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# Bus rapid transit awaits funding

## Fed's answer to CTA's second bid for \$150 million is expected soon

Officials at the Chicago Transit Authority are hopeful that the Federal Transit Administration believes in second chances.

After winning, then losing, federal funding a couple of years ago, the CTA is again competing for a \$150 million grant to introduce rapid-transit-style bus service in Chicago.

The system would begin operating on 50 miles of arterial streets and eventually expand city-wide to connect with dozens of other bus routes as well as CTA and Metra rail lines.



**Jon Hilkevitch**  
Getting Around

transform Chicago's transit grid and spark a long-term surge of new riders who enjoy the advantages of being whisked ahead of traffic on bus-only lanes.

In addition to the potential congestion-relief benefits in the nation's second most traffic-clogged city, air quality would be improved by luring many drivers out of their cars and onto buses, officials said. It all can be accomplished at a fraction of the cost of building new rail lines, and in much less time, they added.

The CTA applied for funding over the winter and the Federal Transit Administration plans to award money this spring to at least one bus rapid transit project that is ready to get under way soon, FTA officials said last week.

CTA officials have set a launch date of early 2012, assuming their application for \$150 million is approved.

The first four corridors of a planned 20-corridor bus rapid transit network are on 79th Street from Ford City to South Shore Drive; Chicago Avenue from Austin Boulevard to Navy Pier; Halsted Street from Waveland Avenue/Broadway to 79th Street; and Jeffery Boulevard from 103rd Street/Stony Island to Jefferson/Washington Streets.

The CTA effort comes after a first attempt that was successful in winning a \$153 million federal grant in 2008 from the Bush ad-



Halsted Street is one of four corridors that could get a rapid-transit bus lane if the CTA's bid for federal funds wins approval. Buses along the routes would move almost 50 percent faster and make limited stops in bus-only lanes. ABEL URIBE/TRIBUNE PHOTO

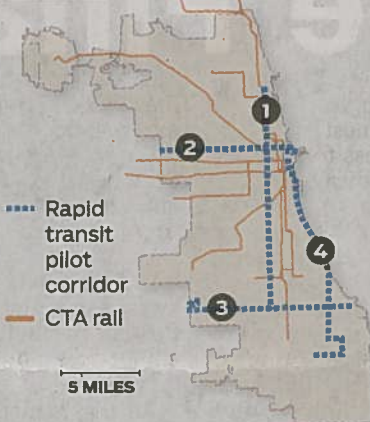
## Four corridors chosen to launch CTA's rapid transit service

The Chicago Transit Authority's rapid-transit bus service is set to start in 2012 with four corridors and offers unique features from regular CTA bus service. The CTA hopes a \$150 million federal grant will help pay the \$193.4 million bill for the service. The additional \$43.4 million would be paid with state and local money.

### FOUR RAPID TRANSIT PILOT CORRIDORS

- 1 Halsted Street**  
Waveland and Broadway to 79th  
Cost: \$20.6 million
- 2 Chicago Avenue**  
Austin to Navy Pier  
Cost: \$16.7 million
- 3 79th Street**  
Ford City to South Shore Drive  
Cost: \$27.4 million
- 4 Jeffery Boulevard**  
103rd and Stony Island to Jefferson and Washington  
Cost: \$10.9 million

SOURCE: Chicago Transit Authority



ministration. But the grant for the pilot project was rescinded when City Hall missed a deadline to raise downtown parking meter rates as part of a "congestion-pricing" strategy to discourage driving into the crowded central business district during peak hours.

Meter rates eventually soared, without the benefit of offering bus rapid transit as an alternative, under a still-controversial deal in which the Daley administration privatized street parking.

The new grant program does not include a congestion-pricing requirement. But it does mandate that applicants meet "livability principles" that include showing

how the new service would impact areas of the city that are underserved by transit; major employment centers and high-density residential areas; as well as helping to reduce pollution.

This time around, a total of \$193.4 million, including \$43.6 million in state and local matches, is needed to acquire 131 accordion-style buses; establish dedicated bus-only lanes during rush periods; install traffic signals that give buses priority to proceed through intersections ahead of other vehicles; and construct special bus stations where passengers will prepay their fares, as they do on the CTA rail system.

"If funding is secured for bus

### RAPID TRANSIT FEATURES

- Bus-priority traffic control and dedicated lanes
- Buses stop every half to one mile depending on location.
- Customers pay fares off the vehicle and can board through rear door.
- Fleet of 131 hybrid buses costs \$117.9 million.
- Rapid transit branding on all shelters and real-time travel information through CTA Bus Tracker.

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fares at bus rapid-transit kiosks at the stations.

Travel times would be slashed compared to normal bus routes. The 50.4-mile startup network would include 17.1 miles of dedicated lanes that would be open exclusively to buses during rush hours, then revert back to use by all vehicles in off-peak hours.

"Dedicated lanes for bus service during rush periods would help to move people faster through the system when it is most critical — mornings and evenings, when the largest number of people are headed either to or from work," Rodriguez said.

While federal officials have not tipped their hand about the CTA's chances of recapturing the lost grant, local urban planning officials are optimistic, saying the transit agency submitted a competitive bid.

"I think the CTA has a pretty good chance of receiving federal funding because bus rapid transit makes a lot of sense for the city and suburban areas," said Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

"People want to get from place to place as efficiently and conveniently as possible," he said, "and bus rapid transit fits the bill at a much lower cost than building fixed rail systems."

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