

2023 RAISE GRANT APPLICATION

# NEW ORLEANS DOWNTOWN TRANSIT CENTER & CONNECTING CORRIDORS



New Orleans Regional  
Transit Authority and  
City of New Orleans

February 28, 2023

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**Application Snapshot**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## DOWNTOWN NEW ORLEANS TRANSIT CENTER: A REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT PROJECT

1. **Safety:** The project makes walking, cycling, riding and driving safer through this major transportation corridor.
2. **Environmental Sustainability:** Transit priority and better passenger amenities means more transit riders. Transit ridership helps decrease energy use and emissions.
3. **Quality of Life:** This multimodal project expands transportation choices and increases access to essential services including major employers and health care in the CBD.
4. **Economic Competitiveness:** The Downtown Transit Center makes transit more efficient, making access to employment centers timelier and more reliable. Given its location in an Opportunity Zone, the Downtown Transit Center supports job creation and economic opportunities within the zone. It also opens the opportunity for creating new commercial spaces that may help offset operations and maintenance costs.

## 1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and the City of New Orleans (the City) are requesting federal funding to assist in the construction of a Downtown Transit Center and to upgrade the streets, bike lanes, and sidewalks around the Transit Center. Our proposal for RAISE funding will enable the City and RTA to implement a key missing piece of transit infrastructure greatly benefitting thousands of daily riders of RTA's bus and streetcar networks. The Downtown Transit Center, in conjunction with a reimagined and revitalized transit system, and rebalanced public right-of-way will enhance the physical environment and economic potential of Downtown New Orleans.

## 1.2 ABOUT RTA

RTA is a subdivision of the State of Louisiana dedicated to providing public transportation in the New Orleans region. As the State's largest transit agency, the RTA operates 30 bus routes, five streetcar routes, two ferry routes, and ADA paratransit service. Bus and streetcar service include seven routes with peak-service frequencies of 15 minutes or better, as well as 11 routes that operate 24 hours/day. RTA's service area is relatively dense, covering more than 500,000 people and 230,000 jobs over a land area of about 185 square miles in Orleans, St. Bernard and Jefferson Parishes.



Source: New Orleans Regional Planning Commission



**The downtown area therefore serves as a key destination and the primary transfer location for RTA bus riders.** With 62,000 jobs and a daytime population of nearly 143,000, Downtown New Orleans is by far the region’s largest employment, cultural, retail and entertainment center and is the focal point of transit service in Greater New Orleans. Over 80 percent of RTA’s bus network and its entire streetcar network converge downtown. In addition, half of suburban Jefferson Parish Transit (JP Transit) serves Downtown New Orleans.

However, despite its 150+ year history as a major destination and transfer area for intracity transit, **downtown New Orleans has never had a facility to accommodate transferring and waiting passengers and bus operations.** As identified RTA’s 2018 Strategic Mobility Plan and the 2020 Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) and bus network redesign, called New Links, a major transfer facility is needed in the downtown area to support connections between local and regional bus routes and streetcars and provide decent and dignified waiting conditions for thousands of daily riders and bus operators.

As part of the New Links implementation, the RTA consolidated downtown service stops into a “hub” that currently consists of four on-street transit stops clustered around a high-traffic intersection. This current transit hub builds off lessons learned following the Hard Rock building collapse in October 2018, which required the RTA to rearrange all downtown service to use a single hub downtown. Despite operational challenges associated with this move, riders responded positively to the consolidation of service into a single transfer area.



*Waiting passengers at the recently completed interim downtown hub.*

The current interim hub, activated as of September 2022, represents an interim and partial solution for RTA’s riders. While all routes now serve the consolidated four stops, there are no off-street facilities to enable optimal transit operations. Only two of these four stops are equipped with shelters and benches, as narrow and crowded sidewalks preclude the establishment of significant passenger amenities. Additionally, passengers must cross 4-6 lanes of traffic to make some transfers which can lead to unsafe crossings.

**The current hub is located nearby to the preferred location for a downtown transfer hub, which was determined in a feasibility study completed in 2019.** The RTA conducted a lengthy Alternatives Analysis (AA) study with stakeholders such as the City of New Orleans and the Downtown Development District (DDD) to identify the optimal location for riders, operations and the downtown community. The AA analyzed current conditions, projected future needs and identified potential locations and designs that could solve what was then a scattered set of transit stops throughout the downtown area which could require an 8-10 walk to complete a transfer. The study used community feedback and operations analysis to identify a the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), which is in the neutral ground of Basin St, fronting Canal St and extending towards Bienville St. The AA identified a target area, conceptual layout, and estimated capital and operating costs for a new facility.

**The current waiting and transferring conditions are improved over previous downtown transfer conditions but remain far below what is needed for the significant riding population, estimated at over 15,000 weekday riders.** This project will improve operational efficiencies and address one of the most basic, yet essential, needs for riders in our semi-tropical climate: comfortable shelter from heat and intense rain. Riders have been asking for improved waiting conditions through multiple surveys, and the RTA is committed to responding. Investing in this project will allow the RTA to take a large first step toward a more equitable transportation system by prioritizing transit where it will have greater return in opportunity. The investment will be further optimized through environmentally smart design that minimizes the carbon footprint of the facility.

A Downtown Transit Center will enhance passenger convenience and allow for more efficient transit operations and supervision. Additionally, it will elevate the experience for thousands of daily riders, transforming a substandard situation into a facility of dignity, safety and convenience for those who depend on and choose to ride public transit.

**The connecting corridors component of this project will support safe multimodal movements to and around the Downtown Transit Center as well as transit priority into and out of the center.** This project will redesign the right-of-way in the blocks leading to the transit center to optimize pedestrian, bicycle, transit vehicle and private vehicle movements through the area.

### 1.3 HOW THE PROJECT WILL ADDRESS TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES

The Downtown Transit Center and Connecting Corridors will address a series of key challenges, described in greater detail below.

#### KEY TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES:

- While downtown serves as the RTA's regional transfer hub, there is no hub facility of any kind.
- Operational efficiency is lost without a concentrated hub, which also impacts service reliability and ability to upgrade to in-line vehicle charging.
- Narrow and crowded sidewalks preclude essential amenities at most bus stops.
- Current routing results in slow travel times and delays.
- Downtown is growing, creating more traffic and eroding schedule reliability.
- The workforce - downtown and regionwide - is evolving with more hospitality and healthcare workers, many of whom are reliant on transit.
- The bikeway network remains incomplete in the CBD and closer integration with transit will provide valuable first and last mile connection and an enhanced multi-modal environment.
- Improve general pedestrian conditions and comfort, with a focus on addressing systemic safety concerns.

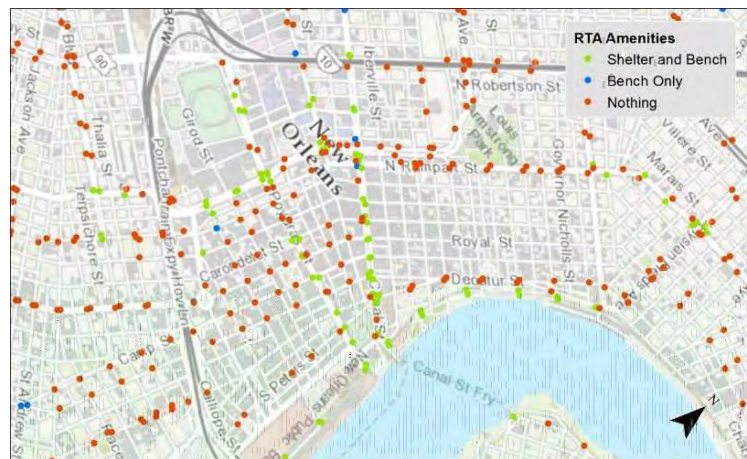
### Make Transfer Connections Convenient:

With the reorganization of bus routes following the implementation of the New Links redesign, all downtown-serving bus routes converge at four stops near the intersection of Loyola Avenue and Tulane Avenue downtown. Passengers making transfers may still need to cross 4-6 lanes of heavy traffic and walk a full block to access their transfer routes. Riders must make a 5-minute walk from these stops to transfer to the Canal Streetcar routes, which support some of the highest ridership numbers in the network. While the interim hub is an improvement over the scatter site downtown stops used in 2018, there remain operational challenges to siting layovers for routes that terminate downtown, supporting safe crossings for riders across the Tulane and Loyola Intersection and establishing clear wayfinding for passengers.

The Downtown Transit Center will support vastly improved transfer operations through the use of an off-street facility with dedicated bus bays for different routes. Protected from traffic, riders will be able to alight and transfer safely and quickly between all bus and streetcar routes that serve downtown. Enabling more efficient transfers out of traffic will enable greater reliability of service and will expand travel opportunities for people utilizing the transfer center.

### Replace Narrow Sidewalks with Comfortable and Safe Waiting Areas:

The provision of passenger amenities - strongly desired in a city with a hot, humid, and rainy climate - is severely limited due to crowded conditions along narrow sidewalks and competing interests such as storefronts. As a result, while shelters are plentiful along the Canal Street and Loyola-Rampart streetcar lines - which operate in their own dedicated right-of-way or alongside medians - the ability to provide adequate shelter and seating at bus stops is constrained.



Most bus routes operate every 15 - 40 minutes meaning passengers may wait up to forty minutes a transfer with few if any places to sit and be sheltered from the elements. The Downtown Transit Center will provide the essential amenities of seating, shade, and protection from the elements. It will also provide improved wayfinding signage, enhanced security and emergency communications. Real-time bus arrival information, pre-paid fares to speed boarding, and level boarding to improve ADA access are additional features that will improve efficiency today and accommodate planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the future.

### Enhance Service in Geographically Significant Downtown

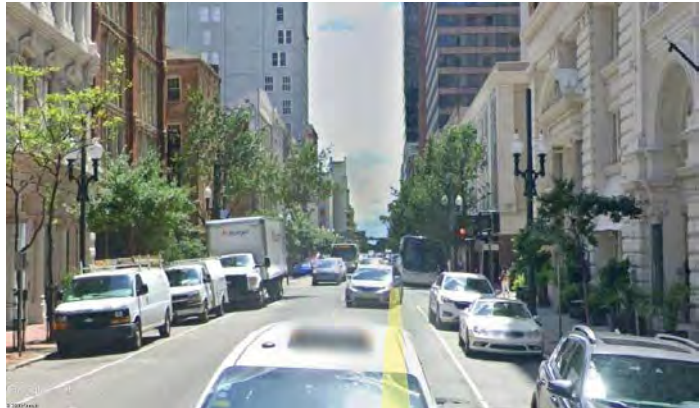
The layout and conditions of the City of New Orleans and its downtown area have a strong influence on service design. The position of the city between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain creates a relatively narrow "isthmus" that funnels most transit through downtown. A single bridge connecting the West Bank and East Bank of the Mississippi River requires that all service from the West Bank be routed through downtown. Opportunities for crosstown service in the city that bypasses downtown are limited. In addition, restrictions on operating transit service



through the narrow streets of the French Quarter make interlining of routes downtown difficult. Combined, these conditions strongly influence the design of the regional system and focus a large share of transit activity in downtown. The bus network redesign implemented in September 2022 reaffirmed the Downtown as a needed nexus for transit users, as job centers remain concentrated in this area.

### Speed Bus Operations through Congested Downtown:

Due to heavy traffic and slowdowns, buses lose a substantial amount of time in downtown. At the intersection of Canal and Basin streets, currently a major bus stop area, average daily vehicle traffic exceeds 25,000 vehicles. Cars and trucks, on-street parking, delivery vehicles, taxis and transportation network companies and bicycle riders compete for limited space along narrow streets. Buses get caught in delays, eroding schedule adherence and reliability when they compete for limited travel and stop space downtown.



Using RTA Route 11 as an example, the average bus travel speed in downtown is 11 miles per hour, compared with 12-16 miles per hour elsewhere. The need to move buses through downtown also limits the ability to schedule driver layover/recovery time at current downtown route terminus locations.

### Support Post-Pandemic Ridership Gains:

Transit ridership in Greater New Orleans has increased steadily since 2005 as RTA has increased revenue hours, improved frequencies, and widened service spans. In less than ten years, annual ridership increased from just over 15 million annual passenger trips to over 25 million. With implementation of the SMP, as defined through New Links, average weekday ridership is projected to increase from about 64,000 to 96,000 riders per day. Many of these riders will take transit to downtown destinations or to make a transfer. Nearly one-third of all vehicle boardings on RTA occurred downtown prior to the New Links reorganization; this share is expected to grow following the restructure of the system. Transit is an essential service for tens of thousands of residents of Greater New Orleans every day.



As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, ridership is still about 65% of pre-pandemic levels but has been showing strong growth. Early findings from the recent bus network redesign indicate another boost in ridership by as much as 10%.

### Support a Changing Workforce:

The fastest growing occupations in Greater New Orleans are in the medical and hospitality industries. According to Greater New Orleans, Inc., the regional economic development organization, the hospitality industry comprises 13% of all jobs in the region with over 82,000 persons employed in accommodations and food services. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, hospitality industry employment grew by nearly 41% between 2010 and 2020. Hospitality is closely followed by the medical industry, with 12% of the region's workers employed in health care and social assistance. Between 2010 and 2020, employment in the health services and education fields increased by 36%. In contrast, total employment in the area increased by 10%. Similarities exist in both employment sectors: a significant number of low-wage jobs and 24/7 work shifts. The mean household income in the City of New Orleans (Orleans Parish) is \$43,258. Over one quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. Many of these workers rely on transit and depend on a safe and convenient location to board their bus and streetcar or to make a transfer, especially in off-peak hours and overnight, and for first and last mile connections to CBD destinations, which would be provided by a Downtown Transit Center.

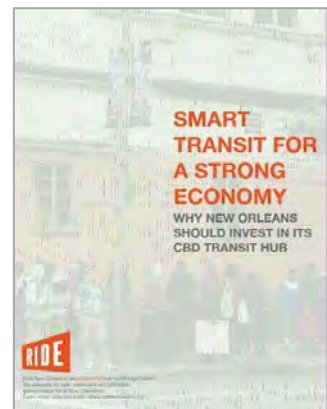
### Enhance Resurgent of Downtown Area:

The recovery of New Orleans since 2005 has resulted in a resurgent downtown that has seen \$7 billion in investment in the last 15 years and includes 17.7 million annual visitors, and 71 hotels with 20,355 rooms. In addition to the hospitality industry, substantial investment has been carried out in the health care and biomedical fields. The Louisiana Cancer Research Center, Bio-Innovation Center, LSU medical center and VA hospital are among the most prominent additions, resulting in 6,000 new jobs within and immediately adjacent to downtown. Tulane University's downtown medical campus is also expanding, which will result in its largest facility being in the CBD. This facility will include research, education, housing, and retail activities. Downtown's population has doubled in the last ten years, with planned development doubling this number again in the next ten years. The growth and revitalization in downtown are putting additional pressure on the CBD's transportation infrastructure, with increased auto and pedestrian traffic that conflicts with transfer movements and transfer connections that will be resolved with a consolidated Downtown Transit Center.

## 1.4 RELATED PLANNING ACTIVITIES

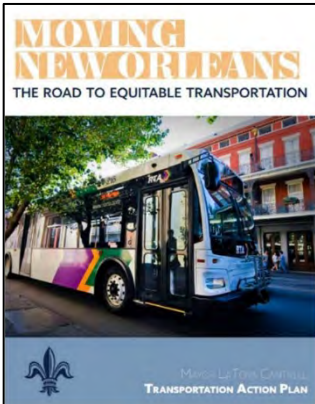
The critical need for a consolidated Downtown Transit Center has been identified and well-documented in several studies and planning initiatives conducted in the last several years:

**Smart Transit for a Strong Economy: Why New Orleans Should Invest in its CBD Transit Hub, 2014.** RIDE New Orleans, a non-profit organization established to promote public transportation in Greater New Orleans, prepared this report in response to what it described as substandard transfer accommodations. RIDE identified several conditions that riders encounter, including considerable distances between bus stops for transferring passengers, narrow and crowded sidewalks, lack of wayfinding, and limited seating and shade. The report highlighted the benefits that could be derived from a well-designed Downtown Transit Center, including improved experience for current riders that could also attract new riders, improved pedestrian safety, and an enhanced downtown environment.





**RTA Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP), 2018.** This two- year initiative led by RTA created a roadmap for improving public transportation in Greater New Orleans over the next 20 years, including a new mission statement, vision, goals, strategies and actions, and measures of progress. The SMP’s goals included prioritization of the rider experience, reliability, and connections to opportunities. Its recommendations included concepts for higher frequency service, expanded hours, pre-paid fares, and downtown mobility improvements including the creation of a Downtown Transit Center.

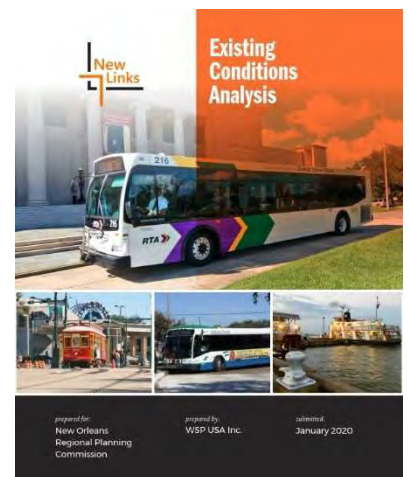


**Moving New Orleans Transportation Action Plan, 2019.** Mayor Cantrell’s vision for the future of our city’s transportation network, focuses on safety, equity, efficiency, and connectivity across all modes of transportation. Originally released in early 2019, the plan guides the transportation agenda of the Cantrell Administration and the activities of the Mayor’s Office of Transportation. In September 2021, the Office released an update of the Moving New Orleans Action Plan, focused on the progress and accomplishments in recent years and the opportunities ahead.

**Moving New Orleans Bikes, 2020.** An effort to improve safety, access, and connectivity for people riding bicycles. Along with transit, walking, and driving, bicycling is an important transportation option that provides numerous benefits to individuals, families, and our city - even for people who never ride! A better bicycle network will provide job access, health benefits, reduce demand for parking, and improve the quality of life.

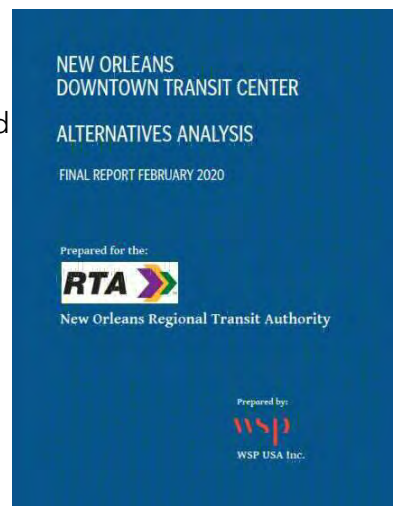


**New Links Comprehensive Operational Analysis, 2020.** New Links is the name of a regional transit development program led by RPC and its project partners, RTA, Jefferson Transit, St. Bernard Urban Rapid Transit, the City of New Orleans, and RIDE New Orleans. It is designed to build on the concepts identified in the SMP and Jefferson Transit’s Strategic Plan, completed in 2019, and create a detailed plan of routes, services and schedules for implementation between 2021 and 2023. New Links includes a detailed assessment of existing and future conditions along with development of service scenarios, all of which include a consolidated Downtown Transit Center as a key component. New Links was completed in 2020 and implemented in Fall 2022.



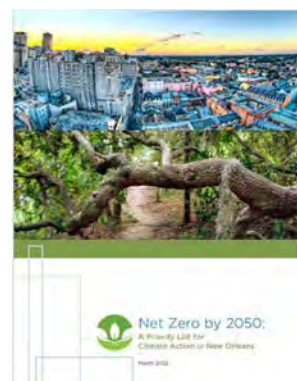
### **Downtown Transit Center Alternatives Analysis (AA), 2020.**

A full-scale alternatives analysis of a consolidated Downtown Transit Center was initiated by RTA in 2015. Because of the initiation of the SMP in 2016, followed by New Links COA, the AA was paused to ensure that its need and function remain valid based on the reimagining. The SMP and New Links provided that validation; a Draft AA Report that described current conditions, including downtown transfer connection patterns and associated issues and challenges, fundamental requirements for a facility, and site alternatives and layout concepts was completed in early 2020. The AA featured a robust outreach program that included a Technical Advisory Committee, agency/stakeholder committee, ridership workshops, public open house, pop-up meetings with riders, surveys, web links, and social media. Documentation of the AA was designed to meet federal, state, and local requirements for potential capital grant funding.



### **Net Zero by 2050: A Priority List for Climate Action in New Orleans, 2022.**

The City of New Orleans has identified a number of greenhouse gas emission activities in the city and created plans to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. Included in these plans is increasing use of public transit by creating more reliable transportation options for residents and visitors to the city. Additional plans laid out in this document include transitioning the majority of the RTA fleet to low or no emission vehicles in this next decade.



## **1.5 WHY THIS PROJECT IS A SOUND INVESTMENT**

The Downtown Transit Center and Connecting Corridors is a solution that offers many rider-needed amenities, more efficient and safer transfers, and improved access and safety for people walking, bicycling, and riding transit along the corridors directly serving the Transit Center. As a result, federal funds used on this project will result in tangible benefits, such as:

- **Safety:** The project and its design features, consolidation of transfer points and improved access makes transit transfers safer, resulting in few pedestrian/motorist crashes. The right-of-way improvements will deploy systemic changes informed by the crash history, including the four fatalities (all pedestrian) that occurred between 2016 and 2020.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Although environmental benefits were not modelled at this point in the design and planning, the proposed Downtown Transit Center design will incorporate emissions reductions technology and renewable energy generation, providing significant environmental benefits.
- **Quality of Life:** The project increases transportation choices and expands access to essential services, such as major tourism and healthcare employers as well as the medical facilities within the CBD. The right-of-way improvements further increase transportation options by completing key links in the Citywide bikeway network, including a connection

to the Lafitte Greenway. The project improves public amenities, resulting in \$83.28.7M (at the 7 percent discount) in total public benefits.

- Economic Competitiveness: The project improves reliability and on-time performance, resulting in travel time savings of \$14M (at the 7 percent discount).
- Partnerships and Collaboration: The project and right-of-way upgrades are the direct result of intentional actions by the City and Mayor Cantrell regarding transportation, as laid out in the Moving New Orleans Transportation Action Plan. After taking office in 2018, the Mayor appointed three new RTA Board Members, who have advanced a vision that saw the hiring of a new CEO, an end to the delegated management model, the New Links Transit Redesign, the delivery of new ferries, and significant increases in the coordination between the City and RTA. The Downtown Transit Center is another key step in this partnership.
- Innovation: This project lays the groundwork for a private-sector partner to develop an overbuild component. In the alternatives explored in 2015, the study left open the ability to propose overbuild concepts to be executed through an air rights agreement or ground lease. The revenue stream from air rights or ground lease payments would offset operations and maintenance for the facility.

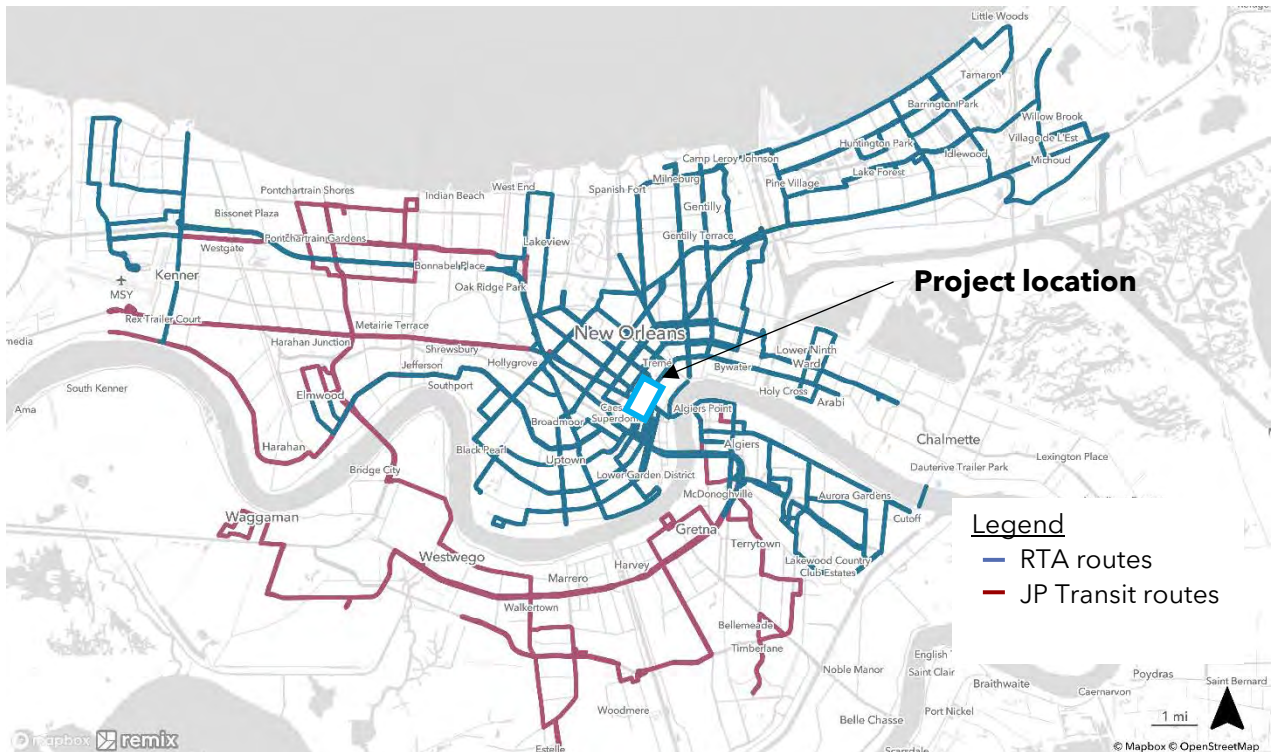


# 2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## 2.1 PROJECT LOCATION

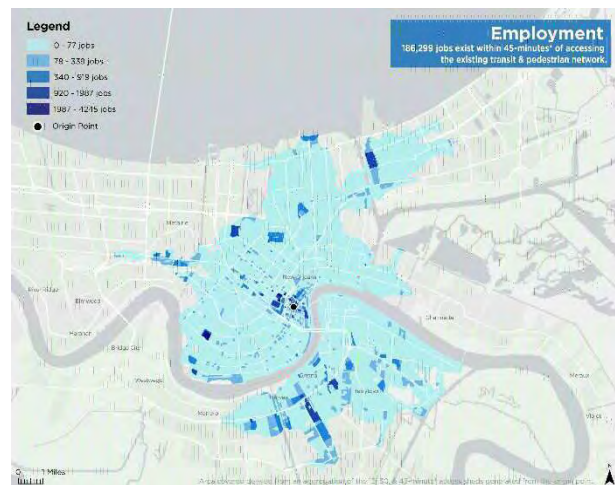
The project is located in the epicenter of RTA transit service, within a five-block area in the Basin Street- Loyola Avenue corridor between Duncan Plaza and Canal Street. Four major downtown districts - the CBD, the Biomedical District, the French Quarter, and the Canal Street corridor - converge on this location. It is also the hub of the RTA network - served by the high frequency/high capacity Canal Streetcar line and the intersecting Loyola-Rampart Streetcar -and the junction of RTA and Jefferson Parish Transit routes.

Figure 2.1.1: Project Location



The heat maps, prepared for New Links, illustrate the reach of the project site. The project location is within a 45-minute walk/transit ride to nearly all of the City of New Orleans and portions of adjacent Jefferson Parish. This walkshed/transit shed encompasses nearly 327,000 people and just under 186,000 jobs.

The Basin/Elk upgrades focus on the 0.40-mile corridor from Basin Street at St. Louis Street to Elk Place at Tulane Avenue. The improvements to the walking environment will connect to the robust downtown walking environment, including the



adjacent historic French Quarter and CBD, with pedestrian scale development and roadways. The new bikeways will provide a key connection between the Lafitte Greenway and the emerging network of bikeways in the CBD.

**Areas of Persistent Poverty**

The proposed project is located in Orleans Parish, which is identified by the US DOT as an Area of Persistent Poverty county.

**Historically Disadvantaged Community**

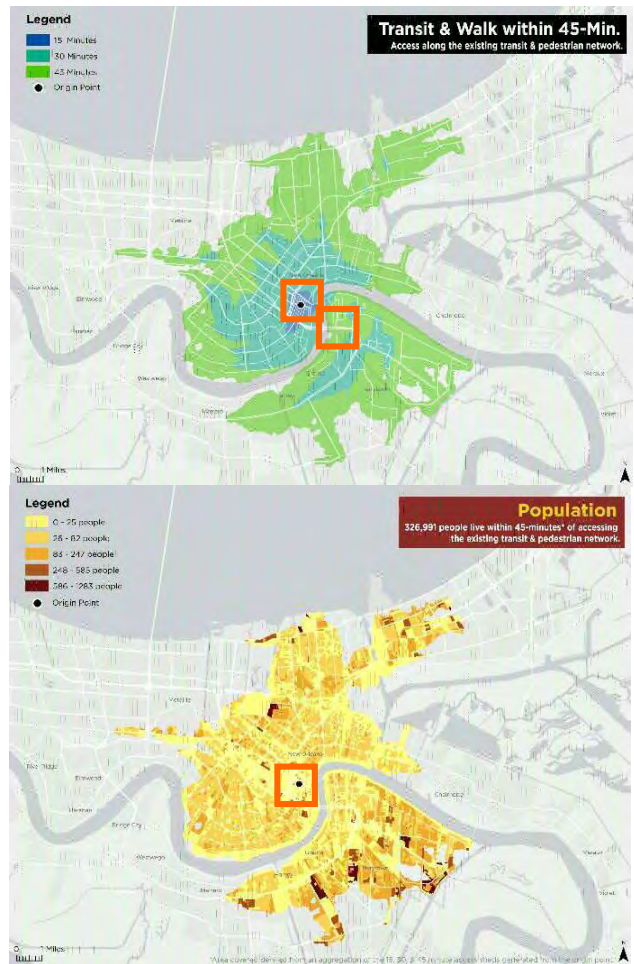
The proposed project is located in Census Tracts 39, 48, 134, and 135 which are all identified by US DOT as Historically Disadvantaged Communities.

**Urbanized Area**

The proposed project is located in the New Orleans Urbanized Area.

**Federally Designated Community Development Zones**

Opportunity Zone: Census Tract 134



**2.2 SCOPE**

The Downtown Transit Center site is underutilized open space in public ownership with build-ready characteristics. No structures occupy the space, precluding the need for any major demolition or site clearing, resulting in minimal site preparation. Below-grade utilities will be upgraded where necessary to allow maintenance access.

This site occupies a little over two blocks of the current neutral ground (median) of Basin Street, between Canal Street (RTA’s streetcar spine and heaviest-used transit line) and Conti Street. The site is immediately proximate to an existing streetcar stop served by three streetcar lines.

The RTA and the City of New Orleans’ Department of Public Works (DPW) have collaborated in developing three different rough scenarios for the layout of the Downtown Transit Center. The RTA has committed local funding complete the preliminary design, engineering, analysis, and environmental work for this transit center in 2023. Through this design phase, these initial scenarios will be considered and completed to finalize the details of the project components. Coordination between DPW and the RTA will remain ongoing throughout the design phase so that the final project components are acceptable and optimal for both.





Figure 2.1.1: Possible Downtown Transit Center Layout

### 2.3 PROJECT COMPONENTS

The project is expected to consist of the following components. The final details will be determined through the initial design phase that will be undertaken by the RTA.

Off-Street Facility: The Downtown Transit Center will be an off-street facility with all bus operations and boarding and alighting activity occurring in an environment with no interference from private vehicle or pedestrian traffic.

Bus Bays and Lanes: The facility consists of bus bays, laid out in a sawtooth or parallel configuration with dual passing lanes to allow buses to pass in both directions with no interference from buses moving in the opposite direction. Both configurations would allow buses to pass those docked at a bay without having to wait for a bus in front of it to clear. Bus bays will be designed to accommodate routes that make a layover at the transit center as those that would just stop to service passengers. This configuration provides maximum flexibility for bus operations within the facility as well as multiple options for buses to enter and exit the facility to and from adjacent streets. The bus bays and lanes will accommodate 60-foot articulated buses (and are designed to be BRT-ready) as well as standard 40-foot buses and 30- and 35-foot buses and paratransit vehicles. Buses will be assigned to specific bus bays although assignments can be adjusted instantly through electronic signage to accommodate special needs and special event services, thereby maintaining maximum operational flexibility.

Passenger Platform: A passenger platform will allow passengers to transfer from one bus to another without having to cross in front of moving buses, creating a safe environment free of obstruction for passengers transferring from one bus to another, or entering or exiting the facility to transfer between buses or streetcars or to/from downtown destinations. Platforms will ideally support level boarding and the platform (curb) edges will feature tactile warning strips. Platform pavement material is concrete for maximum durability and ease of maintenance.

Ticket/Information Center: A proposed enclosed and climate-controlled structure will provide space for staffed information and ticket/pass sales and a facility for drivers, supervisors and other RTA staff.

Retail Space: A proposed allotment of retail space is incorporated within the Ticket/Information Center. Lease payments will help offset the operating costs of the facility.

Covered Platform/Canopy: An essential component is the full enclosing of the waiting area by all bus bays providing shade and protection from the elements. This canopy will include solar panel array to support onsite renewable energy generation.



Seating: Benches are provided at each bus bay.

Wayfinding and Signage: Each bay is equipped with electronic signage to accommodate schedule and real-time information. Signage is also included at the Ticket/Information Center. Wayfinding signage is located throughout the Transit Center.

Supervision and Security: A control and monitoring system, including cameras, is provided.

Hardscape and Landscape: Features include bollards located on the platform at the head of each bus bay to separate buses and waiting passengers and provide protection in the event of an accident. Bike racks, lighting (two fixture per bus bay), planters, hose bibs and waste receptacles are also included. Landscaping will also enhance the aesthetics, provide additional shade, and improve the waiting experience throughout the site.

Signal Enhancements and Lane Improvements: Pavement of adjacent traffic lanes will be replaced; signals upgraded and added to facilitate safe and efficient bus movement.

Operations: Detailed alignment changes to accommodate safe and efficient access and egress at the facility have been developed and are shown in the following graphic.

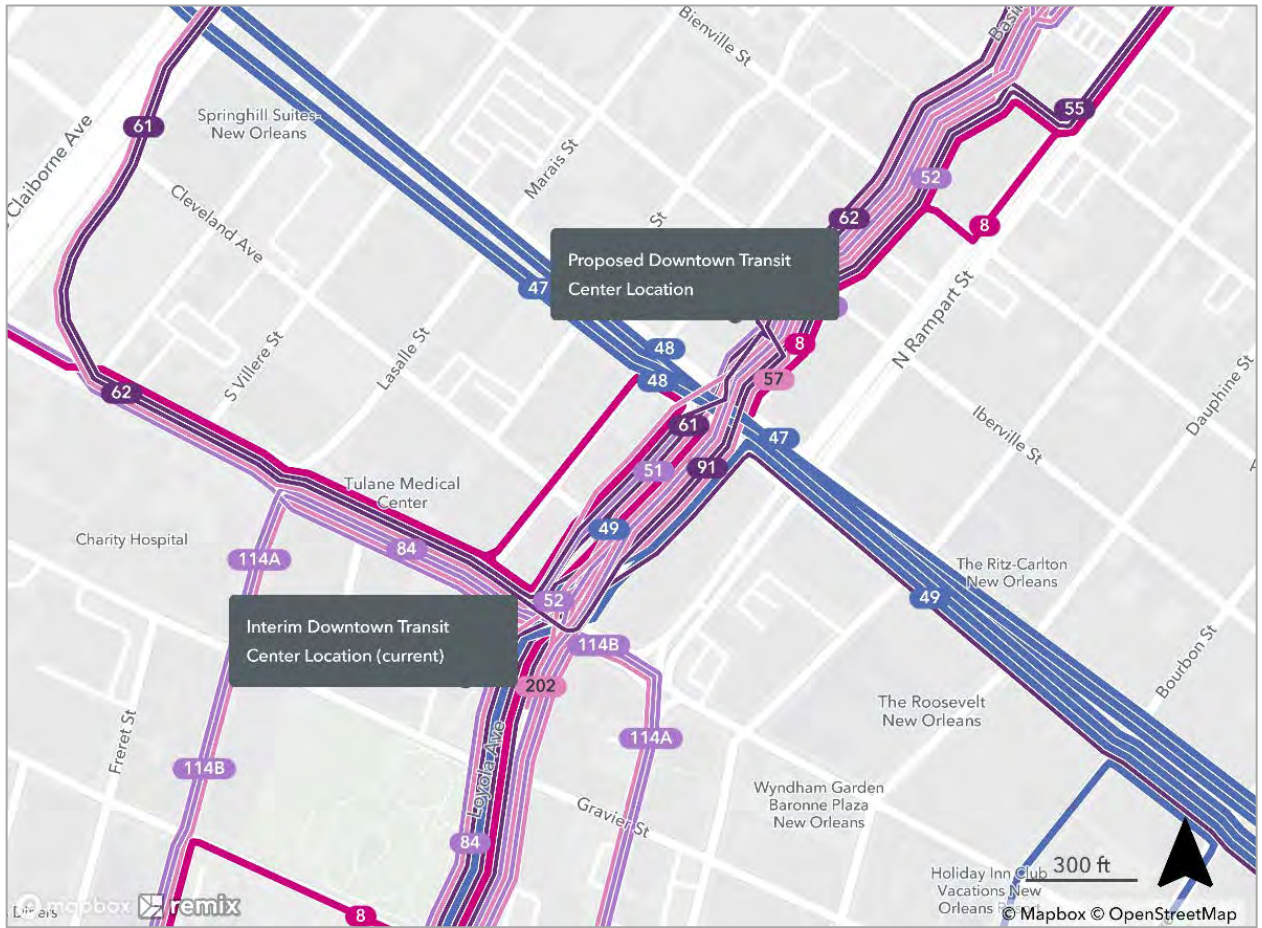
Protected Bike Lanes: The existing bikeway facilities are a mix of standard bike lanes, shared lanes, and a 2-block long two-way protected bike lane connecting the Lafitte Greenway Trail into the CBD area. The Bikeway Blueprint calls for the provision of protected bike lanes along the Basin/Elk/Loyola corridor, which will provide first/last mile opportunities from the Transit Center, help facilitate the safe movement of people bicycling through the corridor, connect to other bike ways in the vicinity, such as Tulane Ave, and provide a high-quality connection between the Lafitte Greenway and the CBD.

Pedestrian Improvements: Pedestrian signals will be added to the remaining intersections along the corridor and all signalized intersections, whether they currently have pedestrian signals or not, will be upgrade to Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) consistent with the City's forthcoming ADA Transition Plan Update. Opportunities to shorten crossings will be identified, complex intersections with higher-speed turn movements and excessive pedestrian delay will be reconsidered to rebalance safety and all users.

Transit Priority: Currently, this corridor does not provide any transit priority features, including for the Loyola Ave Streetcar, which operates in shared general travel lanes. The completion of the BRT design work later this year will inform the design of the future transit priority countermeasures along the corridor to support BRT, standard bus service, and streetcar service. The below figure shows the extensive bus and streetcar transit now running on this corridor following the September 2022 implementation of RTA bus network redesign.

Solar Panels and EV Charging: The Downtown Transit Center is envisioned to support sustainable energy practices through solar panels and EV charging capacity. Renewable energy would be generated through solar panels installed on the roof of the transit center and on the canopy. In-route EV chargers would support the further electrification of the RTA's fleet.

Figure 2.1.2: Downtown Transit Routes as of September 2022



## 3 PROJECT BUDGET

**The City of New Orleans and RTA are requesting \$24,826,905 in Federal funds through the RAISE grant program to develop the Downtown Transit Center and Connecting Corridors.**

### 3.1 SOURCES AND USES OF FUNDS

The total project cost is \$33.03M, both the City of New Orleans and RTA are committed to providing the local 20% match (see Appendix C). The RTA has also committed \$1.9 million of local funds for the design of the transit center in 2023. Additionally, the City and RTA intend to enter into a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement (CEA) to define the roles of each party in delivering the project. Use of RAISE grant funding will adhere to local policies that provide equal opportunities for disadvantaged minority- and women-owned business to participate in all aspects of the contracting and procurement program.

The table below summarizes the use and sources of funds.

Table 4.1.1: Downtown Transit Center Scope Budget Summary

Component	Federal (RAISE)	RTA Funding	Total
Design	\$1,036,977	\$2,259,244*	\$3,296,222
Construction	\$15,231,109	\$3,807,777	\$19,038,887
Contingency & Escalation	\$2,680,213	\$670,053	\$3,350,266
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$18,948,300</b>	<b>\$6,737,075</b>	<b>\$25,685,375</b>

\*Note: \$1.9 million of design costs will be spent by RTA to start project in Q2 2023 prior to award

Table 4.1.2: Connecting Corridors Scope Budget Summary

Component	Federal (RAISE)	CNO Funding	Total
Design	\$565,976	\$141,494	\$707,470
Site Work	\$867,830	\$216,958	\$1,084,788
Construction	\$3,773,174	\$943,294	\$4,716,468
Admin and Legal	\$105,649	\$26,412	\$132,061
Project Inspection Fees	\$188,659	\$47,165	\$235,823
Contingency	\$377,317	\$94,329	\$471,647
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,878,605</b>	<b>\$1,469,651</b>	<b>\$7,348,257</b>

Table 4.1.3: Complete Scope Budget Summary

Component	Federal (RAISE)	Local Funding	Total
Design	\$1,602,954	\$2,400,738	\$4,003,692
Site Work	\$867,830	\$216,958	\$1,084,788
Construction	\$19,004,283	\$4,751,071	\$23,755,354
Admin and Legal	\$3,057,530	\$764,383	\$3,821,913
Project Inspection Fees	\$105,649	\$26,412	\$132,061
Contingency	\$188,659	\$47,165	\$235,823
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$24,826,905</b>	<b>\$8,206,726</b>	<b>\$33,033,631</b>



Costs for specific project components are defined in the following table. Project components include compliance with the City of New Orleans' Living with Water program, a stormwater management requirement. The City of New Orleans continues to re-evaluate this recently adopted ordinance. The design of the project will adhere to the appropriate requirements for its location.

Table 4.1.4 Downtown Transit Center Scope Budget Breakdown

Component	Sub-Component	Cost	Total
Pre-Construction	Selective Demolition	\$390,000	
	Site Prep	\$390,000	
			<b>\$780,000</b>
Building	Ticket Center	\$937,500	
	Retail Space	\$3,000,000	
	FFE/Wayfinding	\$195,000	
	Security Technology	\$150,000	
	SCADA Monitoring	\$150,000	
			<b>\$4,432,500</b>
Hardscape & Landscape	Benches	\$62,400	
	Bollards	\$36,400	
	Bike Racks	\$13,650	
	Lighting	\$291,200	
	Landscape Components	\$97,500	
	Pedestrian Walk	\$864,500	
	Concrete Infill	\$624,000	
		<b>\$1,989,650</b>	
Boarding Area	Canopy	\$8,100,000	
	Lane Improvements	\$1,300,000	
	Solar Panels	\$550,000	
	EV Charging	\$500,000	
			<b>\$9,950,000</b>
Other	Relocation of Monuments	\$514,565	
	Stormwater Management	\$1,372,172	
			<b>\$1,886,737</b>
<b>Construction Total</b>			<b>\$19,038,887</b>
Design/Engineering	Engineering Fees (10%)	\$1,903,889	
	Construction Management Fees (5%)	\$571,167	
	Admin Fees (3%)	\$571,167	
	NREL Support	\$250,000	
			<b>\$3,296,222</b>
<b>Construction &amp; Fees Total</b>			<b>\$22,335,108</b>
Other	Contingency (10%)	\$2,233,511	
	Escalation (5%)	\$1,116,755	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$25,685,375</b>

Table 4.1.5 Connecting Corridors Scope Budget Breakdown

Component	Sub-Component	Cost	Total
Construction	Roadway Repaving and Improvements	\$3,281,138	
	Protected and Raised Bike Lane Facilities	\$405,000	
	Pedestrian Facilities and Safety Improvements	\$760,330	
	Transit Guideway and Signals	\$270,000	
<b>Construction Total</b>			<b>\$4,716,468</b>
Site Work	Related Project Costs	\$1,084,788	
Design	Design	\$707,470	
Administrative and Legal expenses	Construction Administration	\$132,061	
Project Inspection Fees	Resident Inspection	\$235,823	
<b>Construction &amp; Fees Total</b>			<b>\$6,876,610</b>
Other	Contingency & Escalation (10%)	\$471,647	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$7,348,257</b>

Table 4.1.6 Project Costs by Census Tract

Census Tract	Project Costs per Census Tract
Census Tract 134	\$28,573,428
Census Tract 135	\$4,460,203
Total Project Costs	\$33,033,631

## 4 MERIT CRITERIA

### 4.1 SAFETY

Following the implementation of the New Links bus network, the RTA now has a centralized transfer location for bus routes serving downtown which utilizes four corners of a main intersection. Two streetcar routes stop across the street from the main bus hub while the others can be accessed by a three-block walk to Canal Street. According to RTA's Ridership and Transfer Matrix, 67% of RTA transfers occur downtown, within the proposed project limits. While the interim hub is an improvement over the previous scattered-site transfer area, rider amenities remain minimal, constrained by narrow sidewalks and existing infrastructure. Additionally, transfers made at this interim hub require riders to cross 4-6 lanes of traffic to access routes to reach their final destinations, leading to some unsafe crossings. As a result, the project improves safety for pedestrians and motorists by limiting the number of street crossings required for passengers to make a transfer.

The project achieves better safety outcomes by not only improving the speed and ease of transfers, but also providing shelter, lighting, and other passenger amenities conducive to a safe transit ride. The Downtown Transit Center will incorporate best practices of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), CPTED is the application of designing safety and security into the natural environment of a specific area. Specifically, CPTED concepts and strategies use the three interrelated principles of natural surveillance, natural access and territoriality, plus activity support and maintenance.

RTA has also explored the need to supplement CPTED with standard safety features and programs such as security cameras, emergency call boxes, and a staffed security presence. In the AA, community members indicated that lighting and security features were among the top-rated preferences for a Downtown Transit Center.

The project will also improve safety outcomes within the project area through reducing the number, rate, and consequences of transportation-related accidents, serious injuries, and fatalities, including eliminating unsafe pedestrian connections to facilitate transfers.

For the five years from 2018 through 2022, there were 412 reported crashes, with 52% of them involving pedestrians. The upgrades along the Basin/Elk corridor, focused on people walking, bicycling, and riding transit will further enhance safety for vulnerable users with proven countermeasures including high visibility crosswalks, improved lighting, leading pedestrian intervals, protected



Crash Locations by Mode (2018-2022)



bike lanes, and shorter crossing distances. These improvements will take a systemic approach to the corridor, with the goal of addressing the contributing factors to the high number of pedestrian crashes between 2017-2021, as well as other locations that share similar risks.

The project will create several non-quantifiable quality of life benefits for the public, including:

- Improve safety, comfort, and convenience for RTA passengers.
- Improve RTA's operational efficiency and reliability, making it a more enticing and useful service for New Orleans residents.
- Establish a vibrant and modern facility that encourages RTA ridership, as well as economic development in the surrounding vicinity, such as mixed-used development and other transit-oriented development (TOD) projects.
- Promote a network of non-automobile transportation in New Orleans (including buses, streetcars, ferries, pedestrians, cyclists, electric scooters, and more), thereby expanding access to employment, social and recreational opportunities to a broader swath of the regional population of all ages and abilities.

The RTA places a high priority on safety. It has established a goal of 1.5 preventable accidents per 100,000 miles for bus and paratransit and 2.3 preventable accidents per 100,000 miles for streetcar. For 2022, the ratio of preventable accidents was 1.61 for bus and 3.43 for streetcar. Right-of-way improvements in this area will support RTA in meeting its safety goals.

## **4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

More efficient and safer transit transfers encourage transit ridership; and, increased transit ridership reduces single-vehicle occupancy and emissions. Transit ridership has swiftly and steadily increased since 2005 as RTA and Jefferson Parish Transit have been able to increase revenue hours as part of the recovery effort after Hurricane Katrina. Annual ridership increased from just over 15 million passenger trips in 2008 to over 25 million in 2013. The project will take advantage of this trend and positively impact environmental outcomes as a result.

Additionally, the Transit Center supports efforts of the City of New Orleans' 2022 Climate Action Plan, which sets initiatives across city agencies and departments to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Transportation makes up about 43% of greenhouse gas emissions in the city, per the city's latest greenhouse gas inventory report. RTA and the City have planned a number of initiatives to lower those emissions, including providing more reliable and comfortable transportation options, transitioning the fleet to low or no-emission vehicles and connecting residents to various modes of transportation options. Solar panels and EV charging capacity at the Downtown Transit Center will further support these sustainability goals.

A number of other city efforts are also involved in expanding non-single vehicle transportation options. The city recently relaunched Blue Bikes, a bikeshare option with hubs throughout the CBD and French Quarter. The City Planning Commission is joining this effort by developing a Transit-Oriented Communities Plan, which will guide development in the city near transportation access points.

RTA, by promoting better transit connectivity, will reduce some of the need for single occupancy vehicles, while facilitating the use of more environmentally friendly transportation options such as transit, bicycling and walking. It will also encourage residential and mixed-use development

near the largest employment center in the region and therefore will reduce single-occupancy vehicle commuting. The project also reduces the need for taxi/TNC services from the CBD to tourist sites such as the French Quarter and Superdome. As the Charity Innovation District and Bio-Innovation District increase redevelopment and grow employment, many commuters will want to rely solely on transit or increase their use of transit as they reduce the number of household vehicles.

The design of the project accommodates both short local trips, local commuter trips, and regional travel patterns. The project will facilitate efficient transfers among a variety of modes of transit and will help the region conserve energy and limit vehicle related air emissions.

Due to reduced travel and transfer time for riders, the project will ultimately result in increased ridership which will subsequently reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by autos. The resulting mode shift from auto to transit is estimated to provide an annual average reduction of approximately 185,000 VMT per year. Modal shift is critical action in the City's Climate Action for a Resilient New Orleans to achieve 50% reduction of GHGs by 2035 and net-zero emissions by 2050.

New facility designs will address the intensifying climate and resilience needs of the community. As demonstrated recently in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, power outages can be a major failure point of infrastructure in addition to the constant needs of addressing heavy rainfall and mitigating against stormwater and flooding impacts. Ridership data has shown that due to the region's climate, ridership declines significantly during even modest, frequent rains. RTA needs facilities that can provide riders with comfort and efficiency to travel by transit in all-weather conditions.

The RTA is partnering with Finance New Orleans (FNO) to maximize the incorporation of resilient and climate mitigating resilience elements into the project and future transit facilities. Elements include renewable power generation (i.e. solar panels), back-up power, passive heating and cooling, stormwater management and others. Using FNO expertise and with support from the National Renewal Energy Lab (NREL), RTA will be able to further leverage local and federal funding to ensure these components can be fully developed and built into the project. FNO will provide the financial consulting to understand the maximum benefits and optimal reduction of operating and maintenance costs as well as potential source of additional funding through green bonds. This partnership with FNO, the RTA will be supporting meaningful employment opportunities to solving local infrastructure needs in the community and supporting the workforce development of the future.

Through this partnership, RTA and FNO envision a long-term relationship for future projects to develop and finance resilience elements that may fall outside of the budgeted scope of this project, as well as incorporate these elements into existing facilities and future transit hubs.

### **4.3 QUALITY OF LIFE**

Public transportation connects people to opportunity. This includes access to jobs, healthcare, and quality of life. As the largest public transportation provider in the New Orleans-Metairie, Louisiana Metropolitan Statistical Area, the RTA operates 30 bus routes, five streetcar routes, two ferry routes, and paratransit service. Bus and streetcar service includes seven routes with peak-service frequencies of 15 minutes or better, as well as 11 routes that operate 24 hours a day. The

RTA's service area is relatively dense, covering more than 500,000 people and 230,000 jobs over a land area of about 185 square miles.

As a top destination and hospitality city, New Orleans welcomes millions of visitors, and employs thousands of workers at its hotels, attractions, and convention and conference centers. From the state-of-the-art Louis Armstrong International Airport, to the French Quarter, CBD and other city attractions, the RTA's service area serves the major activity centers that employ the workers who keep the economic engine of the city's hospitality industry running. In addition, educational institutions including Delgado Community College, Tulane University, and the University of New Orleans, and healthcare systems such as the University Medical Center, the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, and Tulane Medical Center are important job centers that draw workers from throughout the region. Many of these riders rely on the RTA services not only for daily commutes but also for access to basic services, education, healthcare, and social activities.

The RTA recognizes the importance of providing regional connections to and from the various parts of the service area. Connecting New Orleans East to destinations in the heart of the city and in Jefferson Parish is a challenge due to disinvestment, high poverty rates, and the absence of large job centers in those areas creating hardships that reliable and affordable access to jobs, healthcare, and education can help alleviate. Although closer to the CBD in proximity, the Central City, Iberville, Tremé, and Lafitte neighborhoods have been consistently underserved and are in need of regional connections that will expand the net of employment opportunities and elevate the quality of life for many of the residents in those communities. Transit service is the primary form of transportation for many New Orleans residents and visitors alike. The project would provide a central access point and hub for riders that need to connect to various points within the region to live, work and play.

Currently, to access many of these destinations, passengers wait at one of four main bus stops at the interim hub located in the CBD to make their transfer between buses or from streetcar to bus. The current stops used for transfers lack amenities for waiting passengers, requires bus riders to cross heavily trafficked streets or walk several blocks from one stop to another.

The population that will immediately benefit is existing local bus riders which are 68% black, 40% from households earning <\$25,000 a year, and 51% without access to a vehicle. Because the routes that feed into the project come from all parts of the city, the benefits will extend to riders through the city, which is a designated area of persistent poverty. Residents will benefit from improved access to jobs, education, and other basic services.

#### 4.4 MOBILITY AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION

With the Downtown Transit Center serving two-thirds of all RTA bus routes, and a third of Jefferson Parish Transit's route, the roadway corridors carrying these routes to and from the Transit Center, particularly Basin Street/Elk Place, also impact the efficiency and safety of transit operations and transit passengers. This City has invested in this corridor in recent years, providing bike lanes, pedestrian signals, high visibility crosswalks, and street trees to improve the safety and comfort of users, especially people walking, bicycling, and riding transit.

Informing these improvements and future upgrades are a variety of transportation plans:

- **Complete Streets Ordinance/Policy:** Adopted by Council in 2011 and supported by CAO policies issued in 2016 and 2020, the City has integrated a complete streets approach into its project planning, design, and implementation process. This approach



has seen a significant improvement in the walking, bicycling, and transit elements of roadway projects around the City.

- **Moving New Orleans Transportation Action Plan:** Released in 2019, the Action Plan outlines Mayor Cantrell’s transportation vision, centered on equity, safety, connectivity, and efficiency. Many of the Plan’s action items are advanced by this proposal’s scope of work, including increasing access to jobs, improving and expanding transit, reducing crashes, and expanding the bikeway network.
- **Moving New Orleans Bikes, Bikeway Blueprint:** In 2019, the City engaged in a planning and community engagement process to develop a Citywide bikeway network with the intent of creating a low-stress bikeway network. Subsequently, the City has been moving projects into design, including additional community engagement, with an intention focus on a connected network in the CBD and adjacent neighborhoods to connect residents to the concentration of jobs and community amenities in the area. The Bikeway Blueprint calls for a protected bikeway along the length of the Basin/Elk corridor.
- **Bus Rapid Transit Feasibility Study:** The RTA has adopted a Locally Preferred Alternative for its first Bus Rapid Transit route, which connects two traditionally underserved areas of the City, New Orleans East and Algiers, to downtown with fast, reliable transit. At the core of this proposal BRT route will be the Downtown Transit Center and the Basin/Elk corridor. The study will conclude with 15% conceptual design of right-of-way, including countermeasures such as transit signal priority or dedicated transit lanes that may be appropriate to achieve the goals. The study concludes in Spring 2023 and the project will begin environmental and preliminary engineering in mid-2023 and application to FTA Capital Investments Grant (CIG) Program this year as well.

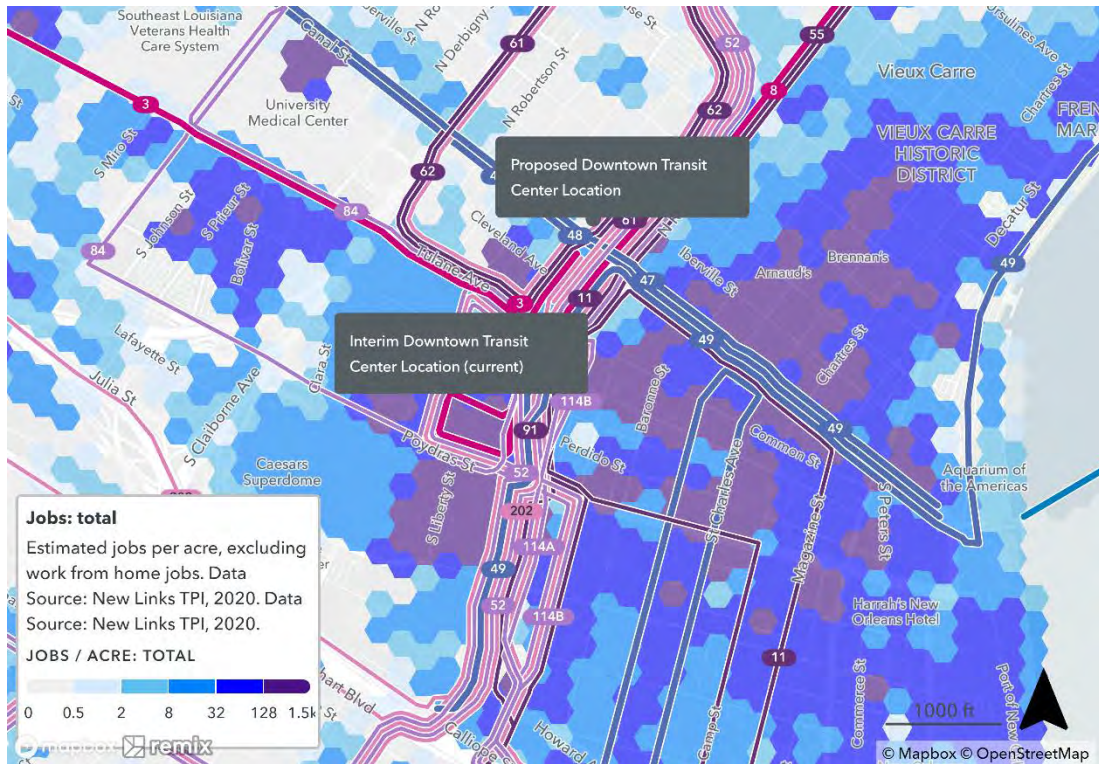
The upgrades to the Basin/Elk corridor will help connect the transit route and its riders with first/last mile connections to the employment centers and community amenities of the CBD. Improvements to the walking environment will improve the connections between the Transit Center and the walkable historic areas of the French Quarter and CBD. These connections will prove vital in maximizing the Transit Center’s utility by ensuring the roadway itself is not a barrier to the very movement we intend to enhance. Pedestrian improvements will also be made to access the Canal streetcar, the current highest ridership line, located adjacent to the facility.

The bikeway improvements will serve as a key segment of the citywide network, filling a crucial gap in the downtown area and connecting to the Lafitte Greenway, a key shared-use trail that connects multiple neighborhoods to within blocks of the Transit Center. Other existing and forthcoming segments of the CBD bikeway network, including Baronne Street, and Tulane Avenue will be tied together, increasing their network utility, by the transit corridor upgrades.

#### 4.5 ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

As stated earlier, **nearly one-third of all transit passenger boardings and alightings in the region occur in the downtown area**; however, it lacks an amenity-rich and protected transfer facility along with passenger amenities such as shelters and seating. The project will contribute much needed transit infrastructure, directly impacting the quality of experience and level of connectivity that riders encounter on their daily trips to the CBD. In turn, better transit connectivity will enhance the economic vitality of the CBD and the region.

Major employment centers are located within close proximity of the existing transfer "hubs" described earlier. Downtown employment is primarily focused on the Canal and Poydras corridors and the area in between. Over half of the businesses in the CBD are considered large employers; the CBD has the highest concentration of workers in New Orleans.



Jobs per acre near the Downtown Transit Center

Employment concentrations extend north of this area, between Poydras and Tulane, which is dominated by medical facilities. Concentrations of employment extend downriver through the heart of the French Quarter and upriver along the St. Charles Streetcar corridor. The current hub and streetcar stops along Canal Street are convenient to most of this concentration.

While downtown alone represents the largest concentration of jobs in Louisiana with 62,000 jobs, the project site is also close to institutional anchors such as the Bio-Innovation District and Charity Innovation District to the north, Superdome to the west, and the French Quarter to the east.

The project supports both employee and tourist access to the French Quarter and Superdome. The French Quarter is the well-known heart of New Orleans tourism, drawing over 17 million visitors annually. The area is home to eight New Orleans historic landmarks and hosts major events. The Superdome, home to the National Football League New Orleans Saints, recently completed \$450 million in renovations. The Superdome seats over 75,000 and hosts not only sports teams, but also concerts and events.



Enhanced passenger amenities and easier transfers in the CBD means that employees, tourists, and other constituents can more easily reach these destinations, thereby supporting and maintaining the economic vitality of New Orleans and beyond.

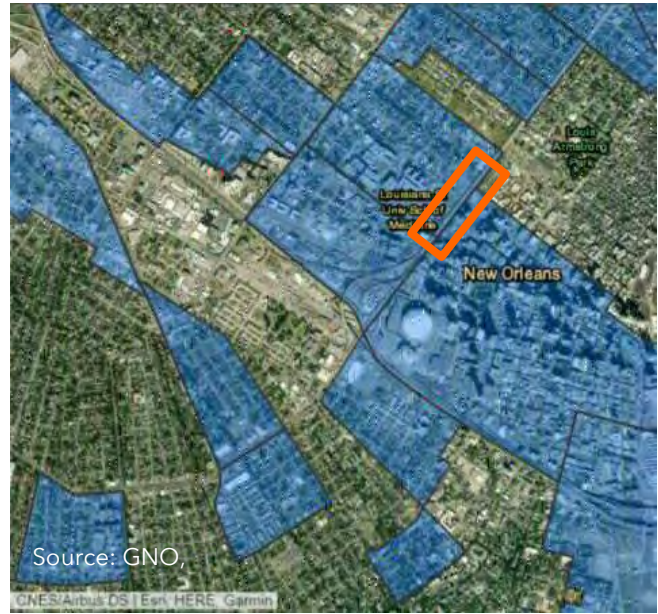
The City of New Orleans, and the downtown in particular, is increasingly being recognized as a rising high tech digital media hub. DXC Technology, for example, is kickstarting development of a tech corridor along Poydras Street, within the project area, by adding 2,000 jobs to its current office. Tulane University is also expanding its downtown medical campus to include research facilities, retail, and housing. These expansions will make this downtown campus their largest facility.

The project also provides better access to New Orleans' Bio-Innovation District, which is the epicenter for jobs growth in health care, leading the nation in employment growth in this sector. The District is a 1,500-acre site that has attracted investments worth over \$2 billion in state-of-the-art facilities, including the Louisiana State University School of Medicine and the Louisiana Cancer Research Center. It is estimated that the Cancer Research Center alone generates a total economic impact of \$64 million for Louisiana and it is estimated that "for every \$1 million in grant funding the Louisiana Cancer Research Center, there is a \$2.21 million impact on the local economy in terms of good jobs and local services and supplies."<sup>3</sup> The project provides vital access to the Bio-Innovation District for both employees and patients.

The project will impact the Charity Innovation District, a tax-increment financing (TIF) district structured to generate revenues to renovate and redevelop the historic Charity Hospital at the center of the district. Transit access is vitally important to the financial success of the District because transit investments have a direct correlation to increased property values and increased TIF revenues as a result. Sixty-three percent of the District has bus or streetcar access and three main circulation routes service the District, so connectivity to the CBD and a centralized transfer facility is a significant amenity for riders. Numerous studies have documented that proximity to transit facilities increases the value of nearby residential, commercial, and retail properties. Investing in the project will help increase the value of properties in the Innovation District. The project will also help maintain and increase ridership, which generates an incentive for businesses, services, and residents to locate at greater densities near the facility, including the Innovation District.



In the City of New Orleans, much of the CBD, Bio-Innovation District and surrounding neighborhoods are designated as Opportunity Zones (shown right, in blue). The CBD Opportunity Zone is the fastest growing Census Tract in Orleans Parish when measured by percent of population growth. The CBD Opportunity Zone is also home to cost-burdened households. The table below shows the characteristics of households in the CBD Opportunity Zone compared to the region.



Households of modest means, like those in the CBD and surrounding Opportunity Zones, are those that are most impacted by transit accessibility. Therefore, the Downtown

Transit Center will make a significant economic impact on those living and working within the Opportunity Zone.

Table 4.5.1: CBD Opportunity Zone Demographics

Indicator	CBD Census Tracts	Region
Percent of People in Poverty (2013-2017)	26.30%	18%
Share of 2-Bedroom Rental Units that are Affordable at 50% of AMI (2012-2016)	13.76%	23.88%
Residential Vacancy Rate (2013-2017)	32.49%	13.32%
Percent of All Low-Income Households that are Severely Cost-Burdened (2009-2013)	45.53%	38.20%
Percent of Renter-Households Receiving Housing Choice Vouchers (2017)	11.61%	14.51%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; 2000 U.S. Census; PolicyMaps

RTA has adopted an aggressive Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) goal of 32% overall participation in FTA assisted contracts for FY2023-2025 to counter decades of racial exclusion. That goal is further subdivided for 20% race conscious and 10% race neutral participations. RTA then provides ongoing and active outreach to DBE business to encourage participation and make them aware of upcoming projects. This project will seek to maximize DBE participation in construction and retail.

In line with the agency's DBE participation goal, the project seeks to incorporate low-barrier retail opportunities to micro and small vendors that are typically excluded from opportunities in larger real estate developments and in many cases operate on the fringes of legality. Through this project RTA will work with additional local partners to use the limited retail space as a pathway to prosperity for many disadvantaged vendors, building capacity and growth.

## 4.6 STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

The project addresses State of Good Repair by providing increased accessibility to multimodal mobility options and maximizing the throughput of the existing transportation network. The project will contribute to a State of Good Repair by improving the condition and resilience of the current and future regional transit system, and through its potential to reduce vehicle miles traveled, and result in minor cost savings related to pavement preservation. The asset residual value at the end of the 20-year analysis period is estimated to be \$1.2 million in discounted dollars.

RTA is committed to maintaining the Downtown Transit Center in a manner that is reflective of the priorities of the agency: a world-class rider experience, innovation, regional connections, equity, and workforce development.

For the Downtown Transit Center, RTA's commitment to its State of Good Repair can be demonstrated by recent commitments to the maintenance of its other major capital assets. For example, part of RTA's recovery after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 has included a carefully planned bus fleet replacement schedule that calls for the purchase of buses over time to achieve desired fleet levels. This schedule includes staggered replacements and refurbishments to extend life cycles for some vehicles. The purpose of RTA's bus fleet replacement schedule is twofold. The first is to keep the overall fleet in a state of good repair while minimizing life cycle costs. The second is to make new investments that are key for minimizing bus-replacement life cycle costs.

Further demonstrating RTA's commitment to State of Good Repair, RTA has spent \$4,844,905 on maintenance of the ferry system and \$3,718,611 for the Lower Algiers and Marine Maintenance location over the last five years. Maintenance expenses for the site were \$719,175. These costs can be reduced with improving the reliability and optimizing the maintenance operations of this facility. A 1-cent sales tax comprises the RTA's revenue stream for the agency, providing a stable and sufficient source of funds to operate and maintain the Downtown Transit Center.

The City's Department of Public Works has established a Mobility & Safety Division, tasked with improving the transportation system's safety and access, especially in relation to vulnerable users and underinvested neighborhoods, and transportation modes. As a new Division, they are not only building new infrastructure, but establishing the plans and budgets for maintaining the infrastructure to ensure it provides the intended mobility and safety benefits for residents.

## 4.7 PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

The City and the RTA are the applicants on this grant. The City and RTA recognizes that building the project involves multiple stakeholders including the State of Louisiana, the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission, and the Downtown Development District. RTA also considers its riders as an important stakeholder and partner. Each stakeholder will play a critical role in the delivery of a successful project:

- The City of New Orleans will lead on the planning, design, and construction of the right-of-way upgrades along the Basin/Elk corridor. The City also serves as a critical stakeholder for the Transit Center itself, as it will be placed in a prominent section of the City and serve a large population of its citizens. The project will need to receive construction permits from the City and go through the City Planning Commission approval process. This typically involves not only technical code compliance reviews, but also design aesthetic reviews. This project will also be an economic development project for the City

and is an opportunity for Disadvantaged Business, Women Owned Business and Job Development departments.

- State of Louisiana is also a critical stakeholder, as several design reviews are required from state agencies. The State Fire Marshal and the Department of Health will have input on design review, reviews during construction and final reviews before occupancy of the building.
- The Downtown Development District (DDD) will represent its constituents in design reviews and serve as a critical partner during pre- construction to help the agency minimize the impact construction may have on the surrounding business. It is also envisioned that the cooperation between the DDD and the RTA that exist today as it relates to maintenance of the area around the bus stops will grow to include the Downtown Transfer Center.
- The New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC), as the Metropolitan Planning Organization, will provide assistance if needed, and the proper approvals when required.
- The RTA will continue to engage the rider during the design process. At key milestones during the design of this facility the rider will be able to comment on the design during one of monthly Rider Advisory Committee meetings. The input will provide the project team critical feedback on the functionality of the facility, to assist the agency in maximizing its resources.
- Finance New Orleans will work with the City and RTA to develop and finance resilient features to reduce operating & maintenance costs, mitigate storm and flood risk, and support emergency response needs.

## 4.8 INNOVATION

The Project is a unique opportunity for U.S. DOT to invest in an innovative package of projects that will not only benefit the residents and workers of New Orleans, but also the more than 17 million visitors that flock to the City each year to visit the CBD and the nearby tourist landmarks like the Superdome and French Quarter. A consolidated transfer facility will support enhanced connectivity among bus and streetcar modes and serve as a catalyst for the continued economic recovery of Greater New Orleans.

### **Innovative Technologies**

Additional planning efforts conducted by the city that are supported by this project are the Resilient New Orleans Plan, the Climate Action Plan for a Resilient New Orleans and the recently completed companion Resilience New Orleans Finance Plan as a guide to fund implementation of critical infrastructure and programs to meet the City's resilience and climate action goals. Transit plays a critical role in these plans by improving service to support mode shift away from cars, reducing flood risk through stormwater management at facilities and increase energy independence and resilience. These actions are also supported by the City of New Orleans Master Plan ("Plan for a 21st Century").

The RTA and City of New Orleans also plan to partner with the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) to develop the specifications for on-site generation and storage of renewable energy, passive heating and cooling, explore opportunities for the development of a microgrid and energy generation for the purposes of a future electric fleet. The RTA envisions this facility to

support the resilience of the city by acting as resilience hub and providing grid backup during emergency events.

**Innovative Financing**

The project, as currently proposed, lays the groundwork for a private-sector partner to develop an overbuild component. In the alternatives explored in 2015, the study left open the ability to propose overbuild concepts to be executed through an air rights agreement or ground lease. The revenue stream from air rights or ground lease payments would offset operations and maintenance for the facility.



# 5 DEMONSTRATED PROJECT READINESS

## 5.1 PROJECT SCHEDULE

**The RTA has committed \$1.9 million in local funds to complete the design, engineering, analysis and environmental work for the proposed transit center in 2023, prior to grant funding availability.** The City and RTA are therefore ready to immediately initiate project activities, including environmental reviews and final design. RTA will also secure the site, currently publicly owned, with minimal demolition and site preparation required. A two-year construction period will result in the opening of the project in late 2026/early 2027.

Phase	2023			2024				2025				2026				
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Env/Design*																
Final Design																
Procurement																
Construction																
In Service																

*\*work conducted with RTA local funds - not part of this application*

## 5.2 REQUIRED APPROVALS

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): As a result of starting environmental and initial design work in mid-2023 RTA will be able to move forward immediately upon award to execute a grant agreement.** RTA anticipates receipt of a Categorical Exclusion for all project elements. The project area sites are currently underutilized and/or vacant and require minimal demolition and site preparation. The project is not expected to result in significant impacts to planned growth or land use for the area; require the relocation of people; involve significant air or noise impacts; have significant impacts on travel patterns; and otherwise, either individually or cumulatively, have any significant environmental impacts. The RTA has on-call engineers and planners, enabling the NEPA analysis to proceed immediately.

**Section 106 Review:** Initial consultation with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has already begun as part of the Alternatives Analysis. A statue and monument are currently located on the Basin Street neutral ground, which will require relocation, although their incorporation into the design of the Downtown Transit Center is a feasible option. RTA plans to continue coordination with the SHPO through the design process and will be submitting site plans as the project proceeds to receive a formal response on whether the project would be deemed to have an adverse effect. If so, specific mitigation can be incorporated into the design, including preserving the statue and monument.

**Section 4(f) Review:** The Basin Street neutral ground (median), while not designated as a park, is a greenspace.

**Design Reviews/Construction Permits:** This building included in the project scope will be designed to the current building codes and standards adopted by the State of Louisiana and City of New Orleans, including the International Building Code requirements for wind loads,

comply with the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, requirements of the Overlay District, and Stormwater Management requirements.

Legislative/State and Local Approvals: No additional state or local legislative approvals are required.

State and Local Planning: The New Orleans Regional Planning Commission will include the project in the long-range transportation plan (Metropolitan Transportation Plan, TIP and STIP) upon award of a RAISE grant.

### **5.3 ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES**

The City and RTA are confident that the project will proceed within the schedule and budget presented in this application. However, as with any capital project, there is risk for unanticipated sources of delay that must be mitigated.

Cost Overruns: Should costs exceed beyond budgeted contingencies, both parties may utilize capital funds or issue bonds, as needed, to cover any funding shortfalls. This project is a priority for RTA and the City of New Orleans. The region as a whole is committed to working together to ensure its delivery.

Location of the Downtown Transit Center: The selection of transit center location has been finalized and approved by the RTA Commissioners and the location is under public ownership.

Unanticipated Environmental Impacts Elevate NEPA to an Environmental Assessment: The anticipated class of action for the Project is a Categorical Exclusion (CE). However, should the Project need to be elevated to an Environmental Assessment (EA), the schedule as outlined allows for ample time to secure a Finding of No Significant Impact ahead of the deadline for pre-construction activities. If an EA is required, RTA will know ahead of the announcement of RAISE grant awards for the current round, and the schedule can be adjusted in coordination with U.S. DOT at that time.

### **5.4 CAPITAL PROJECT & US DOT DISCRETIONARY GRANT EXPERIENCE**

The RTA Infrastructure and Grants Department has over 30 years of experience in the development and implementation of various grant programs, proving its ability to work with Federal, state, regional, and local authorities to use limited public funds in a timely and prudent way. The staff of planners, engineers, project managers, superintendents and administrative personnel has proven experience and capability to design, construct and maintain all components in the bus and transit industry. These experts will assist in keeping the project on time and within budget.

Both the City of New Orleans and the RTA have years of experience around administering federal funding and discretionary grants and delivering results, including discretionary grants awarded by USDOT as listed in the following tables.

Table 2.3.1: Selected Federal Program Received by the City of New Orleans

Grant	Amount	Award Year	Status
<b>2014 HUD National Disaster Resilience Competition</b>	\$141,200,000	2014	underway
<b>2020 USDOT Safety Data Initiative</b>	\$400,000	2020	closed
<b>Covid-19 Public Assistance</b>	\$33,500,000	2020	underway
<b>Hurricane Ida Public Assistance</b>	\$22,100,000	2021	underway

Table 2.3.2: Selected Federal Program Received by the Regional Transit Authority

Grant	Amount	Award Year	Status
<b>Loyola/UPT Streetcar Expansion</b>	\$45,000,000	2011	closed
<b>2015 Passenger Ferry Boats</b>	\$15,200,000	2015	closed
<b>2015 TIGER and Passenger Ferry</b>	\$18,500,000	2017	underway
<b>2017 Passenger Ferry</b>	\$2,437,067	2019	underway
<b>2018 Bus and Bus Facilities</b>	\$6,392,000	2019	closed
<b>2019 Bus and Bus Facilities</b>	\$7,200,000	2019	closed
<b>2020 Bus and Bus Facilities</b>	\$13,916,000	2020	closed
<b>2020 FTA Low or No-Emission Program</b>	\$5,150,000	2021	underway
<b>2021 RAISE Grant</b>	\$18,500,000	2021	underway
<b>2021 5307 Passenger Ferry</b>	\$5,663,000	2022	underway

## 5 BENEFIT - COST ANALYSIS SUMMARY

The City of New Orleans and New Orleans RTA's proposed project for this grant opportunity is the construction of a Downtown Transit Center ("DTC"). In accordance with the requirements set out by the NOFO, the City and RTA have performed a Benefit Cost Analysis ("BCA") for the DTC. The methodology for performance of the BCA can be found in the section below.

The City and RTA anticipate a total cost of approximately \$33.03 million for the completion of the DTC. This cost includes both design and construction of the project. The City and RTA estimate operations and maintenance cost for the facility of approximately \$900,000 per year. These costs (capital and operations/maintenance) total approximately \$59.1 million for the project period, or \$37.3 million when net present valued to 2021 dollars at 7%. The BCA assumes a 30-year project period.

The core benefits associated with this project include: (1) a significant reduction in the number of accidents (including those that result in injury and death), (2) time travel savings associated with more efficient travel through the DTC, (3) a reduction in emissions through the reduction in bus idling time in downtown New Orleans, and (4) a myriad of facilities and amenities related benefits for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

The City and RTA anticipate monetized benefits of approximately \$311.1 million through the delivery of the DTC, \$105.3 million when net present valued at 7%. This results in a 16% return on invested capital for the project.



## 6 APPENDICES

- A. Benefit-Cost Analysis Narrative
- B. Benefit-Cost Analysis Calculations
- C. Funding Commitment Letters
- D. Letters of Support
- E. Moving New Orleans Bikes Blueprint
- F. Moving New Orleans Bikes Guiding Principles