

**Montana RTS Corridor  
El Paso, Texas  
Small Starts Project Development  
(Rating Assigned November 2019)**

Summary Description	
<b>Proposed Project:</b>	Bus Rapid Transit 16.8 Miles, 15 Stations
<b>Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):</b>	\$49.20 Million
<b>Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):</b>	\$28.22 Million (57.4%)
<b>Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2022):</b>	\$3.32 Million
<b>Current Year Ridership Forecast (2019):</b>	4,400 Daily Linked Trips 1,325,700 Annual Linked Trips
<b>Overall Project Rating:</b>	Medium
<b>Project Justification Rating:</b>	Medium
<b>Local Financial Commitment Rating:</b>	Medium

**Project Description:** The City of El Paso Mass Transit Department (Sun Metro) proposes to implement a bus rapid transit (BRT) line operating primarily in mixed traffic along Montana Avenue that begins at the new Far East Transfer Center, and serves the El Paso International Airport, the reconfigured Eastside Transfer Center, and the existing Five Points Transfer Center. The service continues to downtown El Paso taking advantage of a common route and facilities constructed as part of the Alameda and Dyer corridor BRT projects. The project includes construction of new BRT stations including two transfer centers and a new airport station, branded shelters, traffic signal priority at 34 intersections, the purchase of 14 articulated buses, off-vehicle fare collection machines, and real-time arrival information at all stations. Service is planned to operate six days a week, every 10 minutes during weekday peak periods, every 15 minutes during weekday off-peak periods, and every 20 minutes on Saturdays. No Sunday service is planned.

**Project Purpose:** The project corridor is a mix of residential, institutional, commercial, and light industrial areas. The city currently operates five bus routes in the corridor, two of which serve the entire corridor. Currently, due to limited fixed route service and minimal service frequencies, passengers seeking to transfer buses for trips to the Far East Transfer Center area experience delays of up to 70 minutes. The project is planned to help to shorten travel times for these passengers. In addition, the project is intended to improve transit service in a corridor with a high percentage of the population below the poverty level (22 percent) and a low average median household income (less than \$38,100).

**Project Development History, Status and Next Steps:** In June 2009, the City of El Paso initiated an alternatives analysis to examine transit improvements in the Montana Avenue Corridor. The project entered Small Starts Project Development in April 2013. In April 2014, the locally preferred alternative was included in the region's financially-constrained long-range transportation plan. The Sun Metro's Board approved the locally preferred alternative in September 2014. The project completed the environmental review process with receipt of Categorical Exclusion from FTA in December 2017. The City anticipates receipt of a

Small Starts Grant Agreement in early 2020, and the start of revenue service in June 2022.

**Significant Changes Since Last Evaluation (November 2015):** The capital cost increased to \$49.20 million from \$45.52 million, mostly due to refinements in the design and adjustments to the project schedule. No significant changes to the project scope have occurred.

<b>Locally Proposed Financial Plan</b>		
<b><u>Source of Funds</u></b>	<b><u>Total Funds (\$million)</u></b>	<b><u>Percent of Total</u></b>
<b>Federal:</b>		
Section 5309 Small Starts	\$28.22	57.4%
FHWA Flexible Funds (Surface Transportation Program)	\$6.56	13.3%
<b>State:</b>		
TxDOT Comprehensive Mobility Program Matching Funds	\$1.64	3.3%
<b>Local:</b>		
City of El Paso Locally-Funded Debt	\$12.78	26.0%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$49.20</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**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: Low**

The land use rating reflects population and employment densities within ½-mile of proposed station areas, as well as the share of legally binding affordability restricted housing in the corridor compared to the share in the surrounding county(ies).

- Within the station areas, 32,500 employees are found within a ½-mile radius of the stations, which corresponds to a Low rating. Within the station areas, the population density is 3,700 persons per square mile, which corresponds to a Medium-Low rating.
- The proportion of legally binding affordability restricted housing in the project corridor compared to the proportion in the county through which the project travels is 1.07, which corresponds to a Low rating.
- Major trip generators include: the El Paso International Airport; El Paso Community College; shopping centers, such as the Cielo Vista Mall; governmental uses; and military installations, including Fort Bliss.
- Because the area is primarily auto-oriented, parking is generally available in front of commercial properties along Montana Avenue.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium**

**Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium**

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* The City of El Paso has established Plan El Paso, the city's comprehensive plan that contains strategies and policies for new compact, mixed-use development along the corridor that supports infill and redevelopment near transit routes. The plan includes conceptual site plans and identifies compact urban areas.
- *Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations:* The El Paso SmartCode includes a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) overlay, which allows for increased density along transit corridors and could be applied to station areas. Shared parking is encouraged and is granted through the City Administrator; no special use permit or variance is needed.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* Significant public outreach was conducted for Plan El Paso as a means to build public support and plan for mixed-use development. The Sustainable City Centers program is a tax and fee abatement program intended to promote growth and development within designated TOD areas; two projects along the corridor have utilized this program, which is available for private commercial or multi-family projects.

**Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium**

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* The mixed-use zoning and financial incentives of the Monticello Station Area on the Mesa RTS Corridor (a complementary RTS route) resulted in a developer revising its development program into a mixed-use development with pedestrian amenities. The project is under construction. The City has approved four SmartCode Master Plans within the City's RTS corridors that contain infill development, open spaces, pedestrian amenities, and minimized parking lots.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* The eastern extent of the corridor has been the subject of significant suburban residential expansion over the last several years, which has led to considerable supporting commercial and retail development. A total of 557.6 acres of vacant land are available at eight station sites, primarily in the eastern portion of the corridor. Fort Bliss continues to expand, adding additional development opportunities.

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

- Beyond federal programs like HOME Investment Partnerships Program and Community Development Block Grants, the City of El Paso has not developed policy incentives to build affordable housing. However, financial assistance is provided through the Housing Finance Corporation, which the City Council created to help low- and moderate-income persons in purchasing affordable housing.



**brio**

**LEGEND**

- MONTANA CORRIDOR
- TRANSFER CENTERS
- PARK + RIDE
- RTS STATIONS



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