



# AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council

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## STAFF

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## SUBJECT

**First Reading of Ordinance No. 030, 2023, Adopting the North College MAX BRT Plan as a Component of City Plan.**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is for City Council to consider adoption of the North College Max Plan. The North College MAX BRT Plan is the result of approximately 18 months of community engagement, information analysis, and concept refinement. The plan provides recommendations for Bus Rapid Transit, local transit routes, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, future development, and affordability.

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## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of the Ordinance on First Reading.

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## BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

### A. PROJECT GENESIS

Development of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on North College Avenue was identified as a goal in the Transit Master Plan (2019) and has been requested by the North College business and residential community for many years. In addition to policy documents and community demand, expansion of transit services to North College is consistent with the City's climate and equity goals.

Our Climate Future sets a goal of 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and identifies expansion of public transit and bicycle facilities, and increased density, as "big moves" needed to achieve these goals. The current routes (8 & 81) serving the North College corridor are the fastest growing routes in the Transfort system.

The City's efforts to focus on equity includes prioritizing the North College area for this planning process. Notably, the North College area is made up of approximately 41% Hispanic and Latinx community members, as compared to nearly 12% in the Fort Collins community at large. The North College area also has a lower average annual household income (\$47,200) than the rest of Fort Collins (\$68,000). Additionally, North College is home to many social service agencies including Salud Medical Clinic, Larimer County Department of Human Services, Food Bank for Larimer County, Murphy Center for Hope, Catholic Charities of Larimer County, and The Family Center La Familia. The Fort Collins Rescue Mission also is planning to relocate to the area.

These conditions lead to the successful application for an FTA grant (5338 TOD Pilot) to provide funding for consultant assistance to create the North College MAX BRT Plan.

## **B. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the North College MAX BRT Plan and process:

- **Guide transportation infrastructure improvements and new development** in a way that allows North College Avenue to continue its evolution as the northern entryway to the City with a positive community look and feel.
- **Plan and provide steps for implementation for increased transit investment** and a multi-modal transportation network in the North College area that is safe, comfortable, and convenient for people of all ages and abilities.
- **Build upon Citywide efforts to preserve affordability for residents and local businesses** and recommend appropriate strategies for the North College area in particular.
- **Guide new development** that can provide affordable housing, essential services, and open space in the area.
- Contribute to numerous other efforts in the North College area to **strengthen its unique local character and sense of place**.

## **C. PROJECT PHASES AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

The North College MAX BRT Plan has taken an equity-forward approach to plan creation and community engagement. Prior to beginning the planning process, an Equity and Engagement Working Group was created. This group, made up of North College community members and representatives of social service agencies, framed the strategies used in the public involvement plan.

In each phase of the project, all material and events/workshops were available in English and Spanish. Community-based organizations (Spanish-speaking) traveled door-to-door to establish trust and meet community members where they were most comfortable. Also, incentives for participation were provided as recognition that a person's time is valuable and engaging with the City competes with other priorities such as work, childcare, and free time.

Each phase of the project presented information to the community and incorporated feedback into each subsequent phase, thus creating a feedback loop and outcomes that were familiar to stakeholders. Due to this consistent approach, engagement in the final phase of the project garnered very few requests for changes and many nods of appreciation.

Project Phases: (Engagement summaries from each phase are available in Appendix A.)

### **Phase 1 – Existing Conditions**

Opportunities and challenges for existing transportation infrastructure, travel patterns, and development trends were presented to the community and stakeholders. (See Appendix B – Existing Conditions Report). Participants shared that their top concerns were safe and comfortable transportation and fears about gentrification.

### **Phase 2 – Alternatives Evaluation**

Possible future transit alignments, options for multi-modal infrastructure, and the close relationship between land use and provision of transit were presented to the community and stakeholders. (See Appendix C - Alternatives Analysis). Participants shared that increases in density for new jobs and housing is acceptable if it will bring BRT and safer, more comfortable bicycle and pedestrian facilities to the North College corridor.

### **Phase 3 – Recommendations**

Based on the feedback and analysis in the first two phases, recommendations for BRT, bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure, and future land development were presented to the community and stakeholders. Feedback and discussions were primarily focused on confirming what we heard and discussions about implementation and timeline.

### **Phase 4 – Draft Plan**

Outcomes consistent with the trajectory of the plan and revised, based on community and stakeholder feedback, the draft plan document was posted for public review and stakeholder meetings. The feedback provided few areas for adjustment and was generally supportive of the plan and complementary of the process. Revisions to the plan were made based on feedback throughout the process, including comments by the Planning and Zoning Commission specific to phasing implementation.

## **D. PROJECT VISION**

Based on the feedback from the community and stakeholders, the following vision statement was crafted:

*The vision for North College Avenue is for a safe, accessible, attractive, and affordable corridor for people who live, work, and visit the North College area. North College Avenue will be a gateway and hub for local and regional transit connections that link people to essential services, recreation, and entertainment.*

*The corridor will connect to a comfortable and convenient network for people using active modes made up of sidewalks, share-use paths, and bike lanes.*

*Transit stations will be focal points for new, multi-story development that de-emphasizes surface parking. Corridor development will bring upgrades to infrastructure, improve public space, and fill in existing vacant land and buildings. New development will occur in a way that protects the natural environment and preserves affordability and diversity of residents, local businesses, and service providers. North College Avenue will become a district and destination with its own distinct character that is driven by residents, workers, and local business owners. The corridor will be a safe and comfortable corridor to travel through and a destination for people of all socio-economic statuses, ages, and abilities.*

*The corridor will:*

- *Be a gateway into the City of Fort Collins.*
- *Include a safe, comfortable, and convenient transportation network for people taking transit, using active modes, and driving.*
- *Stay affordable for residents and local businesses.*
- *Grow in a way that protects the natural environment and the local community.*
- *Provide ample services, places to live, employment opportunities, and spaces for recreation.*
- *Display its own unique local character.*

## E. PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

(Transportation plan recommendations are located on page 21 of plan document.)

The plan recommends a **phased approach** to implementation for the following reasons (Phasing details are found on page 34 of plan document):

- A major capital project was constructed on North College less than a decade ago. The construction of sidewalks, streetscape amenities, and medians presented challenges for residents and especially businesses in the North College corridor. More major construction in the near term is not welcome.
- The mid- and long-term recommendations are not yet needed in the corridor but associated conditions will be monitored to determine when they are needed.
- The mid- and long-term recommendations are expensive and without meeting certain population and ridership requirements this project is not eligible for the FTA grants that typically pay for such improvements (such as the Small Starts grant used for the MAX BRT).

### NEAR-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a new high frequency bus route on North College Avenue in the existing general purpose travel lanes at a 15-minute frequency.
- Consolidate existing local bus stops on North College Avenue at signalized intersections.
- Realign Route 8 to serve Blue Spruce Drive, Redwood Street, and Linden Street at a 30-minute frequency.
- Implement a micro-transit zone in the North College area to serve places not well-served by fixed-route transit.
- Construct infrastructure for people walking and biking, including segments of shared-use path north of Hibdon Court, new signals on North College Avenue, and improved bikeways, walkways, and crossings along streets parallel and connecting to North College Avenue.
- Adopt amendments to the Mason Street realignment identified in the Master Street Plan.
- Implement Transit Oriented Development (TOD) strategies including a TOD overlay; change setback and height standards; establish connectivity, outdoor space, and dominant block face requirements; adjust Architectural Standards; and create incentives to preserve existing commercial buildings.
- Implement strategies to preserve and increase affordability, including applying the Urban Renewal Authority's tools, requiring considerable public benefits from metro districts, rezoning the North College Mobile Home Park, leveraging the City's land bank, and establishing an affordable housing goal for the area.
- Implement affordable commercial lease strategies, develop business grants for local businesses, and provide incentives for building improvements and redevelopments for local businesses.

## MID-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

The large capital investments (marked with an \*) in the mid-term recommendations will not be implemented until the following **conditions** are met:

- Ridership on North College BRT is at 1,000 boardings per day, or
- Traffic becomes congested to the point that intersections on North College Avenue are experiencing a level of service F, or
- The population (currently approximately 7,000) and employment (currently approximately 16,125) of the area doubles from current levels, or
- CDOT plans a major rehabilitation project for North College Avenue and this plan's recommended improvements could occur at the same time.
- Prior to any major capital project related to this plan, an Equity Analysis is recommended to identify and mitigate possible negative outcomes.

### Recommendations:

- \*Construct Business Access Transit (BAT) bus-only lanes, MAX stations with mobility hubs, and complete shared-use paths on North College Avenue
- \*Acquire property for and construct a bus turn-around north of Terry Lake Road
- Increase bus frequency (15-minutes on North College Avenue and 15-minutes on Route 8) and service hours
- Create a mobility hub near the Wilcox Lane roundabout in conjunction with redevelopment of the former Albertson's
- Construct access infrastructure for people walking and biking along Mason Street and Red Cedar Circle
- \*Construct medians south of Conifer Street
- Provide regional stormwater detention

## LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Once ridership on North College approaches 1,500 boardings per day, recommend increasing North College BRT frequency to 10-minutes and evaluate feasibility of interlining with MAX on Mason Street

## **CITY FINANCIAL IMPACTS**

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Near-term:

- Capital costs: \$3M (plus optional \$2.3M to replace current buses with battery/electric buses)
- Operating costs: \$500k/year for microtransit

- Fixed route operations are revenue neutral

Mid-term:

- Capital costs: \$27M (plus optional \$1M for an additional 40-foot battery electric bus)
- Operating costs: +\$1M/year

Long-term:

- Capital costs: \$1.3M for additional articulated battery electric bus
- Operating costs: \$500k/year

As work is completed toward implementation, various approaches will be utilized. Primarily, State and Federal grants will contribute toward payment for transit improvements (typically with a 20% - 50% local match), bicycle and pedestrian improvements will be included in the capital improvement list and will be constructed incrementally with new land development and redevelopment.

**BOARD / COMMISSION / COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

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The Planning and Zoning Commission recommended approval of the North College MAX Plan by a 7 – 0 vote on November 17, 2022.

The Transportation Board recommended approval by a 5 – 2 vote on October 19, 2022. (Dissenting votes suggested that the long-term recommendations should be implemented immediately and that the cross-section graphics should show a semi-truck.)

**PUBLIC OUTREACH**

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Community outreach has been extensive, and focused on equity. A summary is included in the project narrative, above. Below is a snapshot of engagement. For more details, please review Appendix A.



## ATTACHMENTS

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1. Ordinance for Consideration
2. Ordinance Exhibit A
3. Project Plan Area
4. Transportation Board Minutes – October 19, 2022
5. Planning and Zoning Commission Minutes – November 17, 2022
6. Appendix A – Outreach Summary
7. Appendix B – Existing Conditions Report
8. Appendix C – Alternatives Analysis Report
9. Appendix D – Design Cutsheets
1. Appendix E – Cost Estimate