

# Northwest Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Project

## Columbus, Ohio

### Small Starts Project Development (Rating Assigned August 2026)

| Summary Description                               |                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Proposed Project:</b>                          | Bus Rapid Transit<br>10.0 Miles, 15 Stations            |
| <b>Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):</b>                | \$357,207,000                                           |
| <b>Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):</b>            | \$149,491,000 (41.8%)                                   |
| <b>Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2031):</b> | \$11,990,089                                            |
| <b>Current Year Ridership Forecast (2025):</b>    | 2,000 Daily Linked Trips<br>570,500 Annual Linked Trips |
| <b>Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2045):</b>    | 2,800 Daily Linked Trips<br>808,300 Annual Linked Trips |
| <b>Overall Project Rating:</b>                    | Medium-High                                             |
| <b>Project Justification Rating:</b>              | Medium                                                  |
| <b>Local Financial Commitment Rating:</b>         | High                                                    |

**Project Description:** The proposed Northwest Corridor (NWC) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project seeks to provide premier and affordable transit service to meet the existing and long-term regional mobility and local access needs for residents, businesses, and institutions within the Northwest Corridor. This CIG project is Phase 1 of a larger three phased corridor project. The initial segment runs from Downtown Columbus to COTA's Bethel Road Park and Ride. The full Project will extend to the Ohio University campus area in Dublin. Phase 1 implements a new BRT service connecting several of Central Ohio's most significant employment, healthcare, and entertainment destinations, including The Ohio State University, OhioHealth Riverside Methodist Hospital, Lennox Town Center, and the Arena District. Sixty-five percent of the route would include exclusive or semi-exclusive bus lanes. The NWC BRT service intends to operate using eight specially branded compressed natural gas buses, feature off-board fare collection, near-level boarding, station amenities with enhanced safety features, and transit signal priority. The Project is planned to operate from 5:00 a.m. to midnight on weekdays, with service every 15 minutes throughout the day and 30 minutes in afternoons and evenings. Saturday service is planned from 6:00 a.m. to midnight with buses running every 20 minutes during the day and 30 minutes in the afternoon and evening, and 60 minutes at night. Sunday service is planned from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. with buses running every 20 minutes during the day, 30 minutes in evening, and 60 minutes at night.

**Project Purpose:** The NWC BRT Project plans to bring a new COTA fixed route service to a growing corridor featuring some of Central Ohio's largest institutions, entertainment and sports facilities, and hosting millions of annual visitors. Currently, there is no existing COTA route mirroring the planned alignment. The existing project corridor population is approximately 34,800 with an additional 60,000 students living within or near the corridor. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission projects corridor population growth of 168% by 2050, leading to increased traffic congestion and the need for alternative transportation options. The NWC BRT aims to create an efficient, sustainable, and safe transportation alternative to single occupancy

vehicles that helps to mitigate worsening traffic congestion as the region grows and enhance regional mobility by connecting residents, employees, and businesses throughout the corridor.

***Project Development History, Status and Next Steps:*** COTA selected the NWC BRT Project as the locally preferred alternative in November 2022. It was included in the region's fiscally constrained long-range transportation plan in May 2024. The Project entered Small Starts Project Development in May 2024. COTA anticipates completing the environmental review process with receipt of a categorical exclusion in June 2027, receiving a Small Starts Grant Agreement in June 2028, and beginning revenue service in September 2031.

## Locally Proposed Financial Plan

| <u>Source of Funds</u>                                       | <u>Total Funds (\$million)</u> | <u>Percent of Total</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Federal:</b><br>Section 5309 CIG                          | \$149.49                       | 41.8%                   |
| <b>Local:</b><br>COTA Capital Improvement Plan Transit Match | \$207.72                       | 58.2%                   |
| <b>Total:</b>                                                | <b>\$357.21</b>                | <b>100.0%</b>           |

**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**

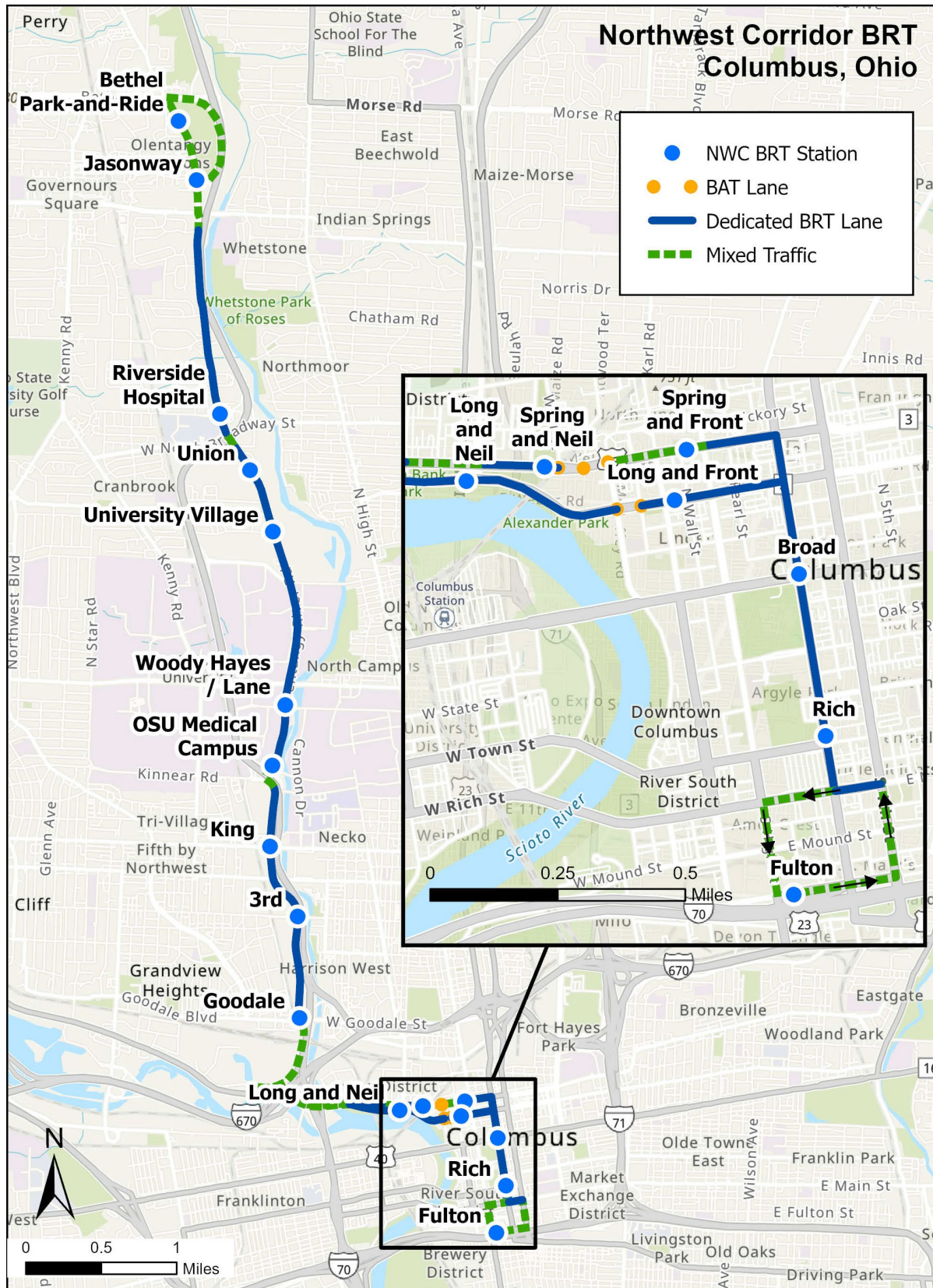
- The Northwest Corridor BRT benefits from extensive transit-supportive zoning and recent regulatory reforms that position the corridor for higher-density, mixed-use development. The Zone In Columbus initiative established new mixed-use districts that permit greater residential and commercial densities, reduced parking requirements, pedestrian-oriented design standards, and affordability-related height bonuses. Downtown Columbus, Ohio State University, Grandview Heights, and several corridor station areas are governed by zoning frameworks that support compact, walkable development patterns consistent with transit-oriented development principles.

##### **Performance and Impacts of Transit-Supportive Plans Policies: Medium-High**

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* Regional, city, multiple neighborhood, and campus plans consistently support compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented growth along the corridor. These plans identify significant opportunities for new housing and employment growth, establish transit-supportive development patterns, and align land use and transportation investments around the planned BRT corridor.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* The corridor benefits from extensive outreach efforts and a variety of implementation tools, including tax increment financing (TIF) districts, Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) tax abatements, infrastructure financing programs, and public-private development partnerships. However, the assessment found limited evidence demonstrating how these tools have been directly applied to support development within Northwest Corridor station areas.
- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* Recent development activity indicates that corridor policies are supporting redevelopment and growth, with thousands of residential units and substantial mixed-use, commercial, healthcare, and institutional development completed or proposed in station areas. Many projects exhibit characteristics associated with transit-oriented development, such as higher densities, mixed uses, and structured parking. There was limited evidence of consistently pedestrian-oriented design and transit-supportive site planning outside of downtown Columbus, however.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* The corridor demonstrates strong potential for additional growth due to favorable market conditions, significant redevelopment opportunities, supportive zoning, and extensive planning for future transit-oriented development. Transit-oriented development (TOD) analysis identified hundreds of acres of redevelopment opportunity and the potential for thousands of additional housing units and substantial commercial development within focus areas. Combined with ongoing investment through LinkUS and Ohio State University expansion initiatives, the BRT project is expected to reinforce and accelerate future corridor development.

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

- While the region has adopted several affordable housing strategies, funding programs, and policy tools, evidence of affordable housing production within corridor station areas remains limited. Columbus and Franklin County have established affordable housing bonds, financing programs, tax incentives, and housing preservation initiative, and the TOD planning process emphasizes housing affordability as a core objective. Nevertheless, relatively few examples were identified of affordable housing developments meeting FTA affordability thresholds, particularly for very low-income households. In addition, some local affordability programs focus on households earning above the income levels considered by FTA.



Ohio State University, FITS GIS, Ohio Rail Development Commission, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS, Esri Community Maps Contributors, Ohio Rail Development Commission, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, US Census