New Rapid Transit for a Growing, Equitable Rochester

A Growing Community

Projected growth and strategic investment will drive substantial future jobs, population, and housing growth in Rochester. Between 2020 and 2040, the following projections are anticipated:

- Olmsted County population will increase by 48,300 (from 167,500 people to 215,000 people).
- The City of Rochester's population will increase by 38,900 (from 125,700 people to 164,800 people).
- Employment in Olmstead County will increase by 37,500 (from 128,400 jobs to 165,900 jobs).

Much of this growth will occur in Rochester's downtown area and an expanded central city.

The Key Role of a Shift to Transit

To accommodate this growth, Rochester aims to achieve 50% of commuter trips to downtown by modes other than single-occupant automobile by 2030. The transition includes 23-30% of commuters arriving by transit while creating multi-modal connections and a network of walkable streets linked to public spaces. Rapid transit will allow people to get to jobs in the central city, prevent traffic congestion, and transition land used solely for surface parking to better use. Meeting these objectives will allow Rochester to accommodate projected employment, population, and housing growth, as identified by the Destination Medical Center (DMC) Master Plan and the City of Rochester Comprehensive Plan.

New rapid transit has the potential to add mobility options for residents, employees and businesses, guide future growth and development in a smart way, and enhance well-being. Alongside other initiatives, this will also help retain and attract a high-quality work-force because of the city’s quality of place and life.

A New Rapid Transit System

Based on previous Locally Preferred Alternative studies, the proposed Rochester rapid transit route runs along 2nd Street SW from the Mayo Clinic West Lot to South Broadway Avenue and beyond 12th Street. The planned transit route will use Bus Rapid Transit (RT). This bus-based transit system travels on streets and highways. This method of transportation effectively services several cities, including Los Angeles, Eugene, Oregon, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, and elsewhere around the world.

RT typically entails larger bus vehicles and more passengers per vehicle than regular bus services. RT systems have less frequent stops than other buses so they can carry more people to their destinations in less time. RT stations typically include platforms heights aligned to bus floors for rapid entry, shelters with lighting and heat, fare pre-payment machines, and real-time departure information. RT services can operate in dedicated, designated, or mixed traffic lanes depending on local requirements.

RT station spacing of one-quarter mile is used in higher density housing, population, and employment areas. Shorter spacing enhances access to the service for users, and for higher rider volumes accessing concentrated employment, education, retail, and entertainment locations. In denser areas, shorter station spacing also disperses higher rider volumes between stations for boarding efficiency. In such regions, stations are typically a minimum of approximately one-quarter mile apart. This distance maintains travel time and service reliability benefits of RT compared to regular local bus service. In lower-density areas, spacing is typically one half-mile apart, dependent upon housing, population, and employment. Relative to rail transit, RT is more flexible and less expensive to implement while maintaining a similar quality of infrastructure and service.

New Rapid Transit for A Growing, Equitable Rochester Study

The City of Rochester and Destination Medical Center (DMC) are exploring ways to improve the well-being and quality of life Downtown with an increase in transit services. The study looks to improve public places, sidewalks and streets around stations to increase neighborhood connections to the transit system. This includes reviewing residential, commercial and employment around the transit system are supportive to riders.

A Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning Study began at the end of 2019 with an investigation of a study area corridor extending half a mile around the 2nd Street SW and Broadway Avenue route. This study included assessment of recent plans, market conditions, existing and proposed transit, bike and pedestrian routes, and existing development and its character. An initial evaluation of locations that were likely to see change looked at vacant sites, surface parking lots, and older and lower density development sites. These are considered to have the highest potential to see more intensive use and partial or full redevelopment by 2040.

In February 2020, a first public consultation round was carried out by the City of Rochester, DMC, and project consultants. This consultation included two open house exhibitions, three pop-up events, online information and presentations, and direct outreach to organizations such as the Downtown Alliance, the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, RNeighbors, and the Rochester Diversity Council.

Public input was gathered on how people move around the corridor today, aspirations for future renovation, development, connections, public spaces, and potential RT station locations. More than 200 people participated.

Community members indicated a desire to see:

- A vibrant downtown, with more amenities, retail, and destinations for residents.
- An improved downtown pedestrian experience.
- Housing options to meet the needs of a range of residents by income, job type, and age.
- Family-oriented communities with homes for long-term residents.
- Transit and development that works in cold seasons.
- Managing transit *and* traffic.
- High-quality transit service, vehicles, and stations.

- Locating stations to access jobs, amenities, services, and homes for residents and parking nodes for commuters.

Second Public Consultation Round
The City of Rochester and Destination Medical Center will host the second round of public engagement beginning April 7, 2020.

At this stage, the TOD Planning Study will move from corridor-wide ideas to the next level of detail for segments of the corridor, such as 2nd Street SW west of Highway 52, St Marys Hospital to downtown, downtown, and Broadway Avenue. The consultation will review the following:

- Proposals and scenarios for the location of RT stations.
- Future development and growth.
- Land uses.
- Development types and heights.
- Open space opportunities.
- Bike routes.
- Pedestrian connectivity.
- Streetscape design.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, this phase of engagement will not use in-person group engagement techniques. The City of Rochester will use multiple online and media-based methods for community engagement and public feedback. Feedback can be provided via several survey tools, a project email address to send in comments and stakeholder telephone interviews.

Next Steps
Following this consultation, the City of Rochester will prepare Draft Final Plans for review at the beginning of June 2020. The intention is to adopt the Planning Study in July 2020, and submit them with other funding application documents to the Federal Transit Administration in September 2020.

Parallel to this TOD Planning Study, the City of Rochester will also be initiating architectural and engineering design for the rapid transit route and stations in June of 2020.