

Local Circulator Bus Feasibility Study for the City of Rockville, MD

Project Description

Transportation and Land Use Connections
Technical Assistance Grant Application
FY 2017

Overall Scope and Requested Service

The project includes several activities that will explore the feasibility of implementing a local circulator bus system (circulator) for the City. The scope of work for this project includes the following tasks:

- 1) Develop three profiles of circulators in the region and the country, with brief summaries of lessons learned.
- 2) Forecast ridership and demand for a circulator to identify routes and stops in Rockville.
- 3) Analyze up to five alternatives for a local circulator system between Town Square and other important activity centers within the City that consider both short and long term solutions.
- 4) Provide cost estimates with fully implementing the presented alternatives.
- 5) Provide a recommendation for one of the identified alternatives based on a cost/benefit analysis.
- 6) Identify possible funding sources and partnership opportunities to implement the recommended alternative.
- 7) Lead three sessions of discussion with a working group comprised of representatives from City departments (including Public Works, Community Planning and Development Services, and the City Manager); one session to discuss the goals and needs for implementing a circulator, one session to present the alternatives, and one session to discuss the results of the cost benefit analysis and the preferred alternative for the final document.
- 8) Lead one meeting with representatives from WMATA, Montgomery County RideOn, and REDI to identify strategies for collaboration on the recommended alternative.
- 9) Organize and lead two public participation sessions; one to gather input on the needs, demand, and interest in implementing a circulator, and one to present the alternatives comparing costs, benefits, and trade-offs for the purpose of gathering public feedback.
- 10) Deliver a final feasibility study document that includes recommendations for one of the alternatives based on a cost/benefit analysis of the alternatives presented.

Benefits to the Local Community and Region

Rockville is situated along several transit routes including Metrorail, Metrobus, RideOn bus, and MARC commuter train that connect the City to key destinations throughout the region. However, when using transit, some Rockville citizens and visitors experience challenges reaching key destinations within the City. For example, more than 50 percent of students travel to Montgomery College's Rockville campus by means other than a personal vehicle, which means they are dependent on transit to access destinations off-campus (Montgomery College

2016 Facilities Master Plan). Seven bus routes connect the campus to Town Square and other activity centers along Rockville Pike, but the bus headways range from 20 minutes to an hour and the streetscape of Rockville Pike makes non-motorized travel unappealing and uncomfortable. With this in mind, the Mayor and Council are interested in exploring the feasibility of a circulator, which would help close the critical gaps in the transit network and encourage people to use the circulator during lunchtime or for short trips, instead of personal vehicles.

Looking to the future, the County has plans to implement 10 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes, three of which will travel through the City. The Mayor and Council support these plans, but also recognize the intention of these routes is to move people through the City, but not necessarily to destinations within the City. Therefore the Mayor and Council see the need to explore the feasibility of a local transit service, such as a circulator, to support the future BRT and improve access between existing transit stations and other important destinations within the City such as Montgomery College, Town Square, and other activity centers along the MD 355 Corridor.

Connections to Regional Policies and Priorities

The project addresses several regional goals, including the following targets from the Region Forward Plan:

- Reducing daily vehicle miles traveled per capita
- Pursuing transportation projects that aim to better connect Regional Activity Centers
- Increasing the share of transit, walk, and bicycle trips throughout the region
- Ensuring that all regional Activity Centers have access to transit
- Reducing CO2 emissions

The project also addresses the following goals from the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan:

- Goal 1 – Provide a comprehensive range of transportation options.
- Goal 2- Promote a strong regional economy including a healthy regional core and dynamic activity centers.

Strategies to Address Recommendations from the Project

If the study determines a circulator would be feasible, the City of Rockville is well positioned to acquire funding for capital investments for a circulator. The City is committed to apply for federal and other grants, and money can be made available for funding matches, if required.

Other successful circulators in the region have launched their services with the help and financial support of local businesses. Rockville has a thriving business community, and the City is fully prepared to pursue partnership opportunities with the help of Rockville Economic Development, Inc. (REDI), a public/private partnership that provides guidance and support to business ventures in the City.

Furthermore, if a circulator is not determined to be feasible, but the study identifies other mechanisms for improving transit connections to activity centers, the City will coordinate with existing transit services and support the recommended enhancements.

Collaboration with Other Agencies and Jurisdictions

Rockville is fortunate to be served by multiple transit services include Metrorail, Metrobus, RideOn bus, and MARC commuter train. A future circulator would complement these transit agencies to close gaps in the transit network. Therefore, this project includes a meeting with WMATA and Montgomery County RideOn to discuss the findings of the feasibility study and strategies for joint implementation.

Integration of Public Input and Community Support

One of the requested tasks in the scope of work is to hold two public participation sessions during the creation of the plan. The first session is intended to gather input on critical gaps in the transit network, and gauge interest in a circulator. Feedback from the public will help inform the demand and needs for a circulator (in addition to technical ridership forecasting). The second session will focus on presenting the findings of the consultant's analysis to the public. The outcome of the second public participation session will be one of the factors included in the cost/benefit analysis that determines the final recommended alternative of the study. In addition to the public participation sessions, it is important to note that the Mayor and Council have identified exploring the feasibility of a circulator as one of their priorities for this session.