

AA FAQ-March 2011

What is the purpose of the Greater Downtown Circulator Alternatives Analysis (AA)?

At its core, an alternatives analysis (AA) is about providing the public, local officials, and potential funding partners with sufficient information for the decision-at-hand. In other words, “What is the best solution among the options for addressing a corridor’s transportation problems? What are the benefits from the solution? How much is it going to cost? What is the best way to pay for the solution? And is a rail solution or other type of fixed guideway solution best overall?”

Therefore, this alternatives analysis begins with a solid understanding of the transit problems that need to be solved in the greater downtown area. Above all it is about engaging the public, but an AA is essential if the solution is to ever be eligible for federal capital funds. The problem to be solved is defined in the “purpose and need” of an AA corridor study.

Who is sponsoring the study?

The Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority (COTPA) is sponsoring the study. COTPA is a regional public trust administered by the City of Oklahoma City. COTPA is responsible for providing safe, efficient and convenient public transportation to the citizens in various communities across central Oklahoma and plans for transit in conjunction with other partners.

What federal funds can an AA help attract?

New Starts capital funds are the federal funds which are usually referred to. The New Starts project development process has many phases and an AA is step two out of about four steps. Capital funds are the funds used to build a public works project such as a streetcar track, to establish the electrification infrastructure, or to buy buses or other vehicles. In recent years the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has also announced other capital funding programs which also require that an AA has been completed, such as Small Starts, Very Small Starts, TIGER, Urban Circulator Grants, TIGERII, and others. Still, other funding sources such as annual federal STP-UZA funds can be used for the projects.

How is the AA different from planning for MAPS Streetcar?

MAPS is focused solely on a 5-6 miles of a streetcar system to be planned and built. The COTPA AA must consider a larger area, longer system and more technologies than MAPS streetcar. The fixed guideway alignment identified in the AA will be recommended by the citizens serving on the COTPA Steering Committee for the Downtown Circulator Alternatives Analysis. That Steering Committee and the MAPS3 Transit/Modern Streetcar Subcommittee work closely and feature some of the same citizens. The AA’s recommendations as to the route and vehicle type will be recommended to the MAPS subcommittee, the MAPS Advisory Board, the COTPA Board of Trustees, and finally to the Mayor and City Council. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will also receive and review the results of the AA. Although the AA could

help determine the routes for the starter segment of the MAPS Streetcar, that MAPS decision is ultimately the decision of the Mayor and City Council.

What area is meant by the term Greater Downtown?

The study boundaries roughly encompass 23rd and the State Capitol to the north, Oklahoma River to the south, Lottie to the east and to west by St. Anthony Hospital and Western Avenue.

What is meant by the term technology?

This is a term used in the professional trade that roughly means the type or class of vehicle. Types of system technologies to be analyzed will include vehicles which operate along a fixed rail or guideway like state-of-the-art electric “light rail” modern-style streetcars used in Portland or Seattle, as well as the potential of vintage style streetcar like those in New Orleans or Little Rock. Also considered are special low-floor hybrid or other buses running in a special busway like Denver’s 16th Street downtown “MallRide.” Another example to be studied is simply regular bus/trolley service not in a special guideway, but with dramatically improved frequencies and longer service hours.

How is the AA Citizen Involvement different than the Lets Talk Transit meetings?

The primary focus of the seven spring 2010 Let’s Talk Transit (LTT) meetings was to get community input about the core part of Downtown that roughly corresponded to the 180 acres of Project 180 Streetscape area. In this way, citizen input for both MAPS transit and AA was gauged early in the Project 180 construction process. The public feedback from these meetings was in this Alternatives Analysis (AA) study as part of the foundation for the preliminary alignment alternatives in the heart of downtown. The AA covers an area larger than 2000 acres.

How long will the AA take and what is the step after that?

As of January, 2011, the AA was programmed to be completed in July 2011.

What external factors may delay the completion of the AA?

As of August 2010, the factors which were beyond the control of COTPA and the Steering Committee’s control were the upgrade of the region’s travel model by ACOG, the outcome of locating the new MAPs convention center, the regional intermodal hub study, review by the FTA, and obstacles that may be encountered during the Project 180 streetscape project. As of early 2011, the travel model was available for use. A new factor had appeared, and that was the uncertainty associated with crossing underneath the BNSF railroad tracks east of Broadway and east of EK Gaylord.

How do citizens get engaged?

Citizens can be engaged by attending the AA Community meeting and observing the MAPS Subcommittee meetings, but also by reviewing the www.letstalktransit.com website, and participating in various local coalitions.

What is meant by the term Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)?

Costs, benefits, and impacts of each alternative are developed and evaluated, funding strategies are analyzed, and a locally preferred alternative (LPA) is selected from these with public input to be advanced for further development. The LPA is based upon full disclosure and understanding of the estimated costs, benefits, and impacts of all alternatives.

Why is the proposed transit project called a “circulator?”

That word “circulator” is a nontechnical term that helps communicate what the eventual service will do for people. It will carry transport people around within a mile or so of the heart of downtown for various trip purposes. As it helps people circulate, this transit will not run in a circular route nor along a long linear corridor. The connotation of circulator is not like that of a just a parking shuttle, or a service that “feeds” people into a commuter system, and it is not to be confused with some link of the greater downtown to outlying areas like the zoo, Penn Square, or the Airport.

How does the upgrade and use of the ACOG Travel Model affect the AA?

The FTA requires that this process of estimating, calibrating, validating, and applying travel demand and performance to estimate the impacts of alternatives must be done using the model furnished by ACOG. Travel forecasting uses that model.

Does an AA focus more on economic development for vacant and sites or on areas of existing buildings and underused buildings?

There must be a balance between serving the existing built environment and the likely economic development. That anticipated development needs to be reflected in the ACOG travel model’s assumptions about future land use.

How does the AA relate to the Project 180 area and the Project 180 construction?

The primary focus of the seven spring 2010 Let’s Talk Transit (LTT) meetings was to get community input about the core part of Downtown that roughly corresponded to the 180 acres of Project 180 Streetscape area. Specifically, the *Let’s Talk Transit* meetings resulted in the development of seven north-south and seven east-west alignment alternatives. These helped case some Project 180 streets to be reserved for action until after the AA was further along. Finally, the AA also spurred a study to help identify streets which were not feasible to use due to Project 180 impacts or due to extreme underground utility obstacles.

What is the end product or products of the AA?

A maps and series of reports about the locally preferred alternative (LPA) and how it was developed, along with a signal that the FTA has concurred. That concurrence can be the

approval of allowing the Oklahoma City project to enter a phase called “Project Development.” In that phase the fixed guideway project has a known route and vehicle technology, but is more closely studied for environmental impacts, potential block-by-block measures that help finalize the design, to gain added community input, and to move the project closer to potential federal funding.

What is the COTPA 2030 Fixed Guideway Plan (FGP) and how does it Relate To Streetcar?

The Plan was the outcome of the COTPA Fixed Guideway Study (FGS) finished in early 2006. The 2030 COTPA Fixed Guideway Study, or Plan, recommended commuter rail transit (CRT), a downtown area streetcar, bus rapid transit (BRT), dramatically enhanced bus service, high occupancy vehicle (HOV) highway lanes and more. Its preparation evaluated a broad range of options and placed the most promising and interrelated ones into a package called the regional 2030 System Plan, the FGP. The 2030 FGP process presented our metro area a unique opportunity to identify transportation solutions that improve mobility, bolster connections among growth centers, enhance economic development, help people save money, and benefit air quality. The COTPA FGS, now often referred to as the FGP, was a study of transit needs in cities throughout the entire region and was sponsored under the leadership of the Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority (COTPA). Intensive transit planning done by COTPA for Edmond and with CART around 2004 with COTPA’s help meant that the FGS enhanced bus component did not get so specific about Norman and Edmond in the 2005 FGS, aside from the commuter rail and HOV components. The FGP was developed with grassroots and grassroots involvement. COTPA’s efforts featured a large citizens Steering Committee, consultant expertise, ACOG’s leaders, and broad public involvement in many cities.

What does the phrase “Fixed Guideway” System mean?

It is a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) phrase that basically means a system of vehicles that can operate on its own pathway or guideway constructed for that purpose. So it is designed for transit, and fixed in the sense that a track, rail, dedicated lane, bridge, system of passenger platforms or other “fixed” in place improvement is relatively permanent, visible, and specific.

Who developed this 2030 System Plan and what citizens, business leaders and special interests groups were involved?

Based on COTPA’s regional foresight and initiative, the 2030 System Plan was developed by one of the world’s largest international planning and engineering firms (Carter & Burgess, now known as Jacobs) and involved a Steering Committee of over 30 local leaders of business, government, chamber, and key interest groups. In fact the mayors of Norman, Edmond, Oklahoma City (OKC), and many other business and other officials served on the Steering Committee. COTPA’s leadership sponsored the study and provided oversight of the consultant and the broad public participation process.

Is the COTPA FGP a regional plan? What does it say about my community's needs?

Yes, it is a regional plan and has bus and/or rail recommendations applicable to the following communities: Bethany, Choctaw, Del City, Edmond, Midwest City, Moore, Mustang, Nichols Hills, Norman, Oklahoma City, The Village, Warr Acres, Yukon, and yet it has implications for many other smaller area towns adjacent to the lines on the 2030 System Plan map. The FGP urges a regional approach, and a regional transit authority (RTA) independent of any existing governments. The RTA is one that likely evolves from the existing semi-regional COTPA (METRO Transit) and possibly from mergers with other transit providers in Norman, Guthrie, and Edmond.

Who has the plan officially adopted the plan?

The COTPA FGP has not been formally adopted by any entity as that is not typically how local plans are put into effect in central Oklahoma. The Plan was formally recognized in 2006, however, by resolutions of the governing bodies at ACOG, COTPA, and The City of OKC.

What does the COTPA FGP say about light rail? Isn't modern streetcar the same thing?

Light rail as they have for commuters in Dallas and Denver or Washington D.C. is too costly to be feasible in our region in the next decade or so. Short trains driven by locomotives are what is meant by commuter rail transit (CRT), and it has promise. Downtown streetcar is only a variant of light rail, in that streetcar is a shorter-length, narrower vehicle. It is similarly powered by overhead catenary wires but is better suited than light rail for sharp turns and lower operating speeds, such as up to 45 mph.

How does the 2030 FGP relate to the ACOG Regional Transit Dialogue?

The 2030 FGP was the springboard that is the basis of the ACOG RTD process. The RTD process starts with the System Plan and features the FGP plan recommendations of a true regional authority funded by a dedicated tax. The RTD has helped leaders and cities become acquainted with the FGP and will help the region gain consensus on moving ahead on the basic steps recommended in the FGP. The RTD involves the new leaders of any cities that played prominent role in the FGP process and helps these leaders discuss, collaborate, and foster cooperation and trust necessary to set the stage for achieving those basic steps.

What does the FGP say about streetcar and the needs of people with disabilities?

All the streetcar and related planned improvements will be overly accessible. The mix of land uses typical near streetcar stops and urged by the FGP will also make it much easier to live, shop and recreate in a small, easy-to-navigate district. The ramps, voice enunciation and even the added bus and paratransit service in the FGP will add much convenience to the lives of people with disabilities (PWD).