

Downtown-Oakland-East End Transit Investment Concept Development Timeline

The discussion of a need for improved transit between Downtown and Oakland began in the early 1900s and continues today. Here is the most recent history of idea.

Bus Rapid Transit and the American Community Competition Design Competition (2001)

CalStart/WestStart and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted a BRT design competition in 2001. Port Authority's contest submission proposed a through BRT service utilizing the East and West Busways with routing via Oakland. The submittal included a rendering of a BRT station located at Fifth Avenue and Atwood Street in Oakland. This rendering became a starting point for subsequent discussions of BRT in the Downtown – Oakland Corridor up to the end of the decade.

The Eastern Corridor Transit Study (2003 to 2006)

The *Eastern Corridor Transit Study* (2003) and its follow-up study, *Transitional Analysis to Locally Preferred Alternatives* (2006), evaluated a number of alternatives for improving transit services in the corridor between downtown Pittsburgh and Greensburg, Westmoreland County. The studies were conducted jointly by Port Authority of Allegheny County, SPC, and Westmoreland County Transit by STV Incorporated.

The studies evaluated the possibility of constructing light rail and/or improving bus service to Oakland. The studies estimated the cost of light rail to Oakland to be between \$1.5 billion and \$1.9 billion (2006 dollars) for subway and between \$650 million to \$800 million for at-grade light rail. A cost for BRT was not developed at this step. The study's outcome, or locally preferred alternative, included the Downtown-Pittsburgh-Oakland Transit Investment (LRT and/or BRT). Both LRT and BRT were to be advanced to the next level of project development.

Oakland Transit White Paper (2004)

The Department of City Planning, Port Authority of Allegheny County, and the Oakland Transportation Management Association (OTMA) produced a white paper for the Oakland Task Force which considered how best to improve transit service to and within Oakland. The service proposal and rendering from the 2001 design competition was incorporated into the paper. Additionally, the paper noted the development of BRT in Cleveland's Euclid Avenue Corridor.

Allegheny County Executive Onorato's Transportation Action Team (2006)

In 2006, County Executive Onorato appointed a Transportation Action Team (TAT) to identify and prioritize major transportation initiatives. The TAT recommendations were based on past technical studies of various transportation options and on identified needs. The group gathered all substantial past and current relevant transportation studies for review. An additional study was not a charge of this team. A technical support team that drew on substantial local consulting expertise helped develop specifics and researched additional background materials. The team benchmarked information, and successful related finance trends, from across the country.

TAT's key recommendation was that rapid direct transit access is critical for future competitiveness: 1) Rapid Transit is needed from Downtown Pittsburgh To and Around Oakland (to link the region's two largest economic generators) and 2) later, construct Rapid Transit from Downtown Pittsburgh to the Airport (extending from the North Shore Connector)

The TAT recommended implementation of the first project, in doable phases. LRT to the airport would come after completion of the North Shore Connector, which was under design at the time.

The TAT findings were intended to generate support for, and participation in, those programs to maximize the economic opportunities of our region by connecting our major economic generators - Oakland to Downtown to the Airport.

After careful examination the TAT determined not to address the following: 1) Transit on existing rail corridors – The utilization of existing rail corridors was found to be principally an issue of movement of freight, not people; therefore, the TAT did not recommend this as a component of the proposed program and deferred the subject for further study, and 2) Formation of a regional transportation authority – The TAT did not address the question of a regional authority and deferred for further study by others.

TAT asked County Executive Onorato to appoint a Transportation Action Partnership (TAP) to implement the priority projects.

Transportation Action Partnership (2008 to 2010)

The TAP was formed in 2008 through appointments by Onorato and Pittsburgh Mayor Ravenstahl. Dennis Davin, Dennis Yablonsky, and Yarone Zober were co-chairs. The TAP oversaw work that:

- Defined projects with options for modes, routes, and technologies (e.g., automated people mover technology for Oakland circulation, bus or light rail between Downtown and Oakland);
- Defined an "owner structure" option;
- Explored a Public-Private-Partnership (P-3) approach for delivery of transit projects; including development rights along routes ; and

- Identified needed legislative actions to facilitate the P-3 approach.

In Spring 2010, TAP released “Prospectus” to the international transportation finance industry to gauge interest and help TAP prioritize transit initiatives.

Key input from the industry, both formal and informal, recommended that the following items be clearly addressed and finalized before proceeding with an RFP for the Oakland Circulator and Downtown-to-Oakland projects:

- Clearly define the Ownership structure including powers and authority,
- Secure all necessary interagency agreements to ensure access to corridor and associated right-of way,
- Seek out and secure State and Federal funding to support project financing,
- Have clear commitments from local businesses and institutions with respect to commitments to participate in the project and occupy associated real estate development,
- Designate the preferred transit corridor for initial implementation, and
- Prepare a Business Plan that addresses concession terms with private partner, sources of revenue, and financial plan.

Among the next steps identified by the TAP was to finalize the project plan:

- Defining a priority corridor for initial and subsequent phased implementation.
- **Phasing options may include implementation of PAAC’s BRT concept with associated real estate development along the corridor with fixed guideway development as a later phase.**
- Establish corridor right-of-way and secure development approval as needed.

Port Authority of Allegheny County Transit Development Plan (2009)

As part of an overall assessment of Port Authority’s route structure, the Transit Development Plan (TDP) recommended “rapid bus” improvements to the system’s bus routes that operated in the Downtown – Oakland – East End Corridor. Basic elements of BRT were identified and presented to TDP Stakeholders. By this time, Cleveland’s Euclid Corridor BRT Project, also known as the Health Line, opened for service. As the Euclid Corridor had some characteristics similar to the Downtown – Oakland Corridor, the opening of the Health Line BRT service generated considerable interest in BRT for Pittsburgh.

TAP Develops BRT Project (2010 to Today)

In August 2010, TAP traveled to Cleveland to experience the HealthLine BRT, which was garnering a great deal of attention and private investment. Following the Cleveland trip in Fall 2010, Sustainable Pittsburgh and other local stakeholders hosted a BRT Forum at Duquesne University to present the concept of on-street BRT with public and elected officials. At this forum, stakeholder interest in the project was generated. It was noted that improved transit operations gained through BRT enhancements and a focus on creating development opportunities could increase the use and demand for transit that would make the corridor more attractive for light rail initiatives in the future. The committee which hosted and funded the forum evolved into the current Stakeholders Advisory Committee for the BRT project.

In Winter 2010, Port Authority issued an RFP for an “Alternatives Analysis/NEPA Study for BRT Downtown-to-Oakland” and the TAP continued work to advance BRT station-area development and partnerships.

For the last two years, Sustainable Pittsburgh has been guiding the project’s public outreach and engagement efforts. More than 40 organizations are participating on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee overseeing the development of the project. As a part of Port Authority’s alternatives analysis, two rounds of public informational meetings and a station design workshop have been held. A project website, www.gettherepgh.org, provides complete and up-to-date information about the project including videos, project simulation exercises, newsletters, and project history.

The next step in the process is Project Development during which the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review to complete an environmental study and preliminary engineering will be performed. A locally preferred alternative alignment will be submitted in a request to the Federal Transit Administration for funding through the New Starts or Small Starts programs.

The Alternatives Analysis, conducted by Parsons Brinckerhoff, estimates that the capital cost of the BRT project is between \$190 million and \$210 million.

References:

Eastern Corridor Transit Study, 2003, prepared for Port Authority of Allegheny County, SPC, Westmoreland County Transit and PennDOT. Prepared by STV Incorporated.

Eastern Corridor Transit Study Transitional Analysis to Locally Preferred Alternatives, 2006, prepared for Port Authority of Allegheny County, SPC, Westmoreland County Transit and PennDOT. Prepared by STV Incorporated.

Onorato Transportation Action Team Recommendations, 2006.

Heinz Endowments, Final Grant Progress Report, Preparation of Industry Outreach Materials & Selection of Priority Project for Implementation, 2012, prepared by ACED.

Oakland Transit Connector and Downtown Pittsburgh to Oakland Request for Industry Review, prepared for the Transportation Action Partnership. Prepared by Lea+Elliott, July 2009.

Transit Development Plan, 2009, prepared for Port Authority of Allegheny County. Prepared by Nelson Nygaard.

Project website: www.gettherepgh.org