



NAIPTA MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 27, 2020

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM:
Kate Morley, Mountain Line Deputy General Manager
Heather Dalmolin, Mountain Line CEO & General Manager

SUBJECT: Mountain Line Downtown Connection Center (DCC) Project

Background and Existing Conditions:

A new Downtown Connection Center (DCC) is identified in Mountain Line's 2020 Strategic Plan as the highest priority capital project in order to support public transit service within the community. Since 2009, Mountain Line has operated the existing DCC under an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) and licensing agreement with the City of Flagstaff for use of City owned parcels on Phoenix Avenue. This transit hub serves approximately 52,000 riders monthly and has upwards of 300 buses accessing the site daily at our current level of service.

The existing DCC has capacity for nine buses at two curb islands and two on-street loading zones developed for 30' buses, the size that were in operation in 2009. Mountain Line currently operates 40' and 60' buses and has had to make minor accommodations and upgrades to the site to fit our new fleet into the existing DCC. The existing loading zones have no additional capacity for transit service expansion and presents significant operational challenges for existing service levels. Under our current conditions, Mountain Line has to get creative about connection schedules and actively manage bus dwell locations.

The existing DCC has minimal amenities for riders and drivers. A portion of the existing City warehouse is used for a driver comfort station with restrooms and a breakroom for staff. Aside from two bus shelters, there are no customer service or amenities for patrons.

Due to these limitations, in FY2018, NAIPTA applied for and received a \$6,777,938 Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307/5339 grant (80% federal/20% local) awarded through ADOT for acquisition, design and construction of a new connection center. Then, in 2019, NAIPTA applied for and received a second FTA Section 5339 grant bringing an additional \$15,675,000 in federal funds to the project. Mountain Line now believes it has adequate funding to develop a true, multimodal, community asset in the heart of downtown.





Alternatives Analysis

In the fall of 2019, Mountain Line conducted an Alternatives Analysis to evaluate a variety of sites for the new connection center. It was determined that sites needed to be a minimum of 141,000 square feet to accommodate bus maneuvering and an administration facility. Sites also needed to be within ¼ mile of the downtown core to ensure the connection center would be within walking distance of that major activity center. Four sites met the criteria and were further analyzed using 66 criteria in 10 overall categories. The site screening criteria included: site access for buses, pedestrians and bicycles; route network impacts; appropriate land use and zoning; community support; railroad/utility impacts; environmental; cost; and existing ownership. Expanding the current site on Phoenix Avenue was identified as the highest-ranking alternative.

Downtown Connection Center Needs and Programming

Mountain Line has identified the following items as key elements of the connection center.

- Provide improvements for the ingress/egress of buses to connect to major arterials.
- Develop an inviting, welcoming space for customers with focus on safety and security and a context-sensitive, sustainable design.
- Provide customer service office(s), safety/operations supervisor offices.
- Separate transit operations from personal vehicles and provide for long-term service expansion with capacity for up to 13 bus bays.
- Develop administrative offices with the possibility of conference or community space.
- Develop opportunities for other transportation modes such as bike share, car share and/or ride hailing services, connection with regional services, bike lockers, rider drop off and customer parking.

Additional items have been identified as desired, but not required:

- Revenue generation component such as building space for partnership opportunities including office or other uses to be determined.
- Public art.
- Community space.
- Civic space.
- Other partner needs.

Concepts

Over the last year, Mountain Line has developed many concepts, trying to maximize use of the property. In coordination with city staff, compatibility with the Rio de Flag project has been the driving factor in design. Mountain Line has fully explored the opportunity to provide space for a P3 partnership; however, the best-practice needs of a transit center coupled with the extensive easements existing across the site have so constrained the developable area so as to virtually eliminate the potential for P3 opportunities.





Attached to this report is what we believe to be the best concept plan for the transit center.

Benefits include:

- Pedestrian and bike connection to the site,
- forward facing building on Milton Ave,
- bus bays that allow for safe movements and provide opportunity for intercity and tour bus use,
- capacity, though reduced, for special parking uses such as Amtrak and winter ordinance overnight permits, and
- opportunity for civic space to meet southside community desires.

With these benefits, its important to realize that expansion of the transit center means reduction of other uses on site, mainly parking. The current site has 159 parking spaces including 7 for over sized vehicles such as RVs and trailers. The concept in front of you has approximately 65 spaces and currently does not have capacity for oversized vehicles. While Mountain Line will explore opportunities to support this type of parking, Mountain Line cannot commit to finding a way to accommodate large vehicle or RV parking on the site. It is important to note that any potential solution for in this regard would come at the expense of civic space desires.

Next Steps

Mountain Line will continue to develop a design through the support of the DCC stakeholders groups which has representatives from Southside neighborhood, La Plaza Vieja neighborhood, transit riders, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Alliance and the county's Sustainable Building Program. Mountain Line will submit an application for a Conditional Use Permit to the City for approval by Planning and Zoning Commission. Mountain Line has committed to bring the CUP to the City Council for their full review regardless of the Planning Commission's formal recommendation. Because the project is federally funded, an environmental review will also be conducted.

Mountain Line recognizes time is of the essence to develop the plans for a new DCC due to the pending Rio de Flag Project. The Rio de Flag project construction will impact the current downtown connection center, meaning plans for the permanent DCC need to be well ahead of the Rio de Flag Project.

Connection to City Plan's

Climate Action and Adaption Plan (implementation is a City Council Goal)

- STRATEGY 2. Prioritize, incentivize, and promote transportation by biking, walking, and transit.

Flagstaff Regional Plan

- Policy LU.5.5. Plan for and promote compact commercial development as activity centers with mixed uses, allowing for efficient multi-modal transit options and infrastructure.





Northern Arizona Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority

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- Policy T.1.7. Coordinate transportation and other public infrastructure investments efficiently to achieve land use and economic goals
- Goal T.7. Provide a high-quality, safe, convenient, accessible public transportation system, where feasible, to serve as an attractive alternative to single-occupant vehicles.
- Policy T.7.3. Support a public transit system design that encourages frequent and convenient access points, for various transportation modes and providers, such as private bus and shuttle systems, park-and-ride lots for cars and bicycles, and well-placed access to bus, railroad, and airline terminal facilities

Southside Neighborhood Specific Plan

- The Downtown Connection Center at this location is supported.



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