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DATE: February 19, 2020

SUBJECT: Pacific Avenue/ SR 7 Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Planning Update

SUMMARY:

On February 19, staff from Pierce Transit, along with Planning Services Division staff, will provide an update on the Pacific Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project.

BACKGROUND:

Pierce Transit's Inaugural Pacific Avenue/SR 7 BRT Project (from Pierce Transit)

In 2017, Pierce Transit launched a comprehensive feasibility study for a High Capacity Transit (HCT) system along 14.4 miles of Pierce Transit's current Route 1; the section serving Downtown Tacoma to Spanaway via Pacific Avenue. The initial deliverable was to create a *Purpose and Need* Statement for the project.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Pacific Avenue/SR 7 HCT project is to establish a north/south HCT link in the heart of Pierce County and serving Pierce Transit's busiest transit corridor. The project will:

- Increase transit ridership through enhanced transit service.
- Deliver cost-effective service that provides capacity to meet future demand.
- Promote transportation equity in the corridor by ensuring that transit service is accessible to all populations.
- Improve multi-modal access and connectivity.
- Support a regional vision for the community as documented in land use and transportation plans.
- Enhance safety and security for transit patrons and public health overall.
- Support existing economic activity and be a catalyst for sustainable economic growth and corridor redevelopment.
- Promote environmental stewardship and sustainability.

The study then carefully analyzed the following potential modes, in addition to the "No Build" (existing service) or "Do Nothing" option:

- Enhanced Bus Service
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
- Streetcar
- Light Rail Transit (LRT)

Each of the travel modes listed above was rated by how effectively use of that mode would advance each of the project goals. Based on the analysis, as well as the partnering agency, public and stakeholder input,



it was determined that BRT is the HCT mode that best meets the project goals. BRT is the most appropriate mode given the current and expected level of ridership and best meets the nexus of existing land use and population distribution with the goals for improved transit speed and reliability and future investment along the corridor.

Development and Approval of the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)

First Screening – BRT Design Considerations

In the spring of 2017, the study's design team produced two discrete conceptual alternatives or options for BRT running way (i.e. where and how the BRT would operate) throughout the 14.4-mile corridor. The first screening included existing (curbside with pullouts) operations plus five different design configurations. These five design considerations included operating the bus in either a mixed traffic lane or a more exclusive (transit only) lane and whether the bus would travel in the right lane (Near the curb) or within the center/median of the roadway. They were:

1. Mixed Traffic: Curbside Lane (i.e., mirroring existing conditions)
2. Mixed Traffic: Median Lane
3. Business Access and Transit (BAT): Curbside Lane
4. Median Exclusive Lane: Right Side Vehicle Boarding
5. Median Exclusive Lane: Left Side Vehicle Boarding

As with the mode evaluation, the design configuration options were evaluated for how well they met the project's Purpose and Need while advancing the project's goals. After analyzing the five design configuration options, and obtaining public input at open houses held in late 2017, two primary options were selected for further design:

1. A curbside-running option where the bus would operate in a mix of Business Access and Transit BAT lanes or within mixed (general purpose) traffic; and
2. A center-running option where the bus would operate in a mix of exclusive lanes and mixed traffic.

Second Screening – Conceptual Alternatives

The recommended design configurations were advanced and refined into two conceptual alternatives for the entire corridor, including a more precise layout of the roadway configurations and station placement. These two conceptual alternatives were identified as the *Curbside Alternative* and the *Median Alternative*.

LPA is Formally Adopted

After ongoing discussions and deliberation with the study's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), their recommendation was to move forward with the Curbside Alternative. The Pierce Transit Board of Commissioners, in collaboration with the City of Tacoma and Pierce County, adopted a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) on July 9, 2018. This action specified the mode, route alignment, and project termini. On April 8, 2019, the Pierce Transit Board refined the LPA by identifying a preferred concept design and station locations. The Board selected as the LPA an option known as the "Median-Hybrid" Alternative, which is a combination of curbside and median lanes, as well as mixed-traffic bus operation using both the right lane and the left lane. This alternative, along with proposed station locations is shown on the map, attached.

Tacoma's Pacific Avenue Corridor Plan

The Pacific Avenue/SR 7 corridor BRT system will support the City's *One Tacoma* Comprehensive Plan, including the Transportation Master Plan's strategic policies, by creating a top quality and advanced travel option that will provide greater mobility access for all users, and support transit-oriented development along one of the City's key corridors. The enhanced transportation services will help meet the Transportation Master Plan's policies calling for significant increases in alternative mode choices to help reduce the use of single occupant vehicles, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and improve air quality. The proposed BRT

system is expected to increase opportunities for mixed-use development and greater density along the corridor, an improved jobs/workforce balance, and encourage more active lifestyles through enhancements to infrastructure that supports first-last mile connections.

While City staff from Public Works and the Planning and Development Services Departments have worked with Pierce Transit to help with the BRT system planning, the City and Pierce Transit have also committed to partnering on a comprehensive Subarea/Corridor Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) project along Pacific Avenue that will evaluate land use, urban design, streetscape, accessibility, connectivity, environmental, and capital needs along this corridor and explore how the community can best capitalize on the significant transportation investment that the proposed BRT system represents. This project is designed to facilitate the City's long-term growth vision, which focuses on supporting new growth and development in centers and along corridors, where this type of transit-oriented development pattern is most feasible. This project has been on hold due to City staffing limitations/reprioritizations but is currently anticipated to begin early 2020.

Pierce Transit BRT project staff are delivering project updates at more than a dozen community meetings in February. By the end of February, notices about soil testing and upcoming open houses will be mailed throughout the corridor. In mid-April, five open houses, as well as a virtual open house, will be held to share 30% project design drafts, and collect community input.

ISSUE:

These related projects present significant opportunities for collaboration between the City and Pierce Transit. Effective coordination will be critical to ensuring that these transportation investments are planned and implemented consistent with the goals and policies of Pierce Transit and the City of Tacoma, and in a manner that is responsive to and supportive of the community's vision for the future. Specifically, the following areas of collaboration have been identified by staff as significant opportunities for improved collaboration between Pierce Transit and the City of Tacoma:

- Establishing a partnering agreement for the Bus Rapid Transit project, which could facilitate clear expectations and commitments from both parties on design and permitting timelines.
- Funding and successful completion of a corridor subarea plan.
- Quarterly updates (or more often when necessary) to Council through the study session and/or IPS committee prior to significant milestone decisions made by the Pierce Transit board.
- Identifying first mile and last mile connection infrastructure enhancements and responsibility.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is an informational briefing only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Partial funding (\$60 Million) for the Pacific Avenue BRT project was provided through the Sound Transit 3 (ST3) ballot measure approved by voters in November 2016, and Pierce Transit is actively working to identify and assemble the remaining project funding, including a Small Starts Capital Investment Grants application successfully submitted to the FTA in September 2018 for \$59.7 million.

Funding has already been allocated to Planning and Development Services for the proposed Pacific Avenue Corridor Plan, which in combination with pledged partnership funding from Pierce Transit and Public Works, should provide sufficient resources to move this project forward.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an informational briefing only and no specific recommendations or decisions are requested at this time. However, considering the “ongoing development/design status” of the Destination 2040 Long-Range Plan Update effort and the Pacific Avenue BRT project, as well as the “pre-launch” status of the Pacific Avenue Corridor Plan project, this will be a good opportunity for the Committee to provide input on methods for enhanced collaboration and other key issues, questions, and/or concerns.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Pacific Avenue BRT Map
2. City Council Resolution 40287 – Pacific Avenue BRT Recommendations (April 2, 2019)
3. Pierce Transit Board Resolution 18-025 – Adoption of BRT Locally Preferred Alternative (July 9, 2018)
4. Pierce Transit Board Resolution 19-008A – LPA Running Way Option and Access to TDS (April 8, 2019)
5. Pierce Transit Small Starts Project Development Documentation