US 36 Mayors & Commissioners Coalition

and 36 Commuting Solutions

Consolidated Comments on RTD's Proposed US36 BRT

Operating Plan and Fare Study Recommendations

March 10, 2015

US 36 Bus Rapid Transit is anticipated to be a highly visible, stellar example of BRT for the region and the nation. The FasTracks program is intended to be a service enhancement program, so no area currently served by routes operating along the US 36 corridor should face service level reductions or service elimination as a result of FasTracks. Degradation of existing service to any areas along the US 36 corridor communities with the implementation of US 36 BRT is unacceptable.

The proposed service plan does not take into account areas of already occurring increased ridership demand associated with development and population growth. Indeed, in some growing areas of the corridor, less direct service is proposed than currently exists. We believe the service plan should improve service to both existing and new emerging markets for US 36 BRT to be successful. To that end, we have followed the following principles in developing our comments:

- BRT should serve existing and new/emerging markets and attract new transit riders to the US 36 corridor.
- BRT should fulfill all of the enhanced service committed to in the FasTracks Record of Decision from the US 36 BRT Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Service should be designed to have capacity on opening day to ensure a high quality customer experience.
- US36 BRT service should maximize investment in US 36 corridor improvements.
- RTD operating investment in the US 36 corridor should be comparable to other corridors approved under the FasTracks program.

To that end, we provide the following combined comments on the draft US36 BRT Operating Plan and the Fare Study Recommendations, since they are so closely inter-related, are under consideration at the same time, and must be integrated if US 36 BRT is to be successful.

<u>We Support the following recommendations</u>:

- **The Local fare classification for the BV (and other All-Station routes)**. BV riders will pay $2.60 under the proposed policy. This proposal treats All Station BRT similarly to the proposed Light Rail fare policy of eliminating zones, and classifying all LRT as local service.

- **Increased frequency of 15-minute All Station service mid-day and 10-minute frequency in the peak commute times.** The improved service to mid-corridor communities is beneficial.

- **New DWB Route adds additional capacity for Broomfield and Westminster to Union Station.** These are very high demand routes, and the proposal will improve service to these stations.

- **All-day fares at twice the single fare.** This proposal is a thoughtful and creative approach to addressing equity issues and concerns.

- **SkyRide service every 30-minutes from Boulder County to DIA with connection to Northwest Parkway** will provide a faster trip than today. Hourly service from Downtown Boulder Transit Center and Boulder Junction at Depot Square results in half hour service from Table Mesa Station. The use of the Northwest Parkway to DIA for these trips will provide a travel time savings for passengers.

- **Proposed SkyRide fare structure reduces costs from $13 to $10.** The fare reduction for SkyRide service will encourage more use.

Our concerns and associated recommendations are:

- **Key customers will experience less frequent, slower or complete removal of service because of FasTracks.** A 50% decrease of service frequency along the Broadway corridor (from 6 minutes to 10 minutes) in what is currently one of the highest ridership portions of the corridor. Eliminating Mid-day Express service between Downtown Boulder Transit Center and DUS impacts Boulder, Louisville and Superior customers.

    a. Recommendation: Retain mid-day express service along the corridor.

    b. Recommendation: Increase peak-hour express service along the Broadway corridor from 6 minutes to 5 minutes. This will help off-set the Flatiron Flyer's reduced per-bus storage capacity for bikes.

- **Less Direct/longer travel time to DIA for Broomfield and Westminster riders due to change in SkyRide routing.**

    Recommendation: RTD should implement a one-seat ride to DIA for Broomfield and Westminster riders.

- **Decreased service/elimination of direct service to the Boulder Flatiron Business Park/East Boulder area through elimination of Route S.**

    Recommendation: Retain current "one seat service" from Denver to the Flatirons Business Park and East Boulder (Hospital/East Campus/employment areas).

- **Eliminating Route 209 service connecting the Frasier Meadows neighborhood/Retirement Community to BRT.**

    Recommendation: Restore service.

- **Eliminating service between the times of midnight-2:00 a.m.**

    Recommendation: Restore Service.

- **Increased travel time and decreased frequency of service from Civic Center Station to the corridor by converting the HX route to local/all station service.**

  Recommendation: Retain Express level of service and current frequency between Civic Center and the corridor serving McCaslin and Flatiron Stations.

- **Lack of Service to Developed Markets**

  a. **No mid-day service is planned from Boulder Junction to Denver Civic Center.** The Boulder Junction to Civic Center Route has sufficient development currently under construction and demand to warrant the addition of 30 minute, mid-day service for opening day.

     Recommendation: Provide mid-day service from Boulder Junction to Civic Center.

  b. **No direct service from DUS to Boulder Junction**- If a rider from Boulder Junction wants to begin or end a trip at Denver Union Station, a transfer will be required to reach Boulder Junction.

     Recommendation: Retain current express service with current frequencies from Boulder Junction to Civic Center as an express route; otherwise it will be degrading service for current HX riders.

  c. **Flatiron PnR Service does not receive service levels in accordance with the significant development that is underway.**

     Recommendation: Maintain the HX service to this station.

  d. **No airport service is planned from Boulder Junction to DIA.** Boulder Junction includes the Hyatt Hotel and sufficient development currently under construction to warrant the hourly headways in the peak.

     Recommendation: Provide airport service from Boulder Junction at Depot Square to DIA, alternating the west end trip terminals between Boulder Transit Center and Boulder Junction at Depot Square.

- **Adjust Proposed Fare Structure for US 36 BRT Service.** In some cases, identical trips are charged different fares. The US 36 BRT service is categorized into two service types; "All Station" and "Express". The "All Station" service is proposed to pay the local fare ($2.60), while Express service would pay the regional fare ($5.50). For example, if someone is going from McCaslin into Boulder, from Westminster to DUS, or stops within Boulder they would pay $2.60 if they got on an "All Station" bus, but $5.50 if they got on the "Express" bus even though the trip is identical. A passenger would experience the same # of stops on the same type of vehicle; but would pay twice the fare. Expecting passengers to schedule their trip depending on whether the next bus is local or express is inconsistent with the concept that passengers using BRT can arrive at a station knowing a bus will arrive quickly.

  a. Recommendation: A local fare should be charged on services or service legs that have multiple stops. All westbound McCaslin trips should be classified as Local Fare Service since it stops at every station. The DWB (Broomfield/Westminster – DUS) should be classified as Local Service since it stops at intermediate stations. As well as trips within Boulder - for example trips between the Boulder Transit Center and CU.

b. Recommendation: Price "Express BRT" service with "express" fare level, rather than regional fare.

- **Comparable Investment/Benefit With Other FasTracks Corridors.** We have two primary concerns with the proposed BRT Service Plan and Fare Study Recommendations.

  The proposed BRT service plan for opening day appears to be primarily limited to the reallocation of the existing base system operating budget, with little increased (less than 11%) operating resources allocated from FasTracks. The proposed plan does not provide the US 36 BRT corridor with a meaningful increased investment in service comparable to that provided to other FasTracks corridors; rather it merely re-allocates the existing base system operations funding. FasTracks funds should be allocated to provide more robust service throughout the US 36 corridor ensuring the success of BRT for individual communities, as well as building support for expansion of BRT to other parts of the region.

  Impacts of the fare study recommendations on the EcoPass have not been evaluated. We are concerned that the effects of the recommended changes on the EcoPass program have not been evaluated. We urge that a cooperative effort with corridor community involvement be undertaken to improve benefits and minimize impacts to this highly successful program.