

Laker Line BRT
Grand Rapids, Michigan
Small Starts Project Development
(Rating Assigned October 2017)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Bus Rapid Transit 13.3 Miles, 11 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$72.76 Million
Section 5309 Small Starts Share (\$YOE):	\$56.19 Million (77.2%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2020):	\$4.79 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2017):	3,500 Daily Linked Trips 2,656,400 Annual Linked Trips
Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2035):	4,400 Daily Linked Trips 3,313,100 Annual Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	Medium-High
Project Justification Rating:	Medium-High
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	Medium

Project Description: The Interurban Transit Partnership (The Rapid) proposes to build a bus rapid transit (BRT) line between downtown Grand Rapids and the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) campus in Allendale. The project includes construction of 11 new stations, but will serve three existing stations as well along the existing Silver Line BRT route in the downtown. The project includes a short segment of dedicated lane in downtown Grand Rapids, transit signal priority, the purchase of 16 articulated compressed natural gas buses, level platform boarding with precision docking of vehicles, off-board fare collection, and construction of a light maintenance facility. The service is planned to operate every six to 15 minutes during daytime hours on weekdays, every 20 minutes during weekday evenings, and every 30 minutes on weekends.

Project Purpose: The project is intended to provide faster high-capacity transit service in a corridor that currently experiences crowding during peak times of day despite existing bus transit service frequencies as short as every six minutes. Anticipated population and employment growth in the corridor, as well as GVSU's plans to expand its student base and facilities, contribute to the need for higher-quality and more transit service. Faster transit service in the corridor supports plans for higher-density, mixed-use and walkable development, including increased student and senior housing, and fit with a growing regional emphasis on multimodal transportation options. The Rapid anticipates that the frequent service provided by the project would allow it to restructure its fixed-route service in downtown Grand Rapids for greater efficiency.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: The Rapid completed an Alternatives Analysis for the Laker Line corridor in December 2014, which culminated in the selection of a locally preferred alternative (LPA). The LPA was adopted into the region's fiscally constrained long range transportation plan in May 2015. The project entered Small Starts Project Development in June 2015. The Rapid completed the environmental review process with

receipt of a documented Categorical Exclusion from FTA in January 2017. The Rapid anticipates receipt a Small Starts construction grant in early 2018, and the start of revenue service in May 2020.

Significant Changes Since Last Evaluation (November 2016): The project cost increased slightly, from \$70.51 million to \$72.76 million, as a result of further design work.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan		
<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal:		
Section 5309 Small Starts	\$56.19	77.2%
Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Program	\$2.02	2.8%
State:		
Comprehensive Transportation Fund Fuel Tax and Motor Vehicle-Related Revenues	\$9.55	13.1%
General Fund Revenues	\$5.00	6.9%
Total:	\$72.76	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 counties.

- Average station area population density is 3,062 people per square mile, which corresponds to a Medium-Low rating. The total employment in station areas is 36,220, corresponding to a Low rating. In the Central Business District (CBD), there are approximately 0.75 parking spaces per employee, corresponding to a Low rating. Typical daily maximum parking cost in the CBD is \$10, corresponding to a Medium rating. The proportion of LBAR housing units in station areas compared to the counties through which the project travels is 5.68, corresponding to a High rating.
- The project corridor includes downtown Grand Rapids, which has a dense urban environment with intense commercial uses. To the west, the corridor passes through medium to low density neighborhoods and commercial areas, then undeveloped land up to the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) main campus in Allendale, which is relatively concentrated.
- Sidewalks and pedestrian crossings are of a good quality on the GVSU campus and in downtown Grand Rapids. In the central portion of the corridor some streets lack sidewalks.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: Medium

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: Medium

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* Corridor policies encourage a mix of uses and denser development near stations. GVSU's master plan for the Allendale campus calls for all new development to be within a five minute walk of the center of campus. Walker's master plan envisions a concentration of development in station areas and more pedestrian-friendly development. Grand Rapids' master plan calls for denser development throughout the corridor and sets out goals for both increasing density and making the area more walkable.
- *Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations:* The city of Walker has zoned a significant portion of land near stations for denser development than exists today, albeit still low to moderate densities, and has created design standards to ensure that the development in the area is pedestrian- and transit-oriented. Outside of downtown Grand Rapids, areas directly adjacent to stations are zoned primarily for mixed uses with low density residential further away from stations. The station area in downtown Grand Rapids is zoned for high density development, with generous density bonuses for mixed uses and mid-to high-rise residential. Grand Rapids and Walker have parking maximums for new development. Zoning does not apply to GVSU's Allendale campus.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* Tax-increment financing districts that support infrastructure enhancements are in place in Downtown Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids' Westside neighborhood, and Walker. The sponsor of the transit project has reached out to prospective developers to discuss appropriate types of development in station areas.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: Medium

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* Four major transit-oriented developments are under construction near planned stations in and around downtown Grand Rapids. No development proposals are currently in process in other parts of the corridor.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* There are numerous opportunities for development in project station areas and the market potential for transit-supportive development is moderately strong. Strong population and employment growth in the corridor are predicted.

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

- The City of Grand Rapids completed an analysis of the residential market in the city, including part of the project corridor, but the analysis did not contain specific recommendations related to affordable housing for the corridor.
- Grand Rapids offers density bonuses for housing developments in which 15 to 30 percent of units carry legally binding affordability restrictions for at least 15 years. Other than that, policies and incentives supporting affordable housing are limited and there is no evidence of developer activity to preserve or increase affordable housing in the corridor.

