NEWS RELEASE

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MTA Board approves Bus Rapid Transit for East-West Connector

Project moves into year-long engineering, environmental phase

NASHVILLE – The Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) Board recently approved Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) running in exclusive lanes as the preferred alternative for the East-West Connector, the project formerly known as the Broadway-West End Corridor Study.

This action by the MTA Board on Thursday culminates a year-long study to evaluate high-capacity transit options for an eight-mile corridor beginning at Five Points in East Nashville and extending down Broadway, West End and Harding Road to White Bridge Road. The corridor study included analysis of several alternative transit options, including modern streetcar, light rail and BRT.

The multi-year project now enters its second phase where it will be further refined with more detailed cost and ridership analysis. This phase includes preliminary engineering and an environmental assessment that must be completed before the project can be eligible for potential federal funding.

“With this approval, we move into an important phase that will provide a clearer picture of more precise information about the costs and numbers of riders of BRT,” Nashville MTA Planning Director Jim McAteer said. “In addition, MTA will be provided with the data we need to assess the impact on traffic and make decisions such as where to locate stations.”

“This is a major step forward in the evolution of public transit in this city and the region,” MTA Board Chair Thomas F. “Freddie” O’Connell said. “This is a vital corridor not only for Nashville, but really for the entire region. It makes sense that as we begin to plan the future development of public transit in this city that we would begin with this corridor.”

The new BRT service would run in dedicated lanes not open to cars. During morning and afternoon rush hour, buses would arrive at the designated, permanent stations every 10 minutes. The rapid transit vehicles would only stop at these stations, which would offer real-time arrival and departure information. Preliminary ridership estimates show approximately 1.35 million passenger trips would be taken annually during the first year.

“If we are going to reduce traffic and help make our city more livable, we need to move forward by expanding our transit solutions,” Mayor Karl Dean said. “Bus Rapid Transit would be a good first step and makes a lot of sense for our city. A BRT system would cost about half as much as streetcars, and it would be easier to build and more likely to qualify for federal funding. Individuals who use the system will not only save money on gas and other travel costs, they will reach their destinations along the corridor faster than a car stuck in traffic.

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The East-West corridor is home to 170,000 employees, 25,000 residents and 11 million visitors. More than 17 percent of the households in the corridor do not have a car.

Without any transit improvements along the corridor, traffic is anticipated to increase nearly 50 percent by 2035, and travelers will be stuck in traffic approximately eight minutes longer than today. Already, the average person in the Nashville area loses about 35 hours and wastes 10 gallons of fuel per year sitting in traffic.

Results of the study concluded that light rail would be too costly and would not adequately meet the needs of the corridor. Both modern streetcar and BRT had a transportation profile that more appropriately fit the needs of the corridor and addressed the goals and objectives of the project.

In addition, streetcar and BRT were determined to yield similar results in terms of increased capacity, ridership, reliability, sustainable development, and both could be designed to support Nashville's "complete streets" policy. However, the preliminary price tag to construct the streetcar line is an estimated $275 million, compared to an estimated $136 million for BRT, and BRT would be faster to build and likely more competitive for federal funding.

The economic development benefits of a rapid transit system are substantial, and the areas surrounding a rapid transit route and its stations are likely to become desirable locations for companies and residents alike. The station areas become ideal for employers seeking an easy commute for their workers and prime real-estate for coffee shops, condominiums and other types of development that thrive on a regular influx of riders. Through the use of hybrid or other alternative-fuel vehicles, BRT can reduce emissions and help improve air quality.

The Broadway/West End Corridor Study was led by Parsons Brinckerhoff, an internationally-known consulting firm.

For more information about the study, visit http://broadwaywestendstudy.com.

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