River Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Albany, New York Small Starts Project Development (Rating Assigned November 2016)

Summary Description		
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit	
	16.0 Miles, 31 Stations	
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$45.28 Million	
Section 5309 Small Starts Share (\$YOE):	\$29.52 Million (65.2%)	
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2019):	\$2.86 Million	
Existing Corridor Ridership (Warranted):	10,500 Daily Linked Trips	
Overall Project Rating:	Medium	
Project Justification Rating:	Medium	
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	Medium	

Project Description: The Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) proposes to implement bus rapid transit (BRT) along the Hudson River that will connect Waterford in the north to Downtown Albany in the south via Troy, Watervliet, and Menands. The project includes uniquely branded buses and stations, transit signal priority, replacement of 10 traffic signals, queue bypass lanes in three locations, real-time bus arrival information, and two park and ride facilities. CDTA anticipates purchasing 20 vehicles and expanding an existing maintenance and storage facility to accommodate the additional vehicles. The River Corridor will be the second bus rapid transit line added to CDTA's transit system, intersecting with the existing BusPlus Red Line BRT that connects the downtowns of Albany and Schenectady via New York State Route 5.

Project Purpose: The purpose of the River Corridor BRT project is to provide faster, more direct and more reliable north-south transit service connecting major activity centers and accommodate an increasing ridership along the River Corridor. The project will also improve existing pedestrian access at station locations by providing safer crossings for pedestrians and transit riders.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: CDTA selected a locally preferred alternative and had it added to the financially constrained long range plan in September 2014. The River Corridor BRT project entered Small Starts Project Development in July 2015. CDTA completed the environmental review process with a documented Categorical Exclusion in March 2016. CDTA expects to receive a Small Starts Grant Agreement in late 2017 and begin revenue service in spring 2019.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan			
Source of Funds	Total Funds (\$million)	Percent of Total	
Federal: Section 5309 Small Starts	\$29.52	65.2%	
FHWA National Highway Performance Program	\$3.72	8.2%	
FHWA Transportation Alternatives Program	\$1.60	3.6%	
FHWA Flexible Funds (Surface Transportation Program)	\$0.82	1.8%	
State: New York State Department of Transportation Cash Contribution	\$4.26	9.4%	
Empire State Development Corporation Grant	\$0.65	1.5%	
Local: CDTA General Funds	\$4.43	9.8%	
City of Albany Cash Contribution	\$0.14	0.3%	
City of Troy Cash Contribution	\$0.11	0.2%	
City of Cohoes Cash Contribution	\$0.02	0.0%	
Total:	\$45.27	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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Factor	Rating	Comments
Local Financial Commitment Rating	Medium	
Non-Section 5309 Small Starts Share	N/A	The Small Starts share of the project is 65.2 percent.
Project Financial Plan	Medium	
Current Capital and Operating Condition (25% of local financial commitment rating)	Medium-High	 The average age of Capital District Transportation Authority's (CDTA) bus fleet is 6.9 years, which is younger than the industry average. CDTA has not issued bonds in the last two years. CDTA's current ratio of assets to liabilities as reported in its most recent audited financial statement is 4.48 (FY2016). There have been no service cutbacks or cash flow shortfalls in recent years.
Commitment of Capital and Operating Funds (25% of local financial commitment rating)	Medium-High	 Approximately 72.3 percent of the non-Section 5309 Small Starts funds are committed or budgeted, and the rest is considered planned. Sources of funds include Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Transportation Alternatives Program funds, FHWA National Highway Performance Program funds, FHWA Surface Transportation Program flex funds, New York State Department of Transportation State transit capital funds, New York State Empire State Development funds, CDTA general funds, and general fund revenues from the cities of Albany, Troy, and Cohoes. All funds needed to operate and maintain the transit system in the first full year of operation are committed or budgeted. Sources of funds include Federal Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula funds, Statewide Mass Transportation Operating Assistance, State-mandated Local Assistance revenue, Mortgage Recording Tax revenue, and CDTA fare and other system-generated operating revenue.
Reasonableness of Capital and Operating Cost Estimates and Planning Assumptions/Capital Funding Capacity (50% of local financial commitment rating)	Low	 Due to an incomplete capital financial plan, assumptions regarding growth in capital revenues and state of good repair costs are very optimistic. The capital cost estimate is optimistic. Regarding growth in operating revenue assumptions, fare revenues are optimistic and other operating revenues are consistent with or conservative compared to recent historical experience. Operating cost estimates are reasonable compared to recent historical experience. CDTA's access to funds via additional debt capacity, cash reserves, or other committed funds to cover cost increases or funding shortfalls and system-wide operating expenses cannot be determined because the financial plan is incomplete.

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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 counties.

- Average population density across all station areas is 4,798, which corresponds to a Medium-Low
 rating according to FTA benchmarks. Total employment served is 62,663, corresponding to a Medium-Low rating. Parking costs in the Albany central business district (CBD) are \$11, corresponding to a
 Medium rating according to FTA benchmarks. The proportion of LBAR housing in the project corridor
 compared to the proportion in the counties through which the project travels is 3.60, which corresponds
 to a High rating.
- Existing development within the project corridor varies significantly. The southernmost station areas, located within the City of Albany, Village of Menands, and City of Watervliet, are mixed use with sections of commercial and residential land use. The northernmost station areas, within the City of Troy, City of Cohoes and Town of Waterford, are primarily residential town centers.
- The corridor generally has a grid structure, four lane roads, and a continuous sidewalk network with block lengths varying between 250 and 1000 feet. Buildings located along the project route are mostly oriented towards the street with minimal setbacks, except for portions of the Village of Menands.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium

- Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies: Four out of six municipalities within the project corridor, covering 28 of 31 stations, have recently adopted or are currently updating their comprehensive plans, which call for intensified development around proposed station areas. The City of Albany has prepared a series of detailed sub-area plans to guide urban redevelopment and identify sites for urban infill, and other localities have prepared plans for village centers and neighborhoods in the corridor. The Cities of Albany and Troy have also adopted complete streets ordinances and guidelines.
- Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations: Existing zoning in most CBD station areas supports moderate density and mixed use development, while zoning in other station areas support moderate to high densities. Three municipalities in the corridor Albany, Troy and Menands are currently updating their zoning codes.
- Tools to Implement Land Use Policies: The cities of Albany, Troy, and Cohoes as well as the counties
 of Albany, Rensselaer, and Saratoga have Industrial Development Agencies that provide tax incentives
 and abatements to local development projects. Additional financial incentives are proposed for the City
 of Albany in the 2015 Impact Downtown Playbook, which has identified underutilized properties where
 redevelopment should be promoted.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium

- Performance of Land Use Policies: There have been at least 24 transit-supportive significant land development projects identified in the project corridor totaling over \$100 million in value. These include commercial, residential and mixed use properties in varying states of permitting and construction.
- Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use: The City of Albany, City of Troy, and Village of Menands offer many redevelopment and urban infill opportunities as there are large sections of vacant or underutilized land near the stations. Regional projections anticipate moderate population and employment growth in station areas over the next 20 years.

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

• The City of Albany has proposed reducing minimum parking requirements for affordable housing developments as part of its rezoning effort. Public housing authorities and private developers are conducting some limited investments in new affordable housing units.

