

**Lowcountry Rapid Transit (LCRT)
Charleston, South Carolina
New Starts Engineering
(Rating Assigned November 2025)**

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 21.3 Miles, 20 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$625.10 Million <small>(Includes \$26.5 million in finance charges)</small>
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$374.21 Million (59.8%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2030):	\$11.50 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2025):	4,100 Daily Linked Trips 1,191,400 Annual Linked Trips
Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2045):	5,800 Daily Linked Trips 1,681,700 Annual Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium-High
Project Justification Rating:	Medium
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	Medium-High

Project Description: The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) proposes to implement a bus rapid transit (BRT) service connecting North Charleston and Charleston. The Project is planned to operate in a dedicated guideway for 11.7 miles (55 percent of the route), with a combination of median-running and side-running exclusive lanes. The Project includes 21 60-foot articulated diesel buses with doors on both sides, two non-revenue vehicles, traffic signal priority, upgrades to the existing operations and maintenance facility, and a park-and-ride facility with parking space for approximately 140 vehicles. Stations are planned to feature dedicated shelters with ticket vending machines to allow off-board fare collection, as well as BRT branding and signage. Service is anticipated to be operated by the Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA), while the urban transportation services would be administered by BCDCOG. On weekdays, service is planned to operate from 4:00 AM to 1:00 AM, with 10-minute headways between 6:00 AM and 9:00 PM, and 30-minute headways for the remainder of the service period. On Saturdays, service is planned from 6:00 AM to 12:00 AM, with 20-minute headways until 9:00 PM, and 30-minute headways thereafter. Sunday service is planned from 7:00 AM to 11:00 PM with 30-minute headways.

Project Purpose: BCDCOG indicates that the Project is needed to provide a high-capacity fixed-route bus service along a rapidly growing urban corridor experiencing surging population and job growth. The BRT intends to improve access to jobs, healthcare, and education for transit-dependent riders. The Project corridor extends from US 78 and Commerce Center in Ladson to Downtown Charleston and is home to a wide variety of activity centers and destinations including the Exchange Park Fairgrounds, Charleston Southern University, Trident Medical Center, North Charleston Wannamaker County Park, Northwoods Mall, Trident Technical College, the College of Charleston, the Medical District, and historic downtown Charleston.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: The Project entered New Starts Project Development in September 2019. BCDCOG selected and adopted the locally preferred alternative into the region's long range transportation plan in May 2021. The environmental review was completed in July 2021 with the issuance of a Documented Categorical Exclusion. FTA approved the Project into New Starts Engineering in July 2022. BCDCOG anticipates receiving a Full Funding Grant Agreement in Fall 2025 with revenue service beginning in late 2030.

Significant Changes Since Last Evaluation (July 2022): Since the Project was rated and evaluated for entry into New Starts Engineering in July 2022, the number of vehicles included in the Project increased from 19 to 21 vehicles. The increase is due to a change in bus type, from battery electric buses to diesel buses.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan

<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal:		
Section 5309 CIG	\$374.21	59.8%
Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Funds	\$1.13	0.2%
Local:		
Charleston County Sales (Bond Proceeds)	\$129.74	20.8%
Charleston County Sales (Cash)	\$109.40	17.5%
Charleston County Debt Service (Cash)	\$10.62	1.7%
Total:	\$625.10	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.

FCA Financial Profile
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Factor	Rating	Comments
Local Financial Commitment Rating	Medium-High	
Non-Section 5309 CIG Share	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CIG share of the overall project is 59.8 percent.
Summary Financial Plan Rating	Medium-High	
Current Capital and Operating Condition (25% of local financial commitment rating)	Medium-High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The average age of the bus fleet is 7.4 years, which is in line with the industry average. The most recent bond ratings for Charleston County, which the sponsor (BCDCOG incorporates) was rated AAA by Fitch Ratings (October 2024) Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA)'s current ratio of assets to liabilities as reported in its most recent audited financial statement is 4.9 (FY 2024). There were no cash flow shortfalls in recent years.
Commitment of Capital and Operating Funds (25% of local financial commitment rating)	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the non-Section 5309 CIG capital funds are committed or budgeted. Sources of funds include previously programmed Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Grant funds, and a previously approved Charleston County transportation sales tax. Approximately 95 percent of the funds needed to operate and maintain the transit system in the first full year of operation are committed or budgeted, the rest are considered planned. Sources of funds include FTA Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Grant funds, FTA Section 5310 Enhances Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities funds, farebox revenue, previously approved multiple Charleston County sales tax (Charleston County Sales tax #'s 1&2), an upcoming dedicated annual allocation (Sales tax #3), dedicated established partnership annual revenue from local entities (College of Charleston, Medical University of South Carolina, and the City of Charleston), and advertising revenue.
Reasonableness of Capital and Operating Cost Estimates and Planning Assumptions/Capital Funding Capacity (50% of local financial commitment rating)	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumed growth in capital revenues are conservative compared to recent historical experience. The capital cost estimate is reasonable. Regarding growth in operating revenue assumptions, forecasted to be optimistic compared with recent historical experience. Operating cost estimates are reasonable compared to recent historical experience. CARTA has access to funds via additional debt capacity, cash reserves, or other committed funds to cover unexpected cost increases or funding shortfalls equal to at least 15.0 percent of the estimated CIG capital cost and 12.0 percent of annual system wide operating expenses (1.5 months).

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EFFECTS RATING: Medium

Supportive Zoning: Medium

- Zoned densities in the station areas are moderately supportive of transit-supportive development. An overlay along the entire LCRT alignment in North Charleston supports mixed uses and sets minimum two-story heights and design requirements; some but not all of the Charleston districts also support transit-oriented design through minimal setbacks and other design requirements. Some Charleston zoning districts have provisions for reducing parking.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium

- *Growth Management:* Regional and county plans identify a desire for compact and mixed-use development patterns and preservation of natural resources. However, tools to implement these goals are limited and mainly rely upon municipal cooperation.
- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* Municipal comprehensive plans generally call for concentrating higher-density and mixed-use development in the LCRT corridor as well as improving pedestrian facilities and connectivity. However, few details regarding planned densities are provided in these plans. More detailed studies have addressed potential development concepts and pedestrian improvements in selected portions of the corridor, especially focusing on the Neck area of Charleston and North Charleston. The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) has been leading additional efforts to advance TOD planning in the corridor that has included more specific land use recommendations, and the North Charleston 2025 comprehensive plan update makes additional reference to TOD-supportive policies.
- *Tools to Implement Policies:* BCDCOG has developed a number of transit-oriented development (TOD) planning resources for corridor municipalities. Numerous community meetings were held since 2019 to introduce TOD and facilitate exercises with the public to identify appropriate areas to implement TOD in the future. Regulatory and financial incentives include tax increment financing, Opportunity Zones, and brownfields redevelopment funds, although few examples were provided of applications of these tools for transit-supportive development.
- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* The application identified over two dozen examples of transit-supportive development projects completed in the past 10 years and five additional planned projects. However, all of these projects were in or near downtown Charleston, and no completed or planned projects were identified in North Charleston.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* There appears to be moderate to significant potential for development in the corridor. Over 50 percent of the parcel acreage within four station areas in North Charleston was classified as a development opportunity site due to the presence of vacant or underutilized land. The market for development appears relatively strong, with the broader corridor capturing 12 percent of recent regional development and adding nearly 5,000 housing units since 2015.

Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing: Medium

- TOD planning for the corridor has identified affordable housing goals and strategies. The City of Charleston and Charleston County have a number of financing and regulatory tools for affordable housing, including fee waivers, affordable housing bonds, trust funds, loan programs, and priority development review. Ten recently developed affordable housing projects were identified in station areas in Charleston producing nearly 500 units. For North Charleston, however, only general goals were identified rather than specific programs, incentives, or development examples.

