

October 9, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Franklin County Board of Commissioners supports the Central Ohio Transit Authority's (COTA) request for funding under the Pilot Program for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) to conduct comprehensive capacity, economic, and market analysis as well as resource and policy recommendations for the remaining transit stations along the West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor.

The West Broad Street BRT corridor is the first rapid transit corridor that will be constructed as part of the regional LinkUS partnership. LinkUS is Central Ohio's comprehensive mobility initiative to help address growth, affordability and opportunity gaps in our community. In 2022, LinkUS was awarded a Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Grant from the Build America Bureau and the West Broad Street BRT was accepted into the Small Starts FTA CIG program.

The Board of Commissioners and our staff continue to be engaged in the collaborative effort to develop and execute the goals of LinkUs and currently serve on several leadership committees, workgroups, and visioning efforts to bring shared community goals to life. In particular, LinkUs seeks to achieve goals which are closely aligned with our Rise Together Initiative, a blueprint for reducing poverty in Franklin County. Through community engagement, feedback, and analysis, this blueprint identified the economic challenges and racial disparities arising from a current mismatch between locations of jobs and public transit, and it recommended action to which our Board of Commissioners is committed to create innovative transportation options connecting neighborhoods of concentrated poverty to jobs by including stronger partnerships with employers

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and economic development planners. A solution such as LinkUs, which seeks to connect more people with easier routes to job centers, closely aligns with these economic inclusion, workforce development, and equity goals.

This Corridor includes 17 stations and will run approximately 9.3 miles along West Broad Street connecting Prairie Township, Franklin Township, Hilltop, and Franklinton to Downtown Columbus. One-third of the residents along the corridor live below the poverty level, 16% of households lack access to a personal vehicle, 36% are Black, Indigenous, or persons of color, and 76% of residents live within an area of persistent poverty. Concurrently, the West Broad BRT is projected to connect residents to 100,000 jobs while adding 40,000 more residents by 2040. The corridor will also connect the workforce to Columbus State Community College, a federally designated anchor institution for one of the nation's five regional Workforce Hubs announced this year.

The Pilot Program for TOD is essential to implementing the LinkUS Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Action Plan that will build connected, walkable, and bikeable communities where the existing residents benefit from new residential and commercial development and are not displaced by it. The LinkUS ETOD strategy aims to preserve existing housing affordability, existing jobs and businesses, and valued community resources and amenities. It will create new housing with an emphasis on affordability, attracting new business investment, and job creation, and encourage new or enhanced community resources and amenities. At the same time, ETOD will be inclusive in ensuring diversity in housing options and price points, ensuring access to jobs, services and amenities for all residents.

The West Broad Street BRT is the first fixed guideway BRT project in Central Ohio and the additional resources that the grant could provide would be a large step toward helping our community address the challenges noted above. Columbus is concurrently seeking Capital Construction and Regional Partnership Challenge Grants within the USDOT Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program for the West Broad BRT.

The strong partnership of COTA, the City of Columbus, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and Franklin County and the major impact that the West Broad BRT will make in our community perfectly aligns with Pilot Program for TOD. It also aligns with Franklin County's workforce development goals linking transportation corridors to job centers. We encourage USDOT to fund this application and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



John O'Grady
Board President



Kevin L. Boyce
Commissioner



Erica Crawley
Commissioner