

Montana RTS Corridor
El Paso, Texas
Small Starts Project Development
(Rating Assigned November 2015)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 16.8 Miles, 15 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$46.99 Million
Section 5309 Small Starts Share (\$YOE):	\$28.22 Million (60.1%)
Annual Forecast Year Operating Cost:	\$4.42 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2014):	4,400 Average Weekday Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium
Project Justification Rating:	Medium
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	Medium

Project Description: The City of El Paso is planning a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line operating in mixed traffic along a route that begins at the existing Five Points Transfer Center, travels through Downtown El Paso, serves the existing Eastside Transfer Center, the El Paso International Airport and ends at the proposed Far East Transfer Center. The project includes construction of BRT stations, traffic signal priority at 34 intersections, the purchase of 12 articulated buses, branded shelters, off-vehicle fare collection machines, and real-time arrival information at all stations. Service is planned to be operated six days a week, every 10 minutes during weekday peak periods, every 15 minutes during weekday off-peak periods, and every 20 minutes on Saturdays. No Sunday service is planned.

Project Purpose: The Montana Avenue Corridor is a mix of residential, institutional, commercial, and light industrial areas. The project corridor includes three major segments: Downtown El Paso via Montana Avenue to the Five Points Transfer Center; Five Points Transfer Center to the El Paso International Airport, including the East Fort Bliss campus of El Paso Community College; and the Far East Transfer Center. The city operates five bus routes in the corridor, although only two serve the entire corridor. Currently, due to limited fixed route service and minimal service frequencies, passengers seeking to transfer buses for trips to the Far East Transfer Center area experience delays of up to 70 minutes. The project would help to shorten travel times for these passengers. In addition, the project corridor has a high percentage of the population below the poverty level (22 percent), a low average median household income (less than \$38,100), and a high percentage of persons using public transit for work trips (2.2 percent). The BRT project would improve transit service for these individuals.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: In June 2009, the City of El Paso initiated an alternatives analysis to examine transit improvements in the Montana Avenue Corridor. In October 2010, the locally preferred alternative was selected and included in the region's financially-constrained long range transportation plan. The project entered Small Starts Project Development in April 2013. The City anticipates completing the environmental review process with receipt of a Documented Categorical Exclusion in 2017, receipt of a Small Starts Grant Agreement in 2018, and the start of revenue service in June 2020.

Significant Changes Since Last Evaluation (November 2014): The capital cost from \$45.52 million to \$46.99 million, mostly due to refinements in the design and adjustments to the project schedule. No significant changes to the project scope have occurred.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan

<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal: Section 5309 Small Starts	\$28.22	60.1%
FHWA Flexible Funds (Surface Transportation Program)	\$7.64	16.3%
State: TxDOT Comprehensive Mobility Program Matching Funds	\$1.59	3.4%
Local: City of El Paso Locally-Funded Debt	\$9.54	20.3%
Total:	\$46.99	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.

**TX, El Paso, Montana Rapid Transit System (RTS) Corridor
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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 60.1 percent.
Project Financial Plan	Medium	
Capital and Operating Condition (25% of plan rating)	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The average age of the Sun Metro’s bus fleet is 8.4 years, which is older than the industry average. • The City of El Paso’s most recent bond ratings, issued in 2014, are as follows: Fitch’s AA and Standard & Poor’s Corporation AA. • Sun Metro’s current ratio of assets to liabilities as reported in its most recent audited financial statement is 1.8 (FY 2014). • There have been no service cutbacks or cash flow shortfalls in recent years.
Commitment of Capital and Operating Funds (25% of plan rating)	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86 percent of the non-Section 5309 funds are committed or budgeted, and the rest is considered planned. Sources of funds include FHWA Surface Transportation Program funds, Texas Department of Transportation Comprehensive Mobility Program transportation funds and Certificates of Obligation bonds secured by the City of El Paso’s general fund and repaid by Sun Metro. • All funds needed to operate and maintain the transit system in the first full year of operation are committed. Sources of funds include FTA Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula funds, fare revenue, a one-half cent public transportation sales tax, City of El Paso general fund revenue, and local rentals and fees.
Capital and Operating Cost Estimates, Assumptions and Financial Capacity (50% of plan rating)	Medium-Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sun Metro’s project cost estimate is reasonable. • The operating assumptions appear reasonable based on the information provided by Sun Metro. • Assumed sales tax revenues are consistent with historical experience. • Assumed farebox collections are optimistic compared with historical experience. • Sun Metro’s financial capacity to cover cost increases or funding shortfalls could not be determined because the financial plan was incomplete.

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LAND USE RATING: Low

The land use rating reflects population and employment densities within ½-mile of proposed station areas, as well as the share of legally binding affordability restricted housing in the corridor compared to the share in the surrounding county(ies).

- Within the station areas, 32,500 employees are found within a ½-mile radius of the stations, which corresponds to a Low rating. Within the station areas, the population density is 3,700 persons per square mile, which corresponds to a Medium-Low rating.
- The proportion of legally binding affordability restricted housing in the project corridor compared to the proportion in the county through which the project travels is 1.07, which corresponds to a Low rating.
- Major trip generators include: the El Paso International Airport; El Paso Community College; shopping centers, such as the Cielo Vista Mall; governmental uses; and military installations, including Fort Bliss.
- Because the area is primarily auto-oriented, parking is generally available in front of commercial properties along Montana Avenue.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* The City of El Paso has established Plan El Paso, the city's comprehensive plan that contains strategies and policies for new compact, mixed-use development along the corridor that supports infill and redevelopment near transit routes. The plan includes conceptual site plans and identifies compact urban areas.
- *Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations:* The El Paso SmartCode includes a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) overlay, which allows for increased density along transit corridors and could be applied to station areas. Shared parking is encouraged and is granted through the City Administrator; no special use permit or variance is needed.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* Significant public outreach was conducted for Plan El Paso as a means to build public support and plan for mixed-use development. The Sustainable City Centers program is a tax and fee abatement program intended to promote growth and development within designated TOD areas; two projects along the corridor have utilized this program, which is available for private commercial or multi-family projects.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* The mixed-use zoning and financial incentives of the Monticello Station Area on the Mesa RTS Corridor (a complementary RTS route) resulted in a developer revising its development program into a mixed-use development with pedestrian amenities. The project is under construction. The City has approved four SmartCode Master Plans within the City's RTS corridors that contain infill development, open spaces, pedestrian amenities, and minimized parking lots.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* The eastern extent of the corridor has been the subject of significant suburban residential expansion over the last several years, which has led to considerable supporting commercial and retail development. A total of 557.6 acres of vacant land are available at eight station sites, primarily in the eastern portion of the corridor. Fort Bliss continues to expand, adding additional development opportunities.

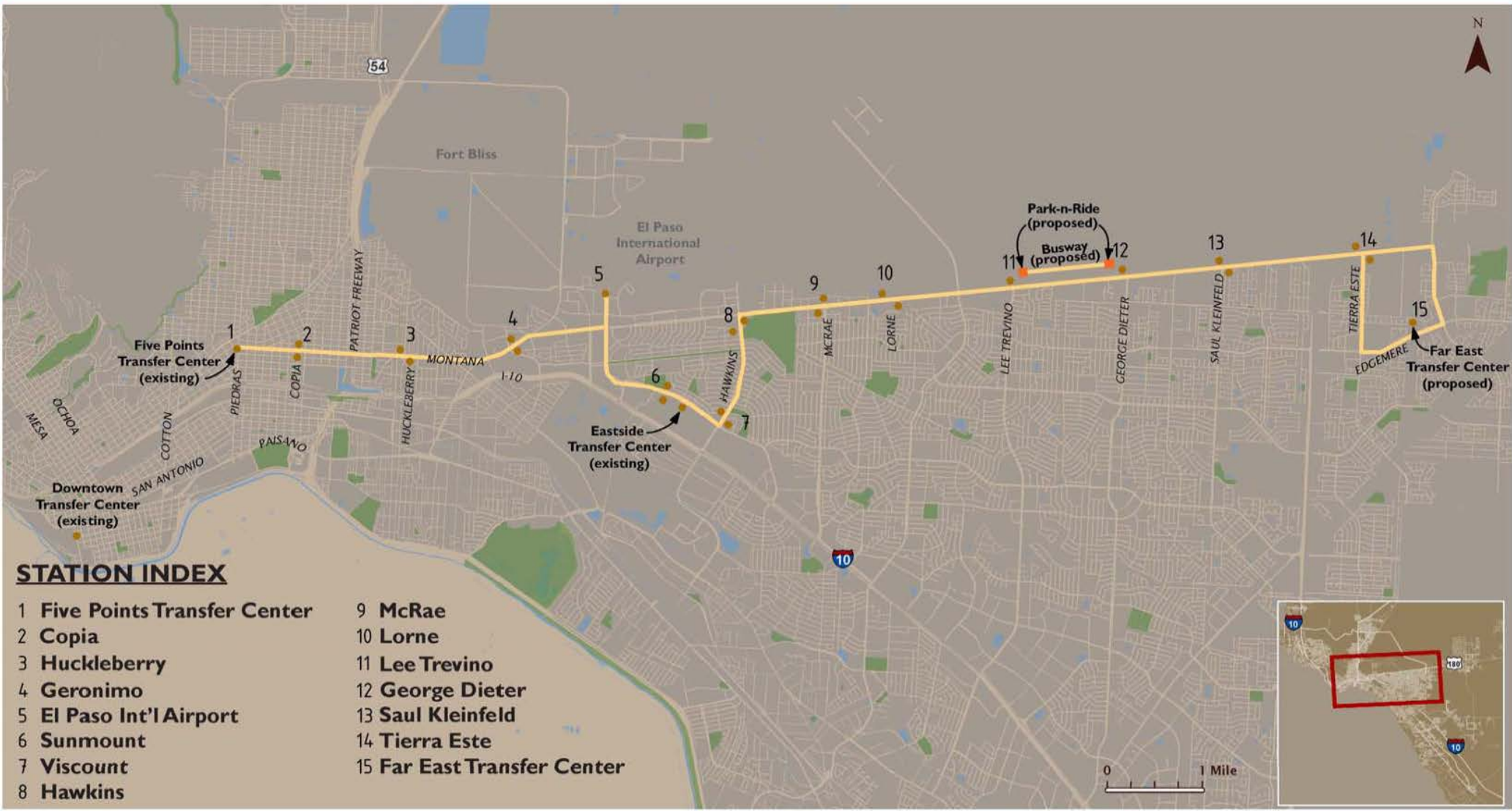
Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing: Medium-Low

- Beyond federal programs like HOME Investment Partnerships Program and Community Development Block Grants, the City of El Paso has not developed policy incentives to build affordable housing. However, financial assistance is provided through the Housing Finance Corporation, which the City Council created to help low- and moderate-income persons in purchasing affordable housing.

EL PASO TRANSIT CORRIDOR

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

MONTANA RTS CORRIDOR



STATION INDEX

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Five Points Transfer Center | 9 McRae |
| 2 Copia | 10 Lorne |
| 3 Huckleberry | 11 Lee Trevino |
| 4 Geronimo | 12 George Dieter |
| 5 El Paso Int'l Airport | 13 Saul Kleinfeld |
| 6 Sunmount | 14 Tierra Este |
| 7 Viscount | 15 Far East Transfer Center |
| 8 Hawkins | |