

sport stadiums, universities, fairgrounds, a convention center and a regional mall. The remainder of the corridor is primarily residential. Polaris, Crosswoods, Worthington, Easton, and the Short North are mixed use areas with an emphasis on retail and restaurants. The Ohio State House, the Arena District, Theater District, City Center, Science Center and redeveloping Brewery District are major traffic generators in the downtown area. The corridor has two large hospitals, Grant Hospital and the Ohio State University Hospital, serving more than 50,000 patients each year. Three colleges and universities (Ohio State University, Columbus State Community College, and Franklin University) are within the corridor. Four major sports stadiums are also in the corridor, including Ohio Stadium (where Ohio State University plays football), Schottenstein Center for basketball, Columbus Crew Soccer Stadium and Nationwide Arena. Other attractions include the Ohio State Fairgrounds, the Columbus Convention Center, and the Veterans Memorial Hall.

Approximately 233,000 people live in the study area and the population is expected to increase to more than 248,000 by year 2025. The North Corridor has approximately 235,000 jobs, which is one-third of the region's total employment. The number of jobs is expected to increase in the study area to 278,000 by 2025. Due to the population and employment within the North Corridor, COTA's busiest bus route is within the study area, serving approximately 13,000 riders per day in the Ohio State University area. The North Corridor is considered the most congested area in the Columbus metropolitan area.

COTA and MORPC have been working together to address the transportation problems and needs in the Columbus metropolitan area. In 1993, COTA and MORPC completed an update of the long range plan for public transportation in the region, which recommended a series of transit system improvements, including the development of eight fixed guideway transit lines using existing freight rail corridors. As a result of the Long Range System Plan Analysis, the 13-mile North Corridor, extending between the Polaris area and Downtown Columbus generally along Interstate-71, was identified as the priority corridor for fixed guideway transit improvements.

COTA and MORPC conducted a Major Investment Study (MIS) for the North Corridor between 1993 and 1995, with the recommendation to expand bus service as the locally preferred alternative. Following the completion of

Vision 2020, a long-range transit plan for central Ohio, in 2001 COTA and MORPC updated the 1995 North Corridor MIS. The MIS update concluded with the selection of a locally preferred alternative comprised of light rail transit and substantial improvements to bus service in the corridor between the Polaris area and Downtown Columbus.

III. Alternatives

The scoping meetings, other community meetings and written comments will be a major source of alternatives for consideration in the EIS. Transportation alternatives proposed for consideration in the North Corridor include:

1. A No-Action Alternative, which is the continuation of existing bus service policies in the study area. Under the No-Action Alternative, increases in service to the year 2025 would track with increases in demand due to population or employment growth in the area, in accordance with current service policies.

2. A Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative, which focuses on operational and low to medium cost capital improvements to bus transit routes and service in the project area, and attempts to serve the project purpose and need as much as possible without the construction of a new fixed guideway.

3. Build Alternatives comprised of Light Rail Transit (LRT) combined with enhanced bus service. The LRT route extends about 13 miles from the Polaris area to the Columbus Central Business District. From Polaris to about 17th Street, the light rail line is proposed to be located in railroad right-of-way (ROW) parallel to the CSXT Columbus line and NS Sandusky-Columbus rail lines. Street running operations are proposed for the light rail line from the vicinity of 17th Street to Fulton Street in the Downtown. The proposed street running alignments south of 17th Street would be along Summit and/or Fourth Streets with a transition to High Street at Interstate 670. An alternative alignment with street running operations along High Street between approximately 17th Street and Interstate 670 that would more directly serve the Ohio State University campus may also be considered.

Two options are under consideration for the portion of the project that is located in the rail ROW between Polaris and about 17th Street: Under one of the options for the railroad right-of-way, COTA may construct a new freight railroad intermodal facility in Delaware

or Union County in the central Ohio area.

Fourteen potential transit stations would be located to serve potential trip generators and in areas where economic development activities are planned or underway. The locations of stations and resulting impacts will be an important area of consideration during the study.

Based on public and agency input received during scoping, variations of the above alternatives and other transportation-related improvement options, both transit and non-transit, may be considered for the North Corridor.

IV. Probable Effects/Potential Impacts for Analysis

The FTA and COTA will evaluate all social, economic and environmental impacts of the alternatives analyzed in the EIS. Impacts may include: Land use, zoning, and economic development; secondary development; cumulative land use impacts; land acquisition, displacements, and relocation of existing uses; historic and archaeological resources; parklands and recreation areas; neighborhoods and communities; environmental justice; air quality; noise and vibration; hazardous materials; ecosystems; water resources; construction impacts; safety and security; utilities; finance; and transportation. Other potential impact issues may be added as a result of scoping and interagency coordination efforts. The proposed impact assessment and evaluation will take into account both positive and negative effects, direct and indirect impacts, short-term (construction) and long-term operational impacts, and cumulative effects. Measures to avoid or mitigate any significant adverse impacts will be developed.

V. FTA Procedures

In accordance with FTA policy, all federal laws, regulations and executive orders affecting project development, including but not limited to the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality and FTA implementing NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508 and 23 CFR part 771), the Clean Air Act, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, Executive Orders 11988, 11990 and 12898 regarding floodplains, wetlands, and environmental justice, respectively, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, and section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, will be addressed to the maximum extent practicable during the NEPA process.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be circulated to