

VelociRFTA Fact Sheet

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:

- Rail-like 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) was 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 Buttermilk Ski Area.



- 2006 RFTA Board of Directors adopted its 2017 Vision Statement for BRT. Evening peak period outbound bus-only lane on Aspen's Main Street opened.
- 2007 RFTA initiated project planning by developing BRT 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 \$44.55 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 prepares for the next 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 winter 2007.

The public's involvement is continuing throughout the current project development phase. Another round of public meetings will be 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. Future public meetings will be announced on the RFTA BRT website—www.rftabrt.com.

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.

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 structures are still being determined as a part of developing the system's Service Plan, with the goal of making them more understandable and convenient for users.

WHAT IS VELOCIRFTA'S ROUTE?

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

HOW WILL THE VELOCIRFTA SERVICE COORDINATE WITH LOCAL BUS SERVICE, SUCH AS RIDE GLENWOOD?

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

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?

VelociRFTA station design standards are currently being developed. When completed, the standards will be used to prepare the detailed design for station construction. 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.

WHO IS ON THE VELOCIRFTA TEAM?

The VelociRFTA Team consists of experts from RFTA, HNTB, Parsons Transportation Group, Bluegreen, Noelhouse Creative and Schmueser Gordon Meyer. 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.

Through a competitive bidding process, RFTA hired the consulting firm of HNTB to assist it in the program management and project development phase of work. HNTB is at the leading edge of advancing the development and implementation of quality transit systems throughout the nation. They bring world class transit experience to transit authorities across the country to plan, design and construct a variety of systems that help move people and goods. Four local firms are also assisting RFTA as a part of the HNTB team. Parsons Transportation is assisting with project oversight. Bluegreen, a planning and design studio located in Aspen, is providing public engagement expertise, as well as station planning and design support. Noelhouse Creative, a visual marketing and branding firm located in Carbondale, is providing strategic branding support services. Schmueser Gordon Meyer, an engineering firm located in Glenwood Springs, is providing surveying and construction management support.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

In the summer of 2010, RFTA will select a design engineering consultant to work with RFTA and the HNTB Team to prepare the detailed design drawings for the project's construction. Other 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