



MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation Committee

From: CMAP Staff

Date: January 10, 2014

Re: GO TO 2040 Update - addition of specific BRT language to the Plan

At the time that GO TO 2040 was created, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) was a relatively new transit mode for the US and region. Since the publication of the plan, PACE and CTA have accelerated several projects with BRT elements. Additionally, federal guidance on inclusion of BRT projects in the region's transportation plan may be evolving. To highlight the importance of the region's BRT projects and enable their eligibility for certain federal funding sources, it is necessary to include more specific language on the region's potential BRT projects in the plan. Therefore, staff proposes the following clarification of BRT as part of the GO TO 2040 Plan Update.

Bus Rapid Transit Improvements

Today, the region faces significant mobility challenges as evidenced by increasing congestion, increasing financial pressures, and deferred maintenance of critical transportation infrastructure. Bus-based solutions like Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) are one option to provide transit in this resource-constrained environment. BRT has garnered growing recognition as a flexible, cost-effective solution for addressing transit needs and providing a commute alternative in congested areas.

BRT is an evolving transportation mode. The Federal Transit Administration defines the concept broadly, stating that it is an enhanced bus system that operates in bus lanes or transitways to provide both flexibility and enhanced speed. Under federal definitions, BRT systems may incorporate various features to speed bus travel, including dedicated bus lanes, busways, off-board fare collection, signal priority, better customer information systems, and enhanced or unique bus stops and vehicles.¹ Internationally, efforts are underway to define basic parameters for any BRT system, which include a separate busway alignment, dedicated right-of-way, offboard fare collection, bus priority at intersections, and platform-level boarding.²

¹ See the FTA's BRT information site for more information at http://www.fta.dot.gov/12351_4240.html.

² See the Institute for Transportation & Development Policy's BRT Standard 2013 website at <http://www.itdp.org/microsites/the-brt-standard-2013/> This standard generally requires a higher level of investment than is currently being considered for the region's BRT projects. The standard is revised biannually, and recently included adjustments to provide more options for lower-demand BRT corridors.

Given this changing framework, definitions and costs for BRT systems are not yet fully outlined. However, service boards and partners in the region are currently evaluating BRT and enhanced bus services. Through their own planning and evaluation activities, CTA and PACE have identified several projects for further planning and implementation in the near term.

CTA, in partnership with CDOT, has already provided enhanced bus service on its J14 Jeffrey Jump route, which has BRT features such as fewer stops, a bus queue jump, real-time arrival signs, unique vehicles, and bus-only lanes for some sections. CTA is also evaluating development of BRT on Ashland Avenue as well as in the Central Loop.

PACE has established and expanded its bus-on-shoulder pilot program on I-55, which has significant BRT elements. PACE also has an Arterial Rapid Transit (ART) program, which includes transit signal priority and other intelligent bus system components. PACE's Priority ART routes include Milwaukee Avenue (Jefferson Park CTA Station to Golf Mill Mall); Dempster Street (Davis Street Station to the O'Hare Kiss-n-Fly); Cermak Street (Forest Park CTA Station to Yorktown); Harlem Avenue (Milwaukee Ave to 95th Street); Halsted Street (CTA 95th Street Station to 159th Street); 95th Street (95th Street CTA Station to Harlem Ave); and the J-route (From Oak Brook to O'Hare and Schaumburg).

The RTA and transit service boards should continue to analyze and implement BRT projects in the region. Since most BRT projects being assessed in the region, including those identified above do not include expanding existing right of way or adding new lanes to existing expressway facilities, they are classified as Strategic Enhancements and Modernization within the Plan rather than major capital projects. Funding for planning and implementation of these projects falls within this category of the financial plan rather than the Major Capital Projects category. Furthermore, several major capital projects have the potential to include BRT service, and this highlighted within individual project descriptions.

It is important to understand that, as they are not defined as major capital projects, BRT projects, such as those identified in this memo, can continue in all aspects of planning and implementation. Staff will continue to work, in coordination with our partners, to better understand all of the costs and benefits associated with enhanced bus service projects. As that work continues, a process for the robust, regional evaluation of strategic enhancements to the region's arterials, including enhanced bus facilities will be developed. Staff anticipate that such an evaluation can be undertaken for the next metropolitan long range transportation plan.

As with any transit investment recommended within GO TO 2040, service planning should be part of an integrated process that combines planning for housing, land use and transportation. Bus service has traditionally been considered to be outside of the traditional definition of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). However, BRT can provide the higher levels of transit service and frequency that can support TOD. In order for bus-oriented development to be successful, TOD planning must take place in tandem with service planning.³ Additionally, siting of stations should be considered carefully so that, in areas where bus TOD may be desired, access by pedestrians and adjacent development is prioritized. Finally, local

³ CMAP has completed an analysis of Land use Policies and Strategies for Expressway-Based Bus Rapid Transit. For more information see <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/mobility/transit/brt>

governments should plan for mixed income transit oriented development, ensuring that housing near transit includes affordable housing provisions and that affordability is maintained in the long-term.

REQUESTED ACTION: Discussion