

WHAT IS BUS RAPID TRANSIT

Bus Rapid Transit, or BRT, is a significantly enhanced bus system that combines the flexibility and cost savings of buses with the efficiency, speed, reliability, and amenities of a rail system. It integrates advanced technologies to provide significantly better service than traditional buses. Unique BRT elements typically include:

- Raillike stations and enhanced bus stops
- Easy-to-board, low floor buses
- Frequent, fast service
- Transit signal priority, allowing buses to stay on schedule
- Exclusive travel lanes for buses
- Real-time signs at stations indicating when the next bus will arrive

WHAT IS RFTA'S VISION FOR BRT?

The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) Board of Directors established in 2006 the following vision for BRT:

"By 2017, our region will significantly reduce dependence on oil through a resource efficient, climate friendly, multimodal transportation system with a regional express line unimpeded by traffic and weather, competitive with the private vehicle in terms of convenience, travel time and quality."

As a part of their vision, the Board developed several goals to measure BRT's success:

- Reduce State Highway 82 corridor congestion and related noise, pollution, delays, economic and quality of life impacts
- Serve multiple key destinations along the State Highway 82 corridor
- Increase access to jobs from affordable housing
- Reduce environmental/climate impacts of travel
- Reduce dependence on foreign/fossil fuels
- Support community development goals and objectives
- Address current operational capacity issues
- Provide flexibility in implementation

BRT HISTORY IN THE REGION

- 2003 RFTA's Corridor Investment Study (CIS) is released. The five-year study developed a regional transportation solution to address mobility needs between Glenwood Springs and Aspen/Snowmass Village. The study recommended BRT as the most economically feasible alternative to meet transit demand and mitigate traffic congestion, both of which are projected to increase in the future.
- 2004 The first rural, high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes in the nation were completely opened between Basalt and the Buttermilk Ski Area.
- 2006 RFTA Board of Directors adopted its 2017 Vision Statement for BRT. Evening peak period outbound bus-only lanes on Aspen's Main Street opened.
- 2007 RFTA initiated project planning by developing service concepts, preparing preliminary cost estimates, and convening a Stakeholder Committee to review work progress and provide input. RFTA solicited input from the public, in addition to the Stakeholder Committee, at open houses and group presentations. The Carbondale park and ride opened on Labor Day.
- 2008 Project planning continued including preparing the station concepts, preliminary facility requirements, and capital and operating cost estimates. The VelociRFTA brand was chosen for the project. Regional voters approved transit funding through a 0.4% (four cents on each \$10 dollar purchase) dedicated sales and use tax increase (0.3% in Carbondale). Additionally, voters approved \$44.5 million in bonding capacity. Public input continued. RFTA received approval from Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to enter into the Project Development phase of the Very Small Starts grant program.
- Dedicated bus lanes from the Buttermilk Ski Area to the Maroon Creek roundabout and a queue bypass lane from the Aspen Airport Business Center to Owl Creek Road opened. This project was funded by the Elected Officials Transportation Committee.
- 2009 Project development work began, including program management and preliminary design. Planning, transportation and public works staff from communities within the region collaborated with RFTA to define the design of stations. Work to obtain environmental clearances through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process began. RFTA received notice of an \$810,000 Congressional earmark for its BRT system. RFTA issued \$27.5 million in bonds for its BRT project
- 2010 Project development work continues. RFTA continues to collaborate with local jurisdictional representatives, including CDOT, and holds a round of public workshops in mid-February. President Obama includes \$24 million for the VelociRFTA project in his FY 2011 budget.

WHY DO WE NEED BRT?

There is a real need for exceptional public transportation in our region that successfully competes with the automobile. RFTA has heard from the public and their valley-wide partners that the best way to accomplish this is with a high-quality Bus Rapid Transit service that gets riders where they want to go quickly, comfortably, conveniently and happily.

HOW WAS THE VELOCIRFTA BRAND CONCEIVED?

In approaching the BRT project, RFTA realized that the public should be aware that a whole new animal in public transit is coming to the valley. RFTA wanted to assure the public that the reliability and broad spectrum of RFTA services would still be in place while introducing another option to valley riders that would bring speed, convenience and a simple limited-stop approach to their daily commute.

WHO WAS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING THE BRAND CONCEPT?

The RFTA Board of Directors and segments of the public were involved in the selection process to find a brand that would communicate the goals of the new bus rapid transit system.

HOW ELSE HAS THE PUBLIC BEEN INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING OF VELOCIRFTA?

The success of VelociRFTA depends on its ability to effectively serve the public by improving performance for existing passengers and attracting new ones. To better understand the needs and expectations of the regional community, RFTA conducted a public outreach program in 2007 and 2008 to inform and solicit feedback. The program included development of English-Spanish fact sheets and brochures, newspaper articles, presentations to community groups, and open-house meetings in many of the communities served by RFTA. The feedback received was an important part of developing the planned components of VelociRFTA. Input received from passengers, technical staff, elected officials and community residents in the region helped to develop the project. The BRT-specific website was launched in the winter of 2007.

The public's involvement is continuing throughout the current project development phase. Another round of public meetings was held in February 2010 to review and discuss the proposed station designs, BRT service plans, other proposed BRT features and coordination with other transit services. Notice of future public meetings will be posted to the website.

WHAT DID RFTA HEAR FROM THE PUBLIC DURING THE FEBRUARY WORKSHOPS?

RFTA received 571 comments during the workshops and via email and mail. Overwhelmingly the comments are supportive of BRT and the elements proposed. The greatest response—42% of all recorded comments—focused on the BRT bus shelter design and locations. Twenty-two percent (22%) of comments specific to the ITS features expressed enthusiasm for real time information for BRT buses, including digital signs, web and smart phone updates.

WHAT CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS ARE INCLUDED IN THE VELOCIRFTA PROJECT?

VelociRFTA includes the purchase of BRT-branded, low-floor buses; construction of 14 VelociRFTA stations at nine locations; the installation of Intelligent Transportation Systems technology on buses and at stations; additional new parking spaces; limited roadway improvements and transit signal priority at select locations.

WHY LOW-FLOOR, CLEAN DIESEL BUSES?

Buses with low floors allow riders to board the bus more easily and efficiently. They are also more accessible for those with mobility challenges, including people in wheelchairs, seniors and parents with strollers. In 2007, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued the most stringent emissions standards ever adopted for diesel powered transit buses. BRT buses will use clean-burning engines and ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel to meet EPA requirements and to improve the quality of the environment in the Roaring Fork Valley.

WHAT KINDS OF ROADWAY IMPROVEMENTS ARE BEING PLANNED?

Minor roadway and traffic signal modifications will be made to give buses priority when needed to maintain their schedules. These improvements include queue jumping, or bypass lanes, at certain signalized intersections and traffic signal modifications at those intersections where congestion causes service delays. VelociRFTA will also take advantage of the bus/high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on Highway 82 between Basalt and the Maroon Creek roundabout and the evening peak period bus-only lanes on Aspen's Main Street. Other minor work within the roadways may also occur at the planned stations. The specifics of these improvements will be determined over the next year.

ARE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLIST IMPROVEMENTS ALSO BEING PLANNED?

Pedestrian and bicyclist improvements are proposed at each station, including enlarged platforms and additional bike racks. RFTA is coordinating with local jurisdictions and the Colorado Department of Transportation to enable important connections, including crossings of SH 82, to be planned for and constructed by those communities and agencies.

HOW WILL RFTA PAY THE PROJECT'S COST?

RFTA will use a combination of local and federal dollars. RFTA is considered eligible for federal funding through a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Very Small Starts grant program and is pursuing other federal funding opportunities.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE BRT PROJECT TO BE "ELIGIBLE FOR A VERY SMALL STARTS GRANT?"

The grant program has very specific requirements for determining project eligibility. This criteria includes an overall cost of less than \$50 million and a federal cost-share of no more than \$25 million with local funds making up the difference. The FTA also takes into consideration regional population and economic trends and local legislation or referenda needed to support the project. The FTA's review of the project's eligibility continues throughout the planning and design process to ensure that the project remains compliant.

WHAT WILL IT COST TO RIDE VELOCIRFTA?

Fares and fare structure are still being determined as a part of developing the system's Service plan, with the goal of making the fare structure more understandable and convenient for users. RFTA expects that the new service will be even more cost competitive with driving, over today's transit service, given the attractive features of BRT. For more information, RFTA's website—www.rfta.com—includes a gas cost savings calculator that enables people to estimate the cost difference between driving a car and riding the bus.

WHAT IS VELOCIRFTA'S ROUTE?

BRT will operate on SH 82 from South Glenwood Springs to Rubey Park in Aspen, with a short diversion to the RFTA park & ride facility on SH 133.

HOW FREQUENT IS THE VELOCIRFTA SERVICE?

The BRT service plan is currently being developed. In general, BRT service will operate at least 14 hours per weekday, with longer operating hours and weekend service possible depending on demand and the funding available. BRT buses will operate frequently throughout the day with the following planned service levels:

- AM peak—every 10 minutes
- Mid-day—every 15 minutes
- PM peak—every 10 minutes
- Evening—every 15 minutes

A ride between Glenwood Springs and Aspen is planned to take about an hour during peak periods. The level of service for VelociRFTA may be modified during shoulder seasons to correspond with demand. Local RFTA service will continue to operate as it does today—every 30 minutes. Some existing express and direct express services may be consolidated with BRT service to achieve greater operating efficiencies.

HOW WILL THE VELOCIRFTA SERVICE COORDINATE WITH LOCAL BUS SERVICE?

The arrival and departure of BRT buses will be closely timed with the arrival and departure times of city buses (such as Ride Glenwood Springs) to ensure ride connections are as seamless and convenient as possible. The success of the VelociRFTA service depends, in part, on the ability of all regional transit services to operate together as a cohesive system.

WHERE ARE THE PROPOSED VELOCIRFTA STATIONS AND HOW WERE THEY SELECTED?

Input from town and county staff, elected officials, and the public has been important in selecting the locations to be served by VelociRFTA. The following are planned as VelociRFTA stations:

- South Glenwood Springs
- Carbondale Park and Ride
- El Jebel (up and down valley stops)
- Willits (up and down valley stops)
- Basalt Park and Ride (up and down valley stops)
- Brush Creek Park and Ride
- Aspen Airport Business Center (up and down valley stops)
- Buttermilk Park and Ride (up and down valley stops)
- Rubey Park Transit Center



WHY ARE TWO STATIONS (EL JEBEL AND WILLITS) SO CLOSE TOGETHER?

The El Jebel station is the result of relocating the El Jebel Park and Ride from its current location to the SH 82 corridor. This move is critical in achieving the VelociRFTA goal of having a trip between Glenwood Springs and Aspen take about an hour. There is sufficient demand at the current park and ride to warrant an El Jebel station location. The Willits station is proposed to serve the Willits neighborhood and potentially the Tree Farm neighborhood, if that is approved and constructed. This station will not have a park and ride.

WHERE IS THE SOUTH GLENWOOD SPRINGS STATION LOCATED?

Currently, there are two options for the Glenwood Springs station—the Roaring Fork Marketplace and the former car dealership site located at 27th Street. Both options were discussed at the February public workshops and most people who commented preferred the 27th Street location.

WHERE WILL THE NEW PARKING SPACES BE LOCATED AND HOW WAS THIS DETERMINED?

Currently parking is available and dedicated at the Carbondale Park and Ride, the Basalt Park and Ride, the Brush Creek Park and Ride and the Buttermilk Park and Ride. New parking spaces are planned in coordination with stations in South Glenwood Springs and El Jebel. Additional spaces at Basalt are also part of the plan. Specific station locations and parking areas continue to be adjusted to reflect feasible parking supplies and to allow communities to maximize Transit Oriented Development (TOD) opportunities, if they desire. In addition to vehicle parking, covered parking for bicycles is planned at many of the stations.

WHAT WILL THE STATIONS BE LIKE?

Currently it is expected that the stations will include the following fundamental components:

- Shelters with seating and leaning areas to provide protection from sun, wind, rain, and snow
- Station and VelociRFTA identification signage
- Schedule and route information
- Electronic signs showing real-time arrival information
- Trash and recycling receptacles
- Bicycle racks
- Parking at most locations
- Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technology

Additional station components and unique identifiers for each location may be included depending on funding. Station design plans and details are currently being determined by RFTA with the help of the local communities, the public, and CDOT.

These components may include:

- Sheltered bicycle racks
- Restrooms
- Ticket vending machines at high-use stations
- Vending machines
- Concessions and other commercial uses
- Additional parking
- Public art and gathering places
- Wi-Fi internet service
- Raised concrete platforms that match the low-floor bus to make boarding and alighting faster and easier
- Security features, such as phone with 911 dispatch



WHAT IS AN INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM?

VelociRFTA includes Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technology to support real-time information on bus arrivals at stations and computer aided dispatching to improve the system's response time to traffic congestion and other sources of delay. The VelociRFTA project could include a central computer system, electronic signs showing arrival/departure times and on-board equipment, including automatic passenger counters, a global positioning system (GPS) and digital radios, for both the new BRT buses and the existing RFTA fleet. These features are currently being evaluated and priced by RFTA.

HOW DOES VELOCIRFTA CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS RFTA, REGIONAL AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY GOALS?

Implementation of VelociRFTA is a fundamental part of RFTA's 2017 Vision Statement, which is to "Significantly reduce dependence on oil through a resource efficient, climate friendly, multimodal transportation system with a regional express line unimpeded by traffic and weather, competitive with the private vehicle in terms of convenience, travel time, and quality." VelociRFTA will also incorporate community green goals related to preserving dark skies, recycling, and energy-efficient facility design and construction. RFTA heard from the public at the February workshops that green building practices are important, and RFTA is committed to including these practices to the extent practically and cost effectively possible.

Here are some other RFTA "green" facts:

- RFTA replaces about 100,000 gallons of oil-based petroleum products with biofuels each year.
- It is important to remember that any type of biofuel usage pales in comparison to simply reducing personal cars by using public transit.
- RFTA services offset 24,888,169 passenger miles in 2006.
- RFTA services offset 16 million pounds CO₂ to the environment in 2006.

I UNDERSTAND THAT RFTA NEEDS TO COMPLETE AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA) FOR THIS PROJECT. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

An EA is a one of a kind environmental study. It helps the government agencies and the public make well informed decisions about the best way to meet future needs while making investments in their community. The EA documents the decision making process. The EA for this project has been submitted to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for review and a public hearing was held on the EA draft in September.

WHO IS ON THE VELOCIRFTA TEAM?

The VelociRFTA Team consists of experts from RFTA, HNTB, Parsons Transportation Group, Bluegreen, Noelhouse Creative, Schmueser Gordon Meyer, Michael Baker Jr, Zgroup Architects, Connect One Design, and Sopris Engineering. RFTA's Michael Hermes is the BRT Project Manager and Angela Kincade is the BRT Deputy Project Manager. While working under the oversight of Dan Blankenship, RFTA's Chief Executive Officer, they are responsible for the direction of the VelociRFTA team. Other RFTA BRT team members include: Kent Blackmer and John Hocker, Operations Directors; Kenny Osier, Fleet Maintenance Director; David Johnson, BRT Assistant Project Manager & Planning Director; Phil Schultz, IT Director; John Tangen, Finance Director; Dawn Mullally Chase, Marketing and Creative Manager; Jason White, Planner and Amy Skinner, Business Specialist.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Important milestones include:

- Continued Jurisdiction Coordination
- Additional Public Outreach
- Environmental Assessment Review and Approval
- Very Small Starts Project Construction Grant Approval
- Right of Way Acquisition
- ITS Procurement
- Vehicle Procurement
- Construction