



Date of Memo: October 11, 2022
Current Meeting: October 20, 2022
Board Meeting: October 27, 2022

BOARD MEMORANDUM

TO: Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation (IPTC) Board of Directors
THROUGH: President/CEO Inez P. Evans
FROM: Chief Development Officer Jennifer Pyrz
SUBJECT: Consideration and approval of change to project definition for the Blue Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project

ACTION ITEM A – 11

RECOMMENDATION:

It is requested that the Board authorize IPTC Staff to modify the Blue Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project definition to divert off W. Washington Street west of Holt Road and use I-70 to connect to the Indianapolis International Airport. No changes are recommended east of Holt Road at this time.

BACKGROUND:

In 2020, Segment 1 of the Blue Line BRT project, which lies between the Indianapolis International Airport and Holt Road, was put on hold at 30% design pending resolution of legislative actions to modify the segment's configuration. The remainder of the project (everything east of Holt Road) was progressed to 60% design. The project was originally intended to begin construction in late 2020, then moved out to 2023 as Red Line construction was nearing completion. With legislative actions pending during the last two sessions, that timeline has been further extended, with current schedule showing a late 2024 construction start.

DISCUSSION:

The Blue Line project is at a stage of development where right-of-way acquisition must proceed, or risk further delay to the project. IPTC has determined that to begin purchasing right-of-way in Segment 1 of the project would introduce unacceptable risk to the agency. This is because of factors outside of its control including pressure from the Indiana State Legislature to modify the configuration in that segment. Risks include expending additional funds, acquiring unnecessary property, and/or risking further delay to the project start. There is also potential for losing FTA Small Starts funding because of the prolonged delay.

To avoid these outcomes, IPTC Staff recommends modifying the Blue Line project to continue as planned between N. Tibbs Avenue and Cumberland but to divert off W. Washington Street at Holt Road and continue west on I-70 directly to the Indianapolis International Airport. In this scenario, Segment 1 of the Blue Line would be replaced with express (non-stop) service running on I-70 between N. Tibbs Avenue (Central Green station) and the Indianapolis International Airport. Note that the N. Tibbs Avenue (Central Green) station is the first station east of Holt Road and would be the westernmost BRT station on Washington Street in this scenario.

Under this scenario, local, non-BRT, service would still be provided on W. Washington Street west of N. Tibbs Avenue, similar to the service that is being provided today. Any enhancements to this section of W. Washington Street, such as upgraded stops or pedestrian improvements, would be considered separately from the Blue Line BRT project and on a separate timeline.

This recommendation aligns with the original Blue Line BRT project definition, approved by the Indianapolis MPO in 2013. It does not prevent future upgrades to service on W. Washington Street (west of N. Tibbs Avenue), when warranted, nor does it preclude IPTC from making improvements to support local transit service there, such as sidewalks and curb ramps. It aligns well with the transit demand in that section of W. Washington Street and better balances the level of investment across the corridor.

If approved, this change will be communicated to stakeholders and the public over the next several months in a variety of small group, one-on-one, and public meeting formats. This change will also be communicated as part of the Marion County Transit Plan Network Redesign outreach that is already underway.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board could reject this recommendation and direct IPTC Staff to continue with the Blue Line BRT project as it is currently defined, with service on W. Washington Street between Cumberland and S. High School Road, then to the Airport via S. High School Road and Perimeter Parkway.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Funding for the Blue Line project is provided from a variety of sources, including FTA Small Starts, Bond Revenues, 5307 Formula Funds, and local funds, as documented in the Capital Plan. This change will reduce design and construction costs. The exact value of the change will be determined as design is progressed.

DBE/XBE DECLARATION:

Not Applicable for non-fiscal action items.

STANDING COMMITTEE DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATION:

This action will be reviewed by the Finance Committee and Service Committee on October 20, 2022.