

TO: Capital Metro Board of Directors

FROM: Sharmila Mukherjee, Executive Vice President of Planning and Development  
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SUBJECT: Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid Extension Projects Update

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**Background:**

As part of the Project Connect System Expansion Program, the Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid route is envisioned as a 10-mile alignment that uses the existing MetroRapid Route 803 as the base corridor, with a 5-mile extension along Menchaca to Slaughter Lane; and a 5-mile extension along US 290 South to Oak Hill connecting Westgate Transit Center (project map attached). Project Connect was designed to utilize a combination of federal and local funding sources, with funding sources analyzed and identified during the federal evaluation component of the project development process.

The original project was referred to as the South Lamar and Menchaca Corridor in the Project Connect Program of Projects. To better reflect the project as currently envisioned, the projects will be referred to as the Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid Extension Projects.

The MetroRapid corridors under the Project Connect Initial Investment Sequence Plan have undergone detailed review of their existing conditions, ridership projections, and potential competitiveness along with a predicated rating under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Small Starts ratings criteria. As part of this review, the Expo and Pleasant Valley projects rated high enough to advance in the federal process. The Board has been updated on those two projects several times during recent Board meetings.

The team also analyzed the Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid Extension Projects and concluded that the Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid BRT corridor would not rate high enough under FTA's Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Small Starts rating criteria for Mobility

(Ridership), Cost Effectiveness, or Congestion Relief, especially in the areas of land use and economic development that are subcategories under Mobility.

Based on this conclusion, we plan on advancing the Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid Extension Project with local funding sources. Despite not advancing the project for CIG funding options, we will continue to review non-CIG federal grant opportunities as they become available with a goal of further leveraging the local investment.

### **Small Starts Project Evaluation/Ratings Criteria:**

FTA Small Starts is a very competitive federal discretionary grant program under the Capital Investment Program (CIG). It is important to consider the competitiveness of each corridor independently to appropriately guide the funding and implementation recommendations into Small Starts.

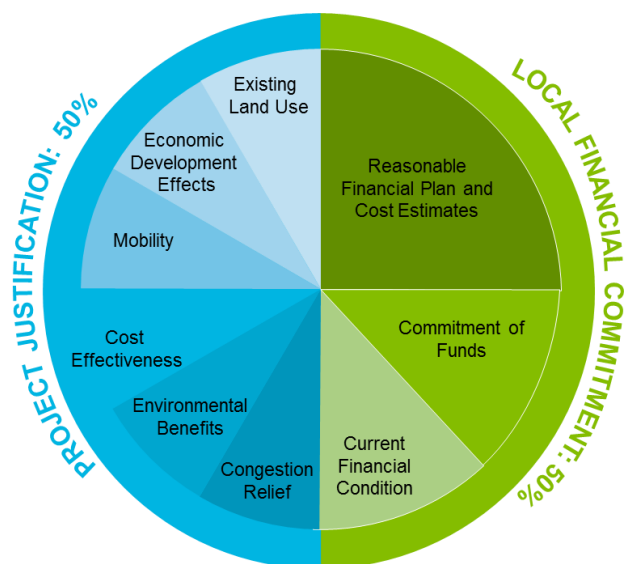
A project rating is split between Project Justification and Local Financial Commitment, each of which are made up of various quantitative and qualitative criteria and subfactors (see Figure 1 below). Each criterion is rated on the five-point scale, from Low to High.

A project must attain at least a 'Medium' rating (on a five-point scale from Low, Medium-Low, Medium, Medium-High, to High) in both Project Justification and Local Financial Commitment to receive a Medium overall project rating and qualify for potential Small Starts funding. Each criterion within Project Justification is weighted equally and must achieve a Medium or higher rating when combined. Projects can demonstrate achievement of 'Medium' for the Project Justification summary rating.

As part of the planning analyses to further develop service plan for Menchaca and Oak Hill and to assess competitiveness for FTA Small Starts,

Capital Metro identified all existing bus routes within a "quarter mile and with alignments parallel

**Figure 1. FTA Project Rating Criterion**



to and for a significant portion of” the South Lamar portion of the corridor. The existing routes included routes 3, 103, 300, 315 and 803. The corridor study area was established by creating a 1/4-mile buffer around the project alignment.

Current MetroRapid 803 operates at a 10-minute frequency and conceptually could operate at up to a 5-minute frequency as part of the future bus network to support full implementation of Project Connect Expansion Program. Current route 803 cannot be included in a new project analysis in federal ratings process as that segment is a previous federally funded project. To assess how service in the Menchaca and Oak Hill corridor would perform under Small Starts, ridership was compared to recently rated Expo and Pleasant Valley ridership. For illustration purposes, Table 1 below compares the Menchaca/Oak Hill project to Expo for three key ridership metrics for linked trips, unlinked trips, and project trips for future year 2040.

**Table 1: Expo to Menchaca/Oak Hill Ridership Comparison (2040)**

	<b>Menchaca/Oak Hill</b> <i>(entire ~10mi segment)</i>	<b>Expo</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Linked Trips</b>	530	800	66%
<b>Unlinked Trips</b>	1140	2300	50%
<b>Project Trips</b>	2250	6470	35%

*A linked trip is a trip where a rider may transfer between types of vehicles or transportation modes, or multiple stops, such as stopping at a daycare center or store along a commute trip. An unlinked trip is a passenger trip taken on a single vehicle, such as a single bus.*

Additionally, Capital Metro route 3 – a currently operational and tremendously important local service – falls within the quarter mile buffer of the project and offers an alignment parallel to the project corridor. Based on this information and analysis, we determined the MetroRapid Extension Project is anticipated to rank overall either Medium-Low or Low in project justification, and is therefore unlikely to be competitive for CIG small starts funding.

### **Next Steps**

Capital Metro continues to focus on our commitment to advance the Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid Extension Project as part of the Project Connect program.

While Capital Metro completed additional analysis and evaluation of the Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid Extension Project, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) simultaneously advanced through final design and began construction of the Oak Hill Parkway. Capital Metro has determined that the Menchaca segment of our project is able to proceed earlier than the Oak Hill segment, as there are no construction conflicts with TxDOT's Oak Hill Parkway Project. Below is a preliminary schedule of how we envision the project being implemented.

- **MetroRapid Service Begins on South Menchaca (Early 2024)**

Route 803 will be extended on Menchaca to Slaughter Lane from Westgate Transit Center (the current terminus) and will begin operation in early 2024. The project will include new electric bus charging infrastructure, modern stations and more. Capital Metro will also review the Route 3 frequency to support system ridership as part of optimal service delivery on behalf of our customers in the area.

- **MetroRapid Service Begins to Oak Hill**

The start of MetroRapid service to Oak Hill is based on the completion of the Oak Hill Parkway Project, which is slated to be complete in 2026. Capital Metro will continue to advance the development of design documents for the Oak Hill Extension so the project is as integrated as possible with TxDOT's project. We will also analyze future 803 operations with the goal of enhancing frequency north of Westgate Transit Center in combination with downtown routing connected to future rail stations.

- **Fleet Upgrade to Electric Buses**

As a key part of this project and the sustainability commitments that are part of Project Connect, Route 803 diesel fleets will be retired and replaced with 40- and 60-foot electric buses. This will be further coordinated with our zero-emission vehicle transition plan. There are no anticipated operational changes as part of this switch to more sustainable energy sources.

We are available to address any questions you may have regarding this update and can be reached at [Sharmila.Mukherjee@capmetro.org](mailto:Sharmila.Mukherjee@capmetro.org) and [Kenneth.Cartwright@capmetro.org](mailto:Kenneth.Cartwright@capmetro.org).

## August 2021 Menchaca and Oak Hill MetroRapid Extension Project Map

