

Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Project
St. Petersburg, Florida
Small Starts Project Development
(Rating Assigned November 2019)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 10.3 Miles, 16 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$43.93 Million
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$21.83 Million (49.7%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2021):	\$4.10 Million
Existing Corridor Ridership (Warranted):	5,400 Daily Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium-High
Project Justification Rating:	Medium
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	High

Project Description: The Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA), in coordination with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the City of St. Petersburg, and other regional stakeholders, plans to construct a bus rapid transit (BRT) line from downtown St. Petersburg to St. Pete Beach via the Central Avenue corridor. The proposed project includes six miles of exclusive bus lanes, transit signal priority, and the purchase of nine branded articulated hybrid buses. The service is planned to operate every 15 minutes during daytime hours on weekdays, every 30 minutes on weekday evenings, and every 15 to 30 minutes on weekends.

Project Purpose: The Central Avenue corridor serves multiple travel markets, including work, healthcare, education, community access, entertainment, and tourism. The project is expected to improve transit accessibility within downtown St. Petersburg and provide more frequent mobility options between downtown St. Petersburg and the Gulf Beaches area. The corridor currently has five local bus routes, but no direct transit service linking central St. Petersburg with attractions to the west. Additionally, bus travel times are slowed by automobile congestion and the absence of transit signal priority or any other preferential treatments. PSTA also expects the project to enhance the corridor’s economic development.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: The project entered Small Starts Project Development in May 2016. PSTA selected the locally preferred alternatives (LPA) in January 2017. PSTA completed the environmental review process with receipt of a Documented Categorical Exclusion from FTA in August 2017. PSTA had the LPA adopted into the region’s fiscally constrained long range transportation plan in March 2018. PSTA anticipates receipt of a Small Starts Grant Agreement in early 2020, and the start of revenue operations in April 2021.

Significant Changes Since Last Evaluation (November 2018): PSTA revised the scope of the project to reduce the number of stations from 17 to 16, which resulted in a reduction of project miles from 11 to 10.3. Additionally, PSTA revised the revenue operations date from December 2020 to April 2021 to reflect a more realistic timeframe for construction completion.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan

<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal: Section 5309 Small Starts	\$21.83	49.7%
State: FDOT New Starts Program Funds	\$9.50	21.6%
FDOT Design Grant	\$1.00	2.3%
Local: PSTA Property Tax Revenues	\$7.60	17.3%
City of St. Petersburg Tax Increment Financing Proceeds or Cash Contribution	\$4.00	9.1%
Total:	\$43.93	100.0%

NOTE: The financial plan reflected in this table has been developed by the project sponsor and does not reflect a commitment by DOT or FTA. The sum of the figures may differ from the total as listed due to rounding.

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LAND USE RATING: Medium

The land use rating reflects population density within one-half mile of proposed stations, employment served by the line, and the share of legally binding affordability restricted (LBAR) housing in the station areas compared to the share in the surrounding county.

- Average population density across all station areas is 4,300 persons per square mile, which corresponds to a Medium-Low rating. Total employment served is 48,700, corresponding to a Medium-Low rating. The central business district (CBD) average daily parking cost is \$13, rating Medium-High. The ratio of station area to county LBAR housing is 3.24, which corresponds to a High rating.
- Downtown St. Petersburg has a mix of uses, including restaurants, hotels, green space, office buildings, retail, and residences. West of downtown, surface parking lots, single-family residences, and big box retail are prevalent. Through South Pasadena, the corridor includes parks, retail, restaurants, and surface parking lots. The southern portion, through St. Pete Beach, includes mid-rise beach resorts, beach clubs, and public beach access parking, as well as retail and single-family residences.
- In Downtown St. Petersburg, developments have short setbacks, sidewalks, and landscaping. First Avenues North and South, along which the BRT will run parallel to Central Avenue, have consistent set-back sidewalks and ADA ramps, but few marked crossings. In South Pasadena and in St. Pete Beach, sidewalks are consistently present on both sides of the road, and signalized intersections include marked crossings with ADA ramps; however, blocks are extremely long with few marked mid-block crossings.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium-Low

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium-Low

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* St. Petersburg has plans and policies that support designating an activity center along Central Avenue, supporting transit-oriented development, increasing densities, improving pedestrian facilities, and increasing parking rates in Downtown. The City of St. Pete Beach Corey Avenue District Plan prioritizes transit supportive measures along the BRT corridor. The City of South Pasadena shows minimal to no transit-supportive plans and policies.
- *Supportive Zoning Near Transit Stations:* Within St. Petersburg and St. Pete Beach, permitted densities along the corridor generally range from medium to high. Residential areas generally are low density. Permitted densities in South Pasadena range from moderate in commercial areas to high for residential zones covered by a Planned Redevelopment overlay zone.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* Some outreach around transit-supportive development has occurred regionally and in the St. Petersburg portion of the corridor. Pinellas County and St. Petersburg have financial and regulatory incentives to encourage transit-supportive development, such as credits and floor area ratio bonuses for transit and pedestrian amenities. Information on incentives for St. Pete Beach and South Pasadena was not provided.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium-Low

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* Renderings for new developments within or near Downtown St. Petersburg show transit-supportive densities, short setbacks, and pedestrian infrastructure. Information for the rest of the corridor was not provided.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* Vacant land is scattered throughout the corridor, with greater concentrations on the eastern half where transit-supportive zoning has been implemented. The corridor is growing, but at a slower rate than the region.

Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing: Medium-Low

- Affordable housing supply and needs were assessed for the South St. Petersburg Community Redevelopment Area (CRA), which covers most of the corridor in St. Petersburg. The CRA directs 40 percent of tax increment financing revenues to the development of affordable and market-rate housing

within the CRA. Habitat for Humanity has invested \$2.9 million in the CRA. St. Petersburg and St. Pete Beach provide density bonuses to developers for affordable housing.

- The St. Petersburg Future Housing Plan Initiative: Housing for All, from All (2019) is a comprehensive 10-year plan intended to expand on existing programs and introduced new solutions starting in 2020. The plan will leverage \$60 million for construction and preservation of 2,400 multi-family units.

PSTA CENTRAL AVENUE BRT PROJECT LOCATION AND LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

ST. PETERSBURG FLORIDA



LEGEND

- LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (BRT)
- STATION
- PSTA LOCAL ROUTES
- ROAD

SOURCE: BASE MAPPING DATA PROVIDED BY PINELLAS COUNTY GIS, PINELLAS COUNTY MPO AND PSTA. ALL OTHER DATA CREATED BY JACOBS.