

HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT STRATEGY UPDATE: CORRIDOR READINESS INVESTMENT TIERS

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Department: Planning, Research and
Development

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ISSUE STATEMENT

With the pipeline of corridor investments for the region established, the final milestone for the High Capacity Transit Strategy looks backward to document how we got here and looks forward to create the roadmap for putting the pipeline to use in implementing the vision. The strategy renews our regional commitment to high capacity transit as an essential tool for achieving many regional goals. The strategy update calls for high capacity projects that fit within the context of communities, serve as the foundation of our regional transportation system, and provide an important tool for supporting community development and maximizing regional goals. To realize these investments and all the benefits they bring, the region will need strong partnership, local champions, and engaged communities to ensure high capacity transit maximizes value to everyone in our region.

High capacity transit is one part — a key part, but still one of many parts — of the broader transit strategy. The Regional Transit Strategy establishes a broad vision (see the 2023 RTP Transit Vision in Attachment 1) using all the tools in our transit toolbox to expand the coverage of the local transit network and even make connections outside of the region, improve frequency on most arterial streets, make the bus better through priority treatments on corridors with greater delay and provide the highest quality investments (e.g., light rail, rapid bus, streetcar) where the most people need to move quickly along major travel corridors. It's also broader than transit type and service — other actions implementing the strategy include investing in transit infrastructure (e.g., dedicated lanes, signal priority), collaborating between transit providers and local jurisdictions, and expanding transit supportive elements (e.g., crossings, travel demand management). A corridor's inclusion in the vision, regardless of tier, reinforces its need for continued investment both in land use and corridor planning to develop the transit-supportive environment and begin growing service so that we can have what we need in place first to successfully take transit to the next level in the future.

ACTION REQUESTED

There is no formal action requested. Staff is seeking feedback from the Metro Council on the work done to date with partners to develop the draft report, particularly the actions and recommendations for implementing the high capacity transit network vision, and will review next steps for the HCT Strategy Update as the effort merges with the 2023 RTP Update process for public review.

POLICY CONTEXT AND IDENTIFIED OUTCOMES

The draft report documents the regional strategy for high capacity transit investment — most importantly what it will take and how the region can work together to realize the network vision (see executive summary in Attachment 3 and the full report in Attachment 4). The report opens by setting the stage for how this work continues the legacy of the 1982 Light Rail System Plan and 2009 High Capacity transit plan, building from the foundation established by the 2040 Growth Concept and Regional Transit Strategy. It outlines what this update was looking to do, including taking stock of existing conditions, challenges and opportunities for high capacity transit, and why it was important to undertake now. It describes the process engaged in with partners, including who was involved and how, and the outcomes for the policy framework, network vision, and corridor tiers. The report also includes call-out boxes throughout to highlight key points including best practices, what we heard from community, and lessons learned.

Then, most importantly, the draft report outlines the actions and recommendations that collectively make up the strategy for implementing the high capacity transit network vision. The implementation chapter kicks off by describing all of the different elements that create an environment supportive of high capacity transit and make a corridor investment successful (shown in Figure 1 below). These actions are the culminating outcome from the framework of prior planning work, reflecting what we know now from more recent challenges and opportunities and emerging best practices explored earlier in the report. Each element includes information on supporting actions, when they happen in the project development process, who is responsible and/or a partner in completing them, and why they matter to the success of a high capacity transit investment on a corridor.

Figure 1: High Capacity Transit-supportive Elements



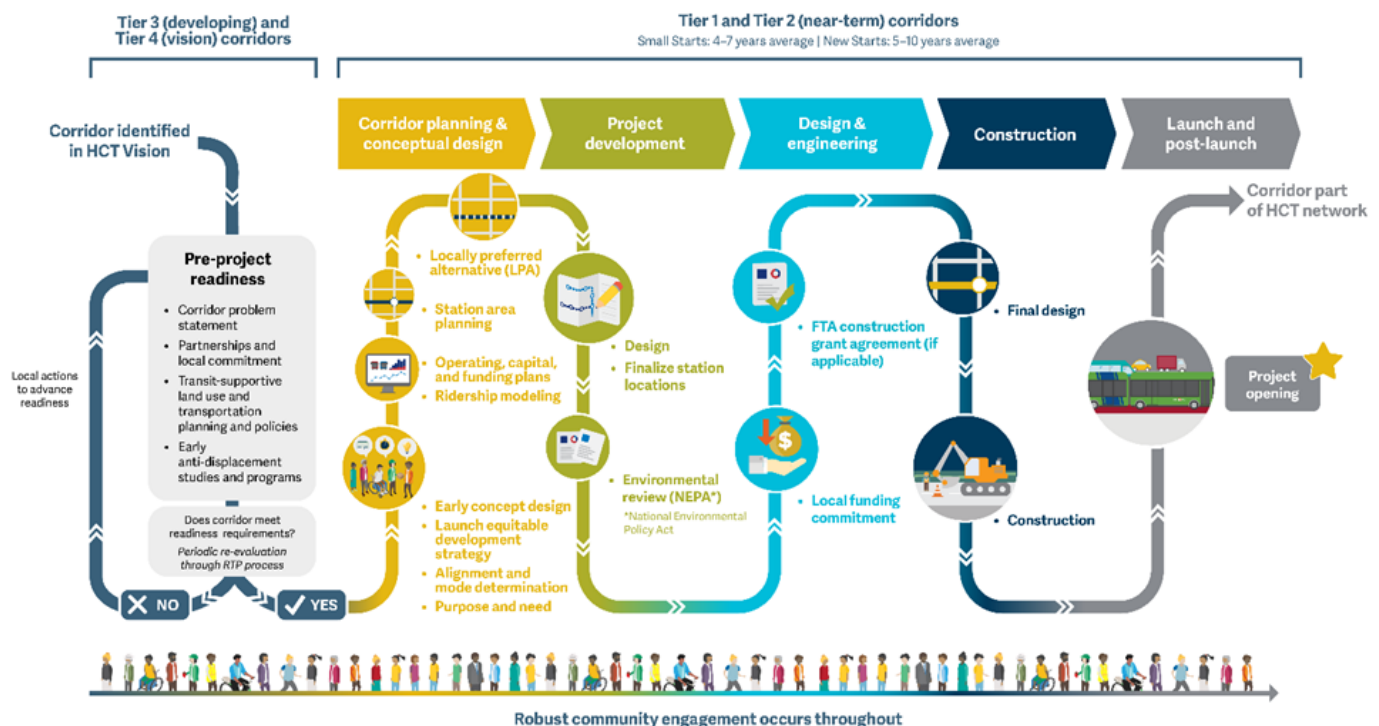
The report also recommends specific actions that regional partners can take to move corridors forward. For Tier 3 and 4 developing and vision corridors, more policy and

planning work is needed toward increasing future land use intensity and population density to reach projected ridership levels and other outcomes indicating high capacity transit investment will be successful (though we are seeing development potential emerge at the Tier 3 level). These efforts support growing much needed transit service and frequency on the corridor, as well as Better Bus investments improving reliability for Tier 3 corridors in particular. To develop corridors, regional partners could explore:

- changes to the comprehensive plan and transportation plan policies, designations and transit-supportive urban form and street designs;
- area and/or corridor land use and/or transit-oriented development plans and community stabilization in key activity centers and potential future station areas;
- begin assessing corridor extent, needs, and barriers to and opportunities for readiness with regional and local partners and community; and
- establishing project champions, partnerships and political leadership.

Figure 2 below illustrates how these activities create a pre-project readiness planning cycle until a corridor demonstrates readiness for high capacity. Tier 2 corridors, while they are ready to advance within the near-term, can still increase competitiveness for federal funding, given its importance with local match to our history of success in implementing high capacity transit. Actions include changes to the development code, alternatives analysis to vet improvement options, and beginning engagement with stakeholder coalition to identify corridor needs and complementary improvements. Finally, Tier 1 corridors are actively engaged in corridor planning and conceptual design to advance toward project development. Ultimately, work is also needed regionally to secure long-term resources for future operation and maintenance of these completed projects that expand the system.

Figure 2: High Capacity Transit Pre-project Readiness and Project Development Processes



POLICY QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

- What key points and/or priorities are important to address in the report?
- Are there additional recommendations or actions to add to best support implementation of the high capacity transit vision? How should we look to begin developing champions for these corridors?
- Are there any next steps not addressed that should be captured in future work? What guidance do you have as we look to use the pipeline in prioritizing and advancing Tier 2 corridors as a next step?

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

The High Capacity Transit (HCT) Strategy Update is a component of the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) update. JPACT and Metro Council approved a [work plan](#), equity framework, and [engagement plan](#) for the 2023 RTP update that serve as the guiding vision and goals for the updated HCT System Strategy. The HCT Strategy has been updated in four key phases developed to align with the timeline, key milestones, and engagement efforts for the 2023 RTP (as shown in Figure 3 below). In addition to attending Metro advisory committee and County coordinating committee meetings, staff has returned to Metro Council for input to inform each milestone.

Figure 3: High Capacity Transit Strategy Timeline



Earlier this year, these committees and Metro Council all provided feedback to refine the corridor tiers and identify additional considerations for high capacity transit investment readiness and the report. Opportunities for public input included an online survey with interactive map; in-person tabling at TriMet's 2023 Annual Service Plan open houses including various locations in Portland, Milwaukie, Troutdale, and Hillsboro in partnership with APANO, Centro Cultural, Rosewood Initiative, and Slavic Family; meetings with TriMet's Transit Equity Advisory Committee and Committee on Accessible Transportation and Clackamas County Small Transit Providers; a small business focus group with invitees from across the region; and additional events held by community-based organizations. Through this engagement, staff heard it was important to consider:

- all the ways we can grow our transit network using the tools in our transit toolbox where improvements may reduce “transit deserts” and/or capture future ridership;
- an approach that continues to emphasize getting our current Tier 1 regional priorities in the ground while also looking to develop a clear strategy for advancing
- work toward Tier 2 priorities with partners (e.g., endorsement and identified champions, funding opportunities and commitments); and
- addressing additional system elements as we look toward implementation like operations, roadway design guidelines, and mobility centers and transfer points.

This month, staff will be working with decision-makers and advisory committees to refine the draft report, particularly the actions and recommendations included in the strategy (see Attachment 2 below for a list of these meetings). Additionally, the team is already working on reaching out directly to all of the community groups and advisory committees, advocacy organizations, agency stakeholders and business organizations engaged as part of other milestones throughout the process to indicate how their feedback informed the outcome and invite additional input on the draft report. Taken together, this feedback will influence development of the final draft report.

The final draft report will be included as part of the public review draft 2023 Regional Transportation Plan. Elements of the RTP (e.g., system assessment and analysis, investment strategy, and future implementation work) that include high capacity transit will be discussed through this spring and summer to develop the review draft document. Staff will consider and make revisions based on the input received for the public review draft to be considered by committees this summer. Responding to what we heard and learned through the HCT Strategy Update, Metro and TriMet are working on a scope for a Rapid Bus Implementation Plan that will take the next step toward realizing the high capacity transit vision. Following a recommendation by JPACT, Metro Council will then consider making a recommendation about releasing the 2023 RTP for public review in a 45-day comment period at the June 29 meeting.

BACKGROUND

The high capacity transit network vision includes corridors collectively identified as of critical regional importance, making key connections between regional centers and town centers. Within the constraints of assumed funding and agency capacity to advance these types of projects, the corridor tiers create a pipeline where the vision corridors with the greatest need and readiness for this highest level of transit service (taking frequent service to the next level) are advanced first — reflecting current regional priorities, leveraging opportunities and maximizing fiscal stewardship and community benefits in-line with regional goals. This creates the strategy for how high capacity investments — the highest level of transit — will be guided in the future, informing the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan and future plan investment strategies.

Community priorities identified through outreach were consistent with the corridor investment tiers (see Attachment 5 documents for input received to date). We heard the most excitement about the Tier 1 regional priority corridors where planning work is already underway. Also top of the list was the Central City Tunnel for improving MAX speed and reliability, as well as the other Tier 2 emerging priorities Lombard/Cesar Chavez,

Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Burnside (in Multnomah County), SW 185th, and Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway. We also heard interest in some of the more ready Tier 3 developing corridors: Killingsworth, Powell, and McLoughlin. Community members were eager for reduced travel and waiting times on transit, expressing a desire to see dedicated space in the roadway for rapid bus, as well as safe connections between regional and town centers and to schools. As we look to implement the vision, they would like to see personal safety improvements, more information at and better access to stops, more accessibility for people with disabilities, and a focus on affordability and anti-displacement measures.

Balancing investments and activities across the region in planning, operations, and investment decisions was another important consideration of the strategy. However, because corridor readiness (e.g., land use market, demonstrated commitment, transit-supportive environment) varies across the region, advancing regional balance meant considering all parts of the region for investment at a scale appropriate commensurate with the current level of readiness. In some areas of the region, even where prior high quality investments have been made on adjacent corridors, our evaluation showed levels of ridership or additional uncaptured ridership indicating the need for additional high capacity investment to further strengthen connections between highly active centers. For example, the Line 20 on Burnside had the second-highest bus ridership in 2022 and taking this connection to the next level provides additional equity, mobility and climate benefits. In other areas of the region, where corridors may not even have transit yet today, we're indicating that there is a need to work to develop the transit-supportive environment and begin to grow transit service, but these areas are not yet ready for the highest quality level of investment. For instance, the Highway 99 corridor was evaluated as part of this process and prior work for developing Southwest Corridor and is not showing the key destinations that draw ridership or the transit-supportive land use policies that generate ridership, the affordable housing that creates community stability, sidewalks and bicycle facilities that allow riders to access transit along the corridor, or the documented support needed to advance a high capacity transit investment. However, the team did work with the working group on several adjustments to the corridor investment tiers:

- Given the community interest in the Killingsworth portion of the Line 72, its Tier 2-consistent evaluation score, and active consideration underway as part of the 82nd Avenue project, as well as the longer-term timeline planned for advancing streetcar on the NW Lovejoy to Hollywood corridor – we moved Killingsworth from Swan Island to Parkrose up to Tier 2 and NW Lovejoy to Hollywood down to Tier 3.
- Given the current adjacent light rail line and the questions around feasibility, we have removed the westside segment of Burnside from the corridor.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 2023 Regional Transit Network Vision
2. Major Milestones and Meetings Outline (updated)
3. HCT Strategy Report: Executive Summary
4. HCT Strategy Report: Full Report Draft
5. Draft Engagement Summary Appendix (in progress)

Is legislation required for Council action? ☐ Yes ☒ No