

August 11, 2021

Ms. Felicia L. James  
Associate Administrator for Planning and Environment  
Federal Transit Administration  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Colfax Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Project Request for Entry into Small Starts Project Development

Dear Ms. James,

The Regional Transportation District (RTD), in collaboration with the City and County of Denver (CCD), requests Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approval for entry into the Small Starts Project Development phase for the Colfax Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project (the Project) in Denver, Colorado. RTD and CCD have addressed all the requested items in FTA's Small Starts guidance to facilitate your review and approval of the Project's entry into project development.

**Name of the study sponsor, partners involved in the study, and roles/responsibilities**

RTD will serve as the study sponsor; collaborate with CCD throughout the project development process; submit the Small Starts rating and grant applications; collaborate with CCD in the design and construction of the Project; and ultimately operate the BRT service. CCD will oversee and manage design and construction and provide significant local funding for the Project. The following agencies are our partners in supporting the Project:

- Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)

Along with RTD and CCD, these agencies will participate throughout the project development process; review design plans and provide construction permits as required within their respective jurisdictions; provide varying degrees of local match for the capital costs of the Project; and provide ongoing coordination with RTD to help optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of the Project:

Throughout the Alternatives Analysis process performed by CCD, and completed in 2019, RTD and CCD directly involved all of the partner stakeholders along the corridor including the Anschutz Medical Campus and the Auraria Higher Education Center, before taking this next step to advance the corridor development. The Project definition reflects the partner stakeholders' support for the Project as well as the land use and economic development goals in CCD's Comprehensive Plan, neighborhood plans to encourage transit oriented development along the corridor, the Auraria Campus Master Plan, the Anschutz Medical Campus Master Plan, regional sustainability goals, and the Livable Communities Initiatives.

Colfax Avenue is the first of several BRT corridors identified in CCD's *Denver Moves Transit* Plan. RTD and CCD are in the process of developing cooperative agreements with other key agencies such as CDOT to formalize roles, responsibilities, and commitments to the Project. The Project definition is included in DRCOG's fiscally constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and will be updated during the project development process as refinements are made.

### Project Manager and other key staff that will perform the Project Development work

Brian Welch, Senior Manager, Planning Technical Services will be Project Manager for RTD. Mr. Welch has been involved in many of RTD's successfully completed projects and is familiar with FTA requirements for Small Starts projects. Mr. Welch will be supported by RTD's management, administrative, financial, and technical staff as well as key CCD staff throughout each phase of project development.

Brian Pinkerton, Principal Project Manager will be the Project Manager for CCD. Mr. Pinkerton has been involved in many of CCD's successful infrastructure projects, such as Denver's 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall Reconstruction Project (National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/design phase), and as the CCD liaison for the RTD's FasTracks Rail expansion program. Mr. Pinkerton also worked previously at CDOT. Mr. Pinkerton will be supported by CCD's management, administrative, financial, and technical staff throughout each phase of project development.

### Corridor Description and Map

The Colfax Avenue BRT project is a 5.5 mile-long infrastructure project with a 9.9-mile long service corridor that extends from Denver Union Station (DUS) in downtown Denver to the Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora (I-225 / R- Line Station) and operating as:

- Curbside-running alignment through downtown Denver, with street-running for 0.5 miles between Denver Union Station (DUS) and Market Street; and transit priority lanes between Market Street and Broadway, northwest-bound on 15<sup>th</sup> Street, and southeast-bound on 17<sup>th</sup> Street.; 1.4 miles;
- Center-running alignment in dedicated lanes between Civic Center (Colfax/Broadway) station and Colfax/Yosemite station; 5.5 miles; and
- Curbside-running alignment in mixed traffic flow in Aurora between Colfax/Yosemite station and Colfax/Potomac/R Line light rail transit (LRT) station; 3.0 miles

The corridor serves many population and employment concentrations, key activity centers, and high ridership destinations.



### Brief description of current levels of transit service in the Colfax corridor today

RTD bus Routes 15 and 15L currently operate on Denver's Colfax Avenue corridor with service seven days per week on 10-minute headways. Routes 15/15L carry the highest bus ridership (22,000 boardings per day) in RTD's system and have the highest service productivity: passengers per service-hour and per service-mile. Routes 15/15L intersect numerous other high ridership north-south routes in RTD's system and connect with RTD's R Line light rail train (LRT) station at I-225, RTD's Civic Center Station (18 bus routes for transfer), and RTD's B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and N rail lines at Denver Union Station, resulting in

many transfers between those routes and Colfax Avenue. Denver Union Station Transfers are also available to CDOT's statewide Bustang bus services, and Amtrak's California Zephyr national rail route.

### **Brief description of the transportation concerns in the corridor**

The Colfax Avenue corridor is a four- to six-lane arterial with current average daily traffic (ADT) ranging from 25,000 to 35,000 vehicles. The DRCOG long-term forecasts of population and employment for the area include a 25% increase in population and in employment by 2040. Approximately 21% of the population is low income (below the poverty line), and 11% of the households in the corridor have no automobile. DRCOG's forecasts recognize trends in local plans and policies that promote more compact infill, affordable housing and transit-oriented development. These significant growth trends will generate even higher travel demand in the Colfax Avenue BRT corridor. Due to growing congestion, travel times through the corridor are expected to worsen, both for automobile traffic and for buses operating in the mixed flow lanes, causing significant delay for transit users.

Consequently, RTD's current transit services will become less attractive as an alternative to the automobile over time. The expected travel time increase will also lead to higher operating costs for the existing services and a higher cost per passenger. Continuation of mixed flow transit service in the Colfax Avenue BRT corridor will not be sufficient to respond to growing transit demand. Consequently, improved service with dedicated transit lanes offering improved travel times will be needed to improve travel reliability and meet the increased mobility demand in the corridor.

In summary, the Colfax Avenue BRT Project is intended to address the growing travel needs of the corridor, including an anticipated sharp rise in travel demand and increasing congestion that will negatively impact all travel in that critical area. Limited stop bus rapid transit service with dedicated BRT lanes and application of Transit Signal Priority (TSP) will be needed to improve transit travel times and increase the attractiveness of transit as a means of moving more people overall in the corridor. Given the magnitude of travel demand and expected growth in this corridor, RTD and CCD see an opportunity to provide enhanced transit service that can capture a larger mode share, respond to CCD's plans for development and transit-oriented development (TOD) along the Colfax Avenue corridor, and to serve more of the total person-trip demand throughout that corridor.

### **Electronic copies of or weblinks to prior studies done in the corridor**

The *Center-Running BRT Preliminary Locally Preferred Alternative* report (2019) and the *Colfax Corridor Connections Alternatives Analysis Report* (2018) are available electronically in the "Project Background" of the following link:

<https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Departments/Department-of-Transportation-and-Infrastructure/Programs-Services/Projects/Colfax-BRT>.

The Colfax Avenue BRT Project is identified in the following RTD and DRCOG plans, respectively:

- <https://www.rtd-denver.com/sites/default/files/files/2020-03/RTD-regional-BRT-feasibility-study.pdf> (p. 19, 2020)
- [https://drcog.org/sites/default/files/resources/2050 RTP.pdf](https://drcog.org/sites/default/files/resources/2050_RTP.pdf) (p. 112, 2021)

### **Identification of the proposed project**

The Colfax Avenue BRT corridor Project definition is based on 2020 and 2040 ridership forecasts, right-of-way availability, stakeholder preferences, compatibility with local land use and economic development plans, affordable capital and operations and maintenance (O&M) costs, and overall cost effectiveness. The intent is to provide enhanced transit service in one of the most highly traveled corridors in RTD's service area and to provide multimodal connectivity with RTD's local bus and BRT services.

The 9.9-mile Colfax Avenue BRT corridor serves a variety of residential, commercial, educational and civic land uses and provides logical termini as described above. The Colfax Avenue BRT corridor is an excellent candidate for enhanced transit service and potential FTA funding support. The Colfax Avenue BRT corridor is the first of the high-capacity, high-frequency corridors being developed by CCD and RTD as part of the *Denver Moves Transit* plan.

As part of the Alternatives Analysis and conceptual engineering work, CCD and RTD have had extensive stakeholder and public involvement to determine the most viable project definition to be advanced during the project development phase. Based on the preliminary analysis, it is expected the Project will achieve excellent results in terms of the FTA Small Starts evaluation criteria. Implementation of the Project is expected to significantly enhance multimodal connectivity and reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Colfax Avenue BRT corridor Project definition includes the following elements:

- BRT limited stop service planned with a minimum 5-minute peak and 10-minute off-peak headways with 24 service hours per day, seven days per week;
- 5.5 miles of center-running dedicated transit lanes between Broadway and Yosemite Street;
- 16 far-side split platform stations in the 5.5-mile capital segment that include level boarding;
- Station locations are spaced an average of 0.37-mile apart, and include: RTD signage, shelters with canopy, off-board fare collection, benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, lighting and security cameras, emergency telephones, public address systems, customer information/wayfinding signage, BRT branding, and public art;
- Transit signal priority (with signal coordination);
- Pedestrian/bicycle access and safety improvements near stations;
- Street improvements as needed, including drainage and utility improvements.

The overall goals of the Colfax Avenue BRT corridor Project are to:

- improve transit operations, travel time, and ridership;
- address traffic congestion;
- improve air quality compared to no action;
- support CCD land use policies;
- increase multi-modal connectivity; and
- encourage new economic vitality including Transit Oriented Development (TOD) near appropriate stations.

The Project is projected to reduce bus travel time by 20-25% and to increase corridor ridership by 35-40% in 2040 with additional growth over time, benefiting all population and employment centers served by the corridor.

### **Project cost estimate**

The Colfax Avenue BRT corridor project capital cost is currently estimated at \$200 - \$300 M (2021 dollars) based on conceptual level design. This cost includes all capital construction, right-of-way acquisition, and vehicle costs, as well as design, contingency and other "soft" costs. The total Project cost will be refined through the project development process.

RTD and CCD intend to request FTA Section 5309 Small Starts Capital Investment Grant (CIG) funding support for the Colfax Avenue BRT Project. Consistent with Small Starts requirements, the significant Project costs will be supported by local, regional, and state funding sources including dedicated CCD



general obligation (GO) Bond funds and other in-kind match. RTD and CCD will submit a complete financial plan along with the Small Starts application.

RTD represents it has sufficient operating funds to support any reasonable additional O&M costs associated with the BRT service in the corridor. This will not require reduction in other RTD services, only ongoing changes to align cross-routes with the improved headway for the BRT service in the corridor and to improve operational efficiencies. RTD has developed an excellent track record of financial management for its Capital Investment Grant (CIG)/New Starts/Small Starts project commitments.

### Anticipated cost to complete Project Development

CCD currently has Parsons Transportation Group under Contract No: DOTI-202055954-00 to complete all project development work for a not-to-exceed budget of \$4,869,800. The Denver City Council approved the funding and the contract on October 20, 2020; the contract was fully executed on October 21, 2020; and Notice to Proceed was issued on October 23, 2020.

### Identification of non-CIG funding available and committed to conduct the Project Development work

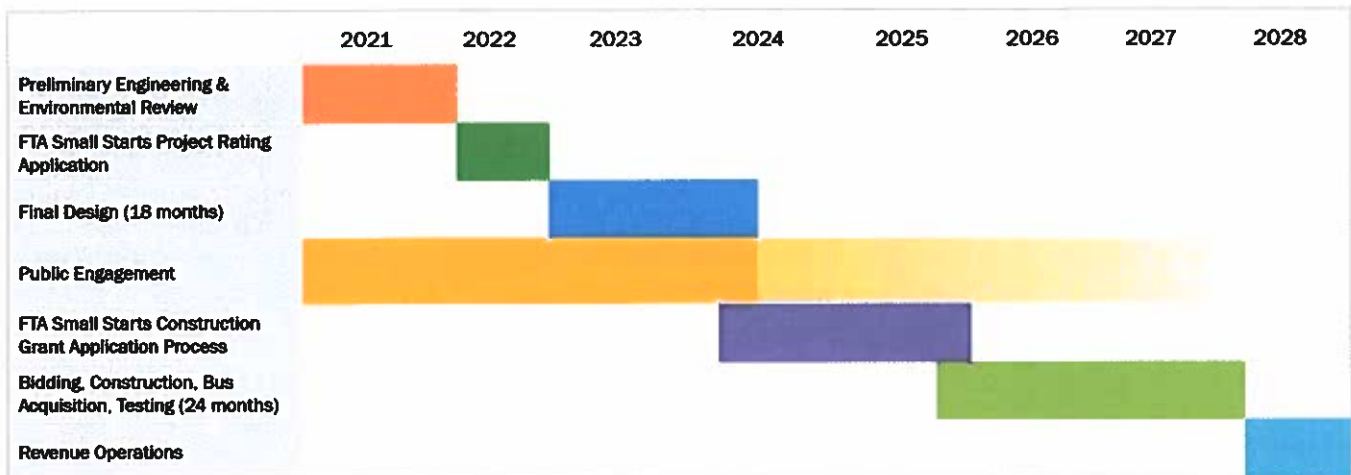
The sources of funding to conduct the project development work include \$4,869,800 of existing, available CCD funds as verified by the CCD's Finance Department. The funding sources include \$3.0 million in Denver Capital Improvement Program (CIP) 30% Design Funds and \$1.87 million in Denver GO Bond BRT funds which total \$55 million to support development of the Project.

### Documentation demonstrating commitment of funds for the Project Development work

The Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee of the Denver City Council passed Council Resolution 20-1052 at their October 6, 2020 meeting to approve Contract Number DOTI-202055954-00 for Parsons Transportation Group with a total budget of \$4,869,800. This funding is part of the Elevate Denver Bond program and approved for preliminary engineering and NEPA clearance services to advance the Colfax Avenue BRT Project through project development.

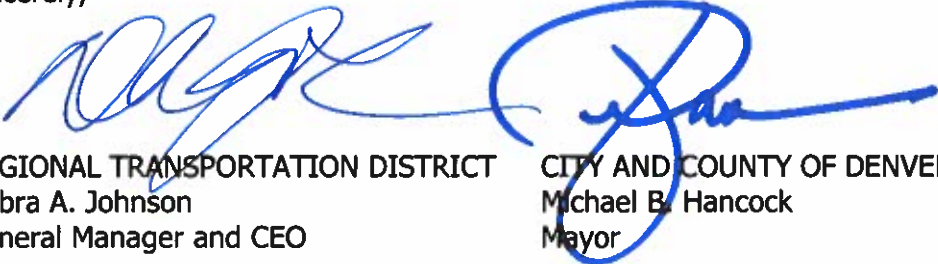
### Anticipated draft timeline for the project

CCD and RTD have initiated NEPA environmental clearance activities for the Project and are consulting with all relevant resource agencies, corridor stakeholders, and the public. RTD and CCD anticipate the following schedule to complete the Project over the next 6-7 years, with the new service operational by 2028:



We have enjoyed working with FTA staff on many previous projects in Denver. We understand FTA's 45-day review/approval period for this request and look forward to receiving your response. Please let us know if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,



REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT  
Debra A. Johnson  
General Manager and CEO

CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER  
Michael B. Hancock  
Mayor

cc: Cindy Terwilliger, FTA  
David Beckhouse, FTA  
Kristin Kenyon, FTA  
Tracey MacDonald, FTA  
Susan Eddy, FTA  
Peter Mazurek, FTA  
Jacob Sacks, FTA  
Elizabeth Day, FTA  
Shoshana Lew, CDOT  
Paul Jesaitis, CDOT

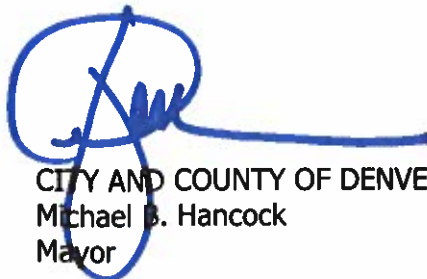
Bill Van Meter, RTD  
Brian Welch, RTD  
Doug Rex, DRCOG  
Ron Papsdorf, DRCOG  
Mike Gill, CCD  
Brian Pinkerton, CCD  
David Krutsinger, CCD

We have enjoyed working with FTA staff on many previous projects in Denver. We understand FTA's 45-day review/approval period for this request and look forward to receiving your response. Please let us know if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,



REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT  
Debra A. Johnson  
General Manager and CEO



CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER  
Michael B. Hancock  
Mayor

cc: Cindy Terwilliger, FTA  
David Beckhouse, FTA  
Kristin Kenyon, FTA  
Tracey MacDonald, FTA  
Susan Eddy, FTA  
Peter Mazurek, FTA  
Jacob Sacks, FTA  
Elizabeth Day, FTA  
Shoshana Lew, CDOT  
Paul Jesaitis, CDOT

Bill Van Meter, RTD  
Brian Welch, RTD  
Doug Rex, DRCOG  
Ron Papsdorf, DRCOG  
Mike Gill, CCD  
Brian Pinkerton, CCD  
David Krutsinger, CCD

