that permits moderate to high densities (typically four stories or more) and mixed uses, while establishing pedestrian-supportive design requirements, and eliminating minimum parking requirements for properties along the alignment. The City of Columbus rezoned transit corridors in 2024 to have form-based mixed-use districts and eliminate minimum parking requirements.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* Regional and local agencies have taken a proactive approach to stakeholder and community engagement in recent years to consider transit-supportive land use concepts as part of regional transportation and local land use planning. To date, however, there has been limited planning specifically for East Main Street corridor station areas. A number of tax increment financing districts cover parts of the corridor but information was not available on how they have been used to support development.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* The project sponsor provided a number of examples of transit-supportive development, mostly in downtown Columbus but with two examples in other corridor communities. While additional recent or proposed development was identified in the corridor, information was not provided to judge the character of that development.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* An economic analysis concluded that there was significant opportunity for new development and growth along the corridor, considering the availability of vacant and underutilized land, most of which is zoned for transit-supportive densities. A regional study identified 1,100 acres with redevelopment potential in the East Main Street corridor.

Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing: Medium-Low
• Columbus and Franklin County have a \$100 million fund to support affordable housing developments and a few smaller financing programs are active. However, there has been limited consideration of corridor-specific affordable housing needs. Examples were provided of five recently-completed affordable housing developments in the corridor adding almost 500 units.



EAST MAIN STREET BUS RAPID TRANSIT - COLUMBUS, OH

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|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| ● BRT Station | Existing CMAX Station | County Boundaries |
| — Dedicated BRT Guideway | — Existing CMAX Alignment | Water |
| - - - Mixed Flow BRT Guideway | — Railroads | Open Space |
| - - - 1/2 Mile Buffer | PRT New Park & Ride/Transit Center | Corridor Municipality |
| | | Central Business District |

