

DOWNTOWN – UPTOWN – OAKLAND – EAST END BUS RAPID TRANSIT CORRIDOR

Scoping Booklet for National Environmental Policy Act Review

City of Pittsburgh
Port Authority of Allegheny County

Uptown/Downtown Scoping Meeting

Tuesday, May 5, 2015
Noon – 2:00 pm
Duquesne University
Power Center Ballroom
1015 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA

Oakland Scoping Meeting

Wednesday, May 6, 2015
6:00 – 8:00 pm
University of Pittsburgh
William Pitt Student Union, Kurtzman Room
3959 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STUDY OVERVIEW.....	1
WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING CONDUCTED?.....	1
WHAT WILL BE COVERED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW?.....	2
WHAT IS A LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE?.....	2
WHY IS THIS PROJECT BEING PROPOSED?.....	3
WHAT IS BUS RAPID TRANSIT?.....	3
WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO DATE.....	4
WHAT ALTERNATIVES ARE BEING STUDIED?.....	4
HOW WILL MY COMMENTS BE USED? WILL THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?.....	6
HOW CAN I SUBMIT COMMENTS?.....	6
CAN I STILL BE INVOLVED AFTER SCOPING IS COMPLETED?.....	6
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?.....	7

Acronyms

BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
CE	Categorical Exclusion
EA	Environmental Assessment
FONSI	Finding Of No Significant Impact
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
LPA	Locally Preferred Alternative
MAP-21	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PE	Preliminary Engineering
PennDOT	Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
SPC	Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
URA	Urban Redevelopment Authority

STUDY OVERVIEW

The City of Pittsburgh, Port Authority, and the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, along with Allegheny County Economic Development, in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), are conducting an environmental and engineering study for a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in the area extending from Downtown Pittsburgh to Uptown, Oakland and other East End neighborhoods in Pittsburgh. Incorporation of bicycle and pedestrian facility improvements into the project is also proposed. The map below illustrates the study area.

Project Study Area



WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING CONDUCTED?

This BRT project is being evaluated by a process set forth by the FTA in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as well as provisions of the enacted Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). Compliance with NEPA and MAP-21's implementing regulations is necessary for a project to be eligible for federal capital funding. The NEPA environmental review process allows for careful consideration of the design, costs, and benefits of transportation alternatives and will document probable effects and identify potential impacts to social, economic and environmental factors associated with the proposed alternatives. Engineering work will define physical and operational aspects of the proposed project in sufficient detail to assess environmental effects.

Scoping is a first step in the NEPA process. The scoping period is an opportunity for the public to review and provide input on the project purpose and need as well as on the impacts on the social/economic environment, the physical environment and the transportation system to be evaluated by the project team.

This environmental study will be performed either as an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Categorical Exclusion (CE). If potential significant impacts are identified, an EA will be conducted. If no significant environmental impacts are anticipated to occur, a CE will be conducted. Based on public, agency and stakeholder input, FTA will determine the level of environmental review necessary for this project.

The goal of the NEPA environmental study is community consensus on a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) which would qualify for funding under FTA's Small Starts or New Starts programs.

FTA Planning and Environmental Process



WHAT WILL BE COVERED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW?

The NEPA review will evaluate existing conditions and the potential impacts of all study alternatives on the natural, social, and physical environments in the study corridor. The dimensions of this review will include:

- Consistency with Community and City Planning Initiatives
- Historic and Archaeological Resources/4(f)
- Neighborhoods and Displacement
- Environmental Justice (Effects on low-income and minority populations)
- Visual and aesthetic conditions
- Parklands/4(f) and 6(f)
- Utilities
- Safety and Security
- Air Quality
- Noise and Vibration
- Floodplains
- Soils and Geology
- Hazardous Wastes
- Endangered species
- Wetlands
- Farmlands
- Coastal Zones
- Navigable Waterways
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Natural and Wild Areas
- Construction impacts
- Transit
- Traffic and Parking

In addition to this analysis, preliminary engineering will be conducted to further define the alternatives under consideration. This will include developing a service plan for operation of each alternative in the corridor as well as for connections to the surrounding neighborhoods. Additionally, capital cost estimates will be refined, operating and maintenance costs will be projected and a financial plan will be prepared.

WHAT IS A LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE?

A LPA is a defined mode, route, and end points that will move through the project development process. Based on public input and the completed NEPA technical analyses, an LPA recommendation will be made to the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC). SPC will then consider amending the region's Long-Range Transportation and Development Plan, to incorporate the LPA into the Plan. After the SPC adopts the LPA into the Plan, the LPA will be submitted to the FTA for approval to advance the project into the detailed engineering phase.

WHY IS THIS PROJECT BEING PROPOSED?

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to improve access to and within the corridor encompassing Downtown Uptown, Oakland and other East End neighborhoods while supporting economic development and community revitalization in these communities. Transit investment in this area will strengthen the linkage between Downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland, and the connections between those job centers and other communities, with transit that is easier to use and more pleasant to ride than can be achieved under present conditions.

Study Area Needs

Need 1: Improve travel in the corridor through more transportation choices, namely improved transit service and improved transit, bicycle and pedestrian access (including access for persons with disabilities) to the corridor's services and amenities.

Need 2: Enhance quality of life in the corridor by ensuring that transit improvements meet community planning goals such as spurring economic development, preserving housing affordability, promoting environmental sustainability and reducing congestion and parking demand.

Need 3: Corridor services should be integrated with the regional transit network including conventional bus routes, the light rail transit system, busways to provide improved connections from the corridor to other city neighborhoods, suburban communities, and outlying counties.

Need 4: More fully utilize limited street resources with an improved balance of transit, bicycle, pedestrian and automobile modes in the corridor including consideration of Complete Streets principles.

Need 5: Increase capacity and improve quality of corridor transit service with reduced transit travel times, enhanced technology and infrastructure, improved reliability and increased operating efficiency.

Need 6: Enhance environmental quality and improve energy efficiency through operational improvements and infrastructure design.

Need 7: Reduce congestion and parking demand through mode shift to transit, cycling, and walking.

Need 8: Ensure that transportation improvements support smart growth through serving existing development, including existing commercial and residential areas, as well as providing a framework for new transit-oriented development in the corridor.

WHAT IS BUS RAPID TRANSIT?

Bus Rapid Transit is a system of measures integrated to improve the quality and reliability of bus service while reducing overall travel times, and, possibly operating costs. These measures could include:

- Frequent service
- Simple route structure
- Limited stops
- Exclusive bus lanes
- Transit signal priority (extends the green on a traffic light, so that a bus can pass through an intersection before the light changes)
- Branding of vehicles and stop facilities
- Enhanced stops or stations with real-time passenger information and with fare vending
- Special vehicles

BRT service could:

- Increase corridor transit ridership
- Improve air quality
- Reduce energy consumption associated with transportation
- Increase operating efficiency of transit
- Support transit oriented development and neighborhood revitalization
- Improve access for bicyclists and pedestrians

This study will evaluate the benefits of BRT in this corridor as well as the impacts in the neighborhoods it will serve.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO DATE?

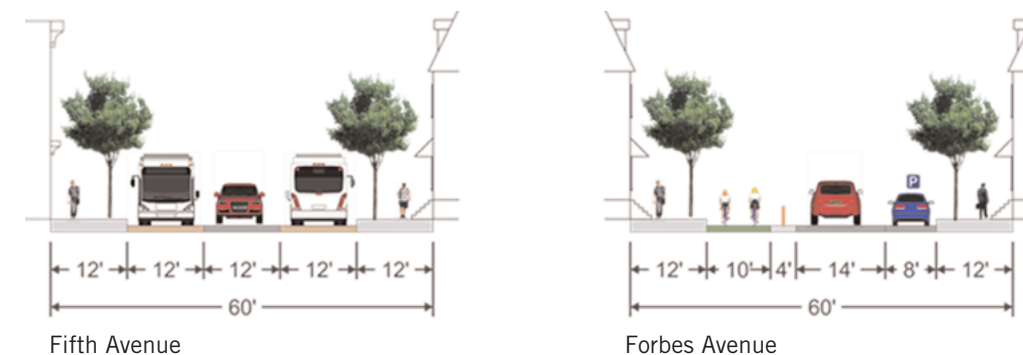
The BRT initiative began with identification, development and analysis of alternative alignments in the Downtown – Oakland – East End corridor. Based on public and stakeholder input and project team proposals, an initial set of 28 options in five different segments of the corridor was identified. These options were entered into a two-step screening process. Those which were too costly, did not improve transportation or did not sufficiently serve the community were set aside. Next, a process based on public and stakeholder input and technical evaluation and produced the alignments described in this booklet.

WHAT ALTERNATIVES ARE BEING STUDIED?

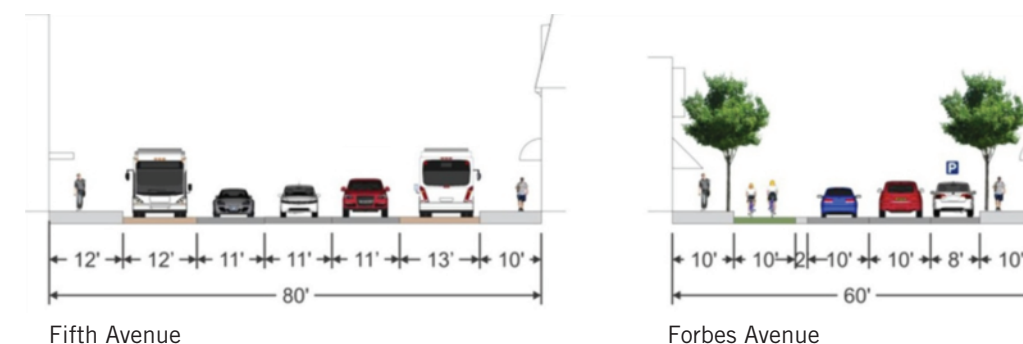
In an earlier phase of this study, two primary alternatives were identified for further study in this NEPA review phase. As illustrated in typical cross-sections below, these alternatives are Fifth Avenue Curbside Lanes BRT and the Fifth/Forbes Concurrent Lanes BRT. A Hybrid alternative is also possible, as different alternatives may be selected for Oakland and for Uptown. A fourth alternative, Transportation Systems Management, is also being considered.

Fifth Avenue Curbside Lanes – The Fifth Avenue Curbside Alternative provides BRT in exclusive bus lanes from Downtown to Bellefield Avenue in Oakland, in both directions, on Fifth Avenue.

Fifth Avenue Curbside Lanes in Uptown

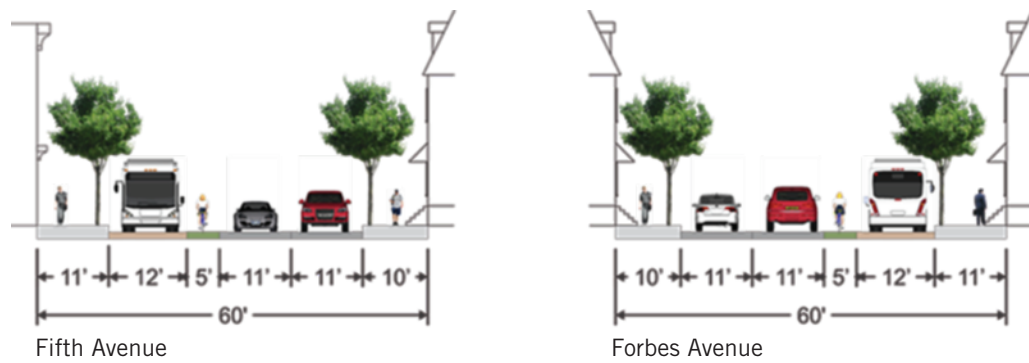


Fifth Avenue Curbside Lanes in Oakland

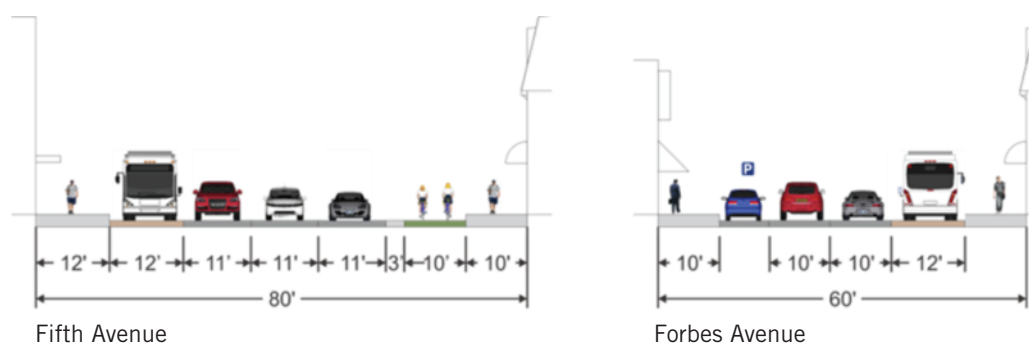


Fifth/Forbes Concurrent Lanes – This alternative provides BRT in exclusive bus lanes from Downtown to Bellefield Avenue, typically in a split alignment with eastbound buses on Forbes Avenue and westbound buses on Fifth Avenue.

Fifth/Forbes Concurrent Lanes in Uptown



Fifth/Forbes Concurrent Lanes in Oakland



Mixed Configuration

A third alternative would provide BRT in the corridor using a combination of both Fifth Avenue Curbside and Fifth/Forbes Concurrent Lanes alignments in different communities within the project corridor. This is not prescriptive; a combination would be responsive to community needs.

Transportation Systems Management

The fourth alternative would provide transit improvements in the corridor without implementing full Bus Rapid Transit. Typically, studies of major transportation project include a Transportation Systems Management (TSM) alternative involving less expensive capital investments. For this project, a TSM alternative would primarily involve transit operational improvements such as transit signal priority, queue jump lanes and upgraded shelters.

There will also be a No-Build Alternative which represents the existing transportation system and all currently programmed transportation improvements in the region. It is the basis for comparing all of the alternatives described above in terms of impacts on the environment and the existing transportation system, forecasting future transit ridership and estimating changes in operations and maintenance costs for providing transit in the corridor.

BRT Connections

The alternative alignments previously outlined describe possible configurations of a BRT or other system improvements in Oakland and in Uptown. Transit improvements will extend beyond Oakland and Uptown, to provide transit connections to Downtown and to other neighborhoods in the east end.

Preliminary analysis proposes a Downtown alignment with bidirectional BRT operation on Fifth Avenue to Liberty Avenue, and a terminal loop via Stanwix Street, Boulevard of the Allies, Commonwealth Place and Liberty Avenue. This alignment will be further considered in a study being undertaken by the City.

Transit improvements must also provide connections to the east end neighborhoods, maintaining or improving upon the current high levels of service to these communities. One configuration for this service will be for BRT routes to extend beyond the exclusive BRT bus lanes in Oakland and Uptown, continuing in mixed traffic to the surrounding neighborhoods. Another option will be for BRT service to only operate between Downtown and Oakland, with local bus routes providing connections to the surrounding neighborhoods. This study will also consider integration of service on the Martin Luther King, Jr. East Busway service into the BRT corridor.

HOW WILL MY COMMENTS BE USED? WILL THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Your comments can make a difference. Comments received during the scoping period will be used to finalize the BRT Purpose and Need Statement and identify environmental issues to be considered in the NEPA review and their method of analysis. You can find out how all comments were addressed by reviewing the Final Scoping Decision Document, which will provide a summary of the scoping process, comments received, and response to comments that will be published after the scoping public comment period ends.

HOW CAN I SUBMIT COMMENTS?

You can submit comments at the scoping meeting, either in writing, onto a computer or provided verbally to project team staff. In addition to the scoping meetings, comments can also be submitted to:

- Project Website: <http://www.portauthority.org/paac/CompanyInfoProjects/BusRapidTransit.aspx>
- E-mail: patrick.roberts@pittsburghpa.gov
- Phone number: (412) 255-2224
- Mail: Patrick Roberts, Principal Transportation Planner
Department of City Planning
200 Ross Street, 4th Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Scoping comments must be submitted by **Thursday, June 4, 2015**.

Privacy Notice

Your privacy is important to us. Your contact information will be used for the sole purpose of this project and will not be sold, shared, distributed or used for any other purpose. However, all comments received during the scoping period will be part of the public record.

CAN I STILL BE INVOLVED AFTER SCOPING IS COMPLETED?

This is just the beginning! Although the formal scoping period ends on Thursday, June 4, 2015, opportunities for involvement in the BRT study will continue. Additional meetings will be scheduled throughout the study and materials will be posted to the project website for community review and comments. Following publication of the NEPA document, a formal public meeting will be conducted to receive your comments on the findings of the NEPA analyses and the recommendation for the Locally Preferred Alternative.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Spring 2015: The public scoping period begins with the May 5 & 6 public meetings and extends to June 4, 2015 during which additional public and agency input is received.

The NEPA review will begin. Coordination with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has been initiated and contacts with other regulatory and resource agencies will occur.

Summer 2015: Community workshops to discuss the location and design of BRT stations will be convened. The analysis of the alternatives effects on the social and economic environment, physical environment and transportation system will continue. The alternatives will be refined.

Fall 2015: The NEPA analyses will be completed. Based on the input from the workshops and technical analyses, the station designs will be developed further.

Winter/Spring 2016: The draft NEPA document will be prepared.

Spring/Summer 2016: The public will review and comment on the draft NEPA document. Based on public comment and the NEPA analyses, the LPA will be selected. A report on the LPA will be submitted to FTA for approval to advance the project into Preliminary Engineering.