

Mason Corridor BRT

Fort Collins, Colorado

(November 2009)

The City of Fort Collins, Colorado, is proposing a 5.0-mile bus rapid transit (BRT) system within its Mason Transportation Corridor (MTC) which extends from Maple Street in downtown Fort Collins to Harmony Road. The “Mason Express” or “MAX” right-of-way (ROW) is parallel to, and a few hundred feet west of, College Avenue (US 287), the city’s primary north-south arterial, and adjacent to Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railway tracks, which currently accommodate six to eight freight trains per day.

MAX BRT would operate at-grade in mixed traffic from the existing North Transit Center 1.2 miles to the northern edge of Colorado State University (CSU) and continue in a 3.8-mile exclusive ROW to the proposed South Transit Center. Service would operate at ten-minute peak frequencies. The project includes construction of the South Transit Center, traffic signal priority in general purpose lanes, a bus guideway facility, eight transit stations, four enhanced bus stops, modifications to the existing Downtown Transit Center, 250 park-and-ride spaces, unique MAX project branding, and five new low-floor vehicles.

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 5.0 Miles 8 Stations, 4 stops, 1 Transit Center and Station, modifications to Downtown Transit Center
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$81.97 Million
Section 5309 Small Starts Share (\$YOE):	\$65.58 Million (80.0%)
Annual Operating Cost (\$YOE):	\$1.62 Million
Opening Year Ridership Forecast (2010):	3,900 Average Weekday Boardings 400 Daily New Riders
FY 2011 Local Financial Commitment Rating:	Medium
FY 2011 Project Justification Rating:	Medium
FY 2011 Overall Project Rating:	Medium

Project Development History and Current Status

The BRT project is the result of a citizens’ initiative begun in 1996 that produced the Mason Street Transportation Corridor Master Plan in January 1999. BRT was selected as the locally preferred alternative in October 2000. The MTC BRT project was approved into preliminary engineering in 2001, but dropped out in 2005 when a series of local ballot initiatives failed. With the infusion of capital from the Colorado Department of Transportation in 2007, the City of Fort Collins sought to advance the project as a Small Start. FTA approved the project into project development in December 2007. An Environmental Assessment for the project was initiated in August 2002, which resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) issued in 2008. A PCGA is anticipated by fall 2010.

Significant Changes Since FY 2010 Evaluation (November 2008)

No significant changes have occurred since last year’s Small Starts project evaluation.

Project Justification Rating: Medium

The project justification rating is based on the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the following criteria: the cost-effectiveness criterion is weighted 33 percent; the transit supportive land use criterion is weighted 33 percent and the economic development criterion is weighted 33 percent.

Cost Effectiveness Rating: Medium

The rating is based upon the level of travel time benefits (600 average weekday hours) relative to the project’s capital and operating costs based upon a comparison to a baseline alternative.

Cost Effectiveness	
	<u>New Start vs. Baseline</u>
Cost per Hour of Transportation System User Benefit	\$23.26*
Incremental Cost per Incremental Trip	\$31.90

* Indicates that measure is a component of Project Justification rating.

Transit-Supportive Land Use Rating: Medium-Low

The land use rating reflects the population and employment densities within ½-mile of proposed station areas.

Existing Land Use: Medium-Low

- Population density within the corridor is approximately 3,100 persons per square mile and employment density within the corridor is approximately 4,800 employees per square mile, both of which reflect poor transit-supportive conditions. Only 25,000 jobs are located within ½ mile of proposed station areas.
- There are provisions for the disabled, such as ramps and curb cuts, throughout the corridor. The city identified missing sidewalks, arterial crossing conflicts and other pedestrian conflicts as part of the update to the Transportation Master Plan completed in 2004, and is working to obtain local, State and Federal grants to complete the projects.

Economic Development Rating: Medium-High

The economic development rating is based upon the average of the ratings assigned to the subfactors below.

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium-High

- The Plan for the Area Between Loveland and Fort Collins, a policy document adopted by the City of Fort Collins, the City of Loveland and Larimer County, calls for a community separator area between the two cities that would be kept rural rather than absorb urban development. The city has agreements with Larimer County that have extended the growth area boundaries beyond the city limits and into the county to govern the development occurring there. Other nearby municipalities are also cooperating with the City of Fort Collins.
- Policies in the City Plan stipulate that higher intensities of development will be located in major transit station areas, such as those in the MTC. The land use code has specific requirements regarding residential, commercial, mixed-use and institutional land use intended to promote transit- and pedestrian-friendly design. The City of Fort Collins has adopted parking-related requirements for both autos and bicycles throughout the city. Maximum parking space

requirements have been established for all non-residential land uses, but there are no minimum parking space requirements.

- The zoning code is structured to create communities, not just to manage individual development projects. Station areas comprise one type of community to which appropriate parts of the code are being applied. One ongoing effort of local land use planning is an analysis of current zoning and land use regulations at station areas to determine if any changes are needed to make the areas more conducive to transit-oriented development.
- Members of the development community, the Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, the Fort Collins Economic Development Corporation, and the Visitors Bureau, as well as individual property and business owners, have been involved in creating the city's and MTC's plans from their inception.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium

- Under the transit-supportive City Plan and implementation-related zoning ordinances, several major city and county buildings have been constructed to create the Downtown Civic Center. Forthcoming projects include a mixed office, retail, and residential medium-high density development on a vacant parcel adjacent to the north end of the MTC. The South Transit Center agreement has been completed and the city now owns the property.
- In 2004, an examination of infrastructure needs provided an assessment of all the properties along the corridor with regard to their potential for redevelopment. The result showed a significant number of properties that had good redevelopment potential under the existing zoning. Even more redevelopment would be expected with future transit-supportive zoning changes.

Local Financial Commitment Rating: Medium

The local financial commitment rating is based on the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the following criteria: the New Starts share of project costs is weighted 20 percent; the strength of the capital finance plan is weighted 50 percent; and the strength of the operating finance plan is weighted 30 percent.

Section 5309 Small Starts Share of Total Project Costs: 80.0%

Rating: Low

Locally Proposed Financial Plan		
<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funding (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal: Section 5309 Small Starts	\$65.58	80.0%
State: Senate Bill 1 State Funding	\$8.56	10.4%
Local: General Fund	\$6.04	7.4%
Existing Land Purchase for South Transit Center	\$1.20	1.5%
Private: Downtown Development Authority	\$0.60	1.0%
Total:	\$81.97	100.0%

NOTE: Funding statements reflected in this table have been made by project sponsors and are not DOT or FTA assumptions. The sum of the figures may differ from the total as listed due to rounding.

Capital Finance Plan Rating: Medium-High

The capital finance plan rating is based upon the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the subfactors listed below. The agency capital condition is weighted 25 percent, the commitment of capital funds is weighted 25 percent, and the capital cost estimate, planning assumptions and capital funding capacity subfactor is weighted 50 percent.

Agency Capital Condition: Medium

- The average age of Transfort's bus fleet is 10.6 years in age, which is older than the industry average.
- The City of Fort Collins' good bond ratings, which were issued in 2007, are as follows: Moody's Investor Service Aa2 and Fitch AA.

Commitment of Capital Funds: High

- All non-Small Starts funding is committed. Sources of funding include state Senate Bill 1 funding, local general funds, state funds, a land contribution from the City, and funding from the Downtown Development Authority.

Capital Cost Estimate and Planning Assumptions: Medium

- City General Fund assumptions in the capital plan are in line with historical experience. Other capital revenue sources are assumed to be one time grants.
- The capital cost estimate is considered reasonable for this phase of project development.

Operating Finance Plan Rating: Medium

The operating finance plan rating is based upon the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the subfactors listed below. The agency operating condition is weighted 25 percent, the commitment of operating funds is weighted 25 percent, and the operating cost estimates, planning assumptions and operating funding capacity subfactor is weighted 50 percent.

Agency Operating Condition: Medium

- The City transit system's current ratio of assets to liabilities is greater than 2.0.

Commitment of Operating Funds: High

- All operating funding is committed. Funding sources include fare revenues, City General Fund revenues, Section 5307 formula funds, and advertising revenues.

Operating Cost Estimates, Planning Assumptions, and Financial Capacity: Medium-Low

- Assumptions about growth in operating and maintenance costs are optimistic compared to historical experience. Operating revenue assumptions are reasonable compared to historical trends.

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