

**-Meeting Summary-
North Nevada Transit Connectivity Study
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting #2
November 7, 2019**

Attendees

Technical Advisory Committee Members:

Ryan Phipps, City Engineering
Jay Anderson, City Communications
Page Saulsbury, City Comprehensive Planning
Tim Roberts, City Traffic Engineering
Jariah Walker, Urban Renewal Authority
Daniel Sexton, City Planning & Development

Steve Bodette, City Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Erin Powers, City Water Resources
Kate Brady, City Traffic Engineering – Bicycle Planning

Project Team:

Brian Vitulli, Mountain Metro Transit Project Manager
Rick Nau, Kimley-Horn Project Manager

Kyle McLaughlin, Kimley-Horn
Chris Joannes, Kimley-Horn
Hannah Rimar, GBSM

Key Takeaways and Action Items

- The four corridors that will be advanced to the next level of analysis are Cascade Avenue, Nevada Avenue, Weber Street, and Wahsatch Avenue.
- The project goals scoring matrix will be revised to be more specific to limit confusion about scoring and priorities.
- Define if the overall goal of this project is to be the backbone of future high-capacity regional transit, or if this is an economic development tool for the existing study area.

Meeting Notes

1. Introduction

- Project Overview and Schedule
 - The project is on-schedule – the study team is currently evaluating modes of travel and north-south alignments between Downtown Colorado Springs and the North Nevada Study Area through the end of 2019.
 - The project is expected to be completed in July of 2020.
- Development of the Preferred Transit Alternative
 - The ultimate goal of the North Nevada Transit Connectivity Study is to identify a preferred transit alternative, which includes a preferred transit mode, route alignment, station sites, operations characteristics, and an implementation plan.

- Many factors influence the preferred alternative, including capital and operations costs, ridership, engineering feasibility, federal requirements, environmental constraints, and public/stakeholder engagement.
- TAC Meeting #2 Purpose
 - The purpose of this meeting is to review the project progress to date and to discuss the initial consultant recommendations for transit modes and alignment alternatives to carry forward for further study.

2. Public/Stakeholder Involvement Schedule and Initial Feedback

- There are three phases of public and stakeholder engagement within the process:
 - Phase I: Kick-off Purpose, Needs/Goals, and Modal Refinement
 - TAC/CAC Kick-off Meetings, focus groups, Community Office Hours held in late summer/early fall, 2019.
 - Office hours went well with larger than anticipated turnout and participation. The project team heard from several community organizations during the first event and many residents from the Old North End Neighborhood at the second event. The team heard a wide variety of opinions regarding the potential alignments and transit modes.
 - Phase II: Alternative Development and Evaluation Screening Process
 - TAC/CAC meetings in November 2019, Public Meeting in January 2020, Community Office Hours in February/March 2020.
 - Phase III: Final Recommendations and Fatal Flaws
 - TAC/CAC meetings, Community Event, Public Meeting in mid-2020.
- Engagement-to-Date Key Themes
 - Focus Groups:
 - Expansion of project area
 - Regional connectivity
 - Transit as a parking solution
 - Dedicated transit lanes
 - Making transit attractive to riders
 - First/last mile connectivity
 - Travel time considerations
 - Public engagement and project updates
 - Office Hours:
 - More frequent/efficient service desired
 - Environmental considerations
 - Dedicated transit lanes
 - Quality of life issues (i.e., historic character, noise, etc.)
 - Optics of “empty” local buses
 - Proximity to desirable destinations
 - Reliability of schedules
 - Safety
 - TAC Discussion:
 - FAQs have been developed to address many of the comments and questions heard repeatedly in the first phase of the engagement process, which have been posted to the project website.

- There are some suggested edits to the FAQs related to historic districts that will be provided to the project team regarding approval processes of infrastructure improvements.
- The intent of the Historic District FAQs is to show that this project is not intended to impact the Historic Districts protections and that the project team is not intending on substantially impacting the medians on north-south streets.

3. Sketch Ridership Forecasting

- The project team developed sketch ridership forecasting using a number of methodologies to determine what the logical growth in transit demand will be and potential boosts in ridership demand in response to a premium transit option being implemented within the study area.
- The sketch ridership forecast is that daily ridership on a premium transit service would be in the range of 3,000 to 5,000 riders per day. The current ridership on MMT Routes 9 and 19 through the study area is 899 riders per day.
- The daily ridership most aligns with Enhanced Bus, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Light, or Streetcar service.
- The initial consultant recommendation is to continue studying BRT Light and Streetcar service and to drop Enhanced Bus because of its limited impact on economic development.
- TAC Discussion:
 - How would increased jobs in the study area impact transit ridership – it is likely that future employees would not live in the study area as well.
 - It is anticipated that future development would be more transit-oriented and that there would be provisions for longer-distance commuters, such as park-and-ride facilities, to capture at least part of riders' commutes on transit. Future limitations in parking in Downtown Colorado Springs would also push more commuters onto transit services.
 - The forecasted ridership is a relatively modest percentage of future trips and represents a conservative ridership estimate.
 - Which transit modes can be best adopted to future regional transit growth?
 - Streetcar generally has more frequent stops and slower service, BRT has more potential for expansion.
 - The overall goal for the project needs to be determined – regional transit service vs. targeted economic development within the study area.
 - Can you transition from streetcar to Light Rail Transit (LRT) in the future?
 - Past experience of the project team is that starting a system with one mode and then transitioning is very difficult because of major disruptions to service to reconstruct the system
 - It is technically possible to upgrade from streetcar to LRT service because the tracks are identical, but there are several factors that make it difficult:
 - If there is a portion of streetcar service without overhead wires, LRT cannot currently run on battery.
 - Stations would need to be lengthened to accommodate longer trains.
 - LRT typically has longer station spacing, and some streetcar stops may need to be removed.
 - Is streetcar service usually on a single track or double track?
 - Some systems have been built on a single track, but most of those systems have gone back and added a second track because of capacity constraints of single tracks.

- A longer corridor (Woodmen Road to Lake Avenue for example) would be more useful for regional transit trips. We need to make sure we're not being short-sighted with the transit mode to ensure a larger system can be built out in the future.
- What can be done to increase future capacity on streetcar and BRT systems?
 - Streetcars cannot be combined to form a train and BRT can be run with articulated buses, but that is a modest capacity increase. Both types of service would require more frequent headways to increase capacity.

4. Environmental Resources

- At these preliminary stages, the project team is focused on “red flag” resources that could cause issues in the federal funding process in later stages.
- There are substantial historic resources within the study area, which does not preclude or prohibit transit, but improvements would require review by the Historic Preservation Board and State Historic Preservation Office.
- There are a number of trail crossings in the study area and a potential major 4(f) impact with the Shooks Run Trail along Weber Street south of the Rock Island Railroad alignment.
- There are areas of high concentrations of minority populations, low income populations, linguistically isolated households, and zero-vehicle households within the study area, but it is not anticipated that an undue burden would be placed on these areas.
- TAC Discussion:
 - The City is actively working to complete the Legacy Loop Trail, which would utilize the Shooks Run Trail along Weber Street. The City is open to allowing transit infrastructure along this alignment provided that there is still continuous trail connectivity.
 - Does the potential 4(f) impact with Shooks Run occur with either mode of transit (BRT and streetcar)?
 - The right-of-way for Weber Street narrows to approximately 15' at the northern end, so any mode of transit would impact the Shooks Run parcel if it were to be on the Weber Street alignment.
 - The trail running parallel to the Van Buren Channel and the Rock Island Railroad needs to be at least 25' from the railroad itself, which will need to be factored into future trail design if it is impacted by the transit project.
 - Are there any restrictions on constructing a transit overpass over the Rock Island Railroad and Van Buren Channel if the right-of-way for the parallel trail was purchased with TOPS money?
 - The City is sure that a vehicular overpass would be prohibited, but not sure about a transit/trail overpass.

5. Alignment Alternatives

- The project team went through each of the proposed alignment alternatives (I-25, Cascade Avenue, Tejon Street, Nevada Avenue, Weber Street, and Wahsatch Avenue) and documented physical constraints to implementing dedicated transit facilities along each corridor and potential right-of-way issues.
- TAC discussion regarding the physical constraints exercise included:
 - What qualifies as dedicated lanes?

- For BRT light and streetcar, they would likely be lanes that would be reserved for transit only, separated by striping and not physical barriers. It is possible to provide access to parallel parking or right turns in these lanes as well.
- Would the Rock Island Railroad need to be decommissioned for the I-25 alignment?
 - Most likely yes, it would be difficult and expensive to be able to fit both the railroad and a transitway within the right-of-way.
- How would shared bus/bike lanes work on the Cascade alignment? Are there examples the project team can provide for where this treatment has been implemented?
 - When buses encounter a bicycle in the lane they can either merge into the general traffic lane to pass the cyclist, or if the cyclist is able to ride in the parking lane it would allow the bus to pass without merging into general traffic. An example of shared bus/bike lanes is on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, but the project team can provide the TAC with additional examples after the meeting.
- On Cascade Avenue north of the Rock Island Railroad, there is not enough space for a separate transit lane. The City is currently planning to move the curbs out enough to accommodate a five-foot bicycle lane in this section of the roadway.
 - Correct, the roadway would require reconstruction to accommodate dedicated transit lanes.
- The City is planning to perform a study on Nevada Avenue in the Old North End to evaluate removing a through traffic lane. With a lane currently closed for construction, the City is performing traffic counts to evaluate the impacts.
 - The City has received a traffic study from the Old North End Neighborhood stating that a lane reduction is possible. However, when public engagement occurred there was major pushback from the public about a road diet on Nevada Avenue.
- When a travel lane was removed on Cascade Avenue for the buffered bicycle lanes through the Old North End, there were not a lot of trips diverted onto Nevada Avenue.
- The City will be installing bicycle lanes on Weber Street during the Summer of 2020.
- The project team updated the TAC on the final project goals, which were finalized based on input at the previous TAC meeting.
- The project goals were broken down into discrete elements that could be scored in a rubric to evaluate how well each alignment addresses the project goals. The TAC members were then asked to score a sample of the alignments as a calibration exercise to determine if the project team scores similarly to the TAC members.
- TAC Discussion on the project goals rubric and alternative scoring:
 - A clarification that should be made is that the scoring is primarily for the area between Downtown and the Rock Island Railroad because the alignment is shared for all alternatives through the North Nevada primary study area.
 - Clarify where economic development is targeted for the scoring – Downtown? Near North End? Old North End Neighborhood? North Nevada Primary Study Area? There are different sizes of development possible in each of these areas. The study team should be more specific about the context of redevelopment in each area to not unintentionally convey that high-density developments will be coming to historic neighborhoods.
 - Once an alignment is selected, the project team will be doing more specific quantifications of redevelopment parcels. However, this study is not intended to influence any zoning or redevelopment decisions other than what is in the Renew North Nevada Master Plan.

- Where is the terminus in Downtown proposed to be?
 - There are ongoing discussions about where the service would terminate and more specific information on Downtown routing will be determined when a final Downtown Transit Center location is determined.
- The physical constraints and project goals do not take into account the political impact of adding transit to Nevada or Cascade Avenues, which will impact project implementation.
 - These analyses are purely technical and an effort to make the process as objective as possible. The next public engagement phase, which will present these alignments, will be the point where public and political sentiment will factor into decision-making.
- The initial Consultant Recommendation is to advance the Cascade, Nevada, and Weber alignments to the next phase of study because of their high alignment with the project goals and relatively minimal physical constraints.
- TAC comments on corridors to advance:
 - Wahsatch should be carried forward as another alignment to be studied in more detail – it provides a less politically-sensitive corridor and has minimal physical constraints along the majority of the corridor.
 - The project team will seek concurrence from the Citizen Advisory Committee on advancing Wahsatch. If that is obtained, the team will continue to study the corridor.
 - The role of the consultant is to provide the most acceptable technical solutions, it is up to the City and City project manager to make the final decisions. None of these corridors will ever get consensus.
 - The project team aims to find the most implementable project, both from a technical and public sentiment point of view.
 - Members of the TAC would like to see how this study fits in with the larger, regional transit planning in the region. That should be further defined by the time this is presented again.

6. Next Steps

- The project team will continue to refine the selected alternatives, including:
 - Street cross-sections
 - Design options for constrained areas
 - Station locations
 - Operations
 - Environmental constraints
 - Capital and operating costs
- There will be a public open house in mid- to late-January.
- The next TAC meeting will be sometime in March or April 2020.