



METRORapid University Corridor Project Frequently Asked Questions

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What is METRORapid?

METRORapid is a top-of-the-line bus service that operates like light rail to deliver faster connections and a smooth, convenient ride.

The service features:

- Modern design that offers 100% accessibility, with wider doorways and level boarding.
- Outstanding customer amenities such as station-like platforms at every stop.
- Dedicated, transit-only lane to move through traffic.
- Convenient schedule for easy trip planning.

The maximum capacity of a METRORapid vehicle is estimated at 126 passengers.

Why has METRO chosen METRORapid (bus rapid transit) over light rail, and could it be converted in the future?

There are multiple benefits to building and operating the METRORapid system over other technologies. Here are just a few:

- METRORapid overall requires less right-of-way to construct, resulting in a lesser need for METRO to purchase property.
- METRORapid provides more flexibility, is as efficient as rail, but more effective than a local bus service.
- Overall cost to operate is less, which decreases the amount needed from taxpayer funds, yet it allows METRO to provide more services to the broader Houston community.

The University Project, as a METRORapid option, was presented as part of the METRONext Program and was approved by nearly 70% of the voters in 2019.

Currently, this is a Bus Rapid Transit project; there are no plans for rail. The METRORapid vehicles will operate similarly to existing METRORail.

How is reliability improved with the METRORapid service compared to regular METRO bus routes?

The METRORapid vehicles will run in a dedicated transit-only lane and will have signal priority at traffic signals, like METRORail. The dedicated transit-only lanes, and coordinated signals, will make METRORapid more reliable than a local bus service that operates in general traffic.

What is the total project cost, and how much federal funding is METRO seeking? Initial project work indicates that the cost could be in the range of \$1.6-\$1.8B, subject to inflationary market conditions. Cost for the project will be re-evaluated prior to entering final design.

METRO is presently seeking 60% or more of the eligible costs from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Capital Improvement Grant program. This will equate to over \$900M in federal grant funds that would be invested directly into the Houston region.

Has the alignment been determined for METRORapid University?

Yes, the METRO Board adopted the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) on April 5, 2023. A map of the alignment can be found under the “View Alignment “ tab at www.ridemetro.org/University

Road Design Improvements and Traffic Impacts

What kind of roadway, sidewalk, and drainage improvements is METRO planning to do as part of this project?

Roadway conditions are being assessed as part of the project, and METRO is working with the City of Houston to determine roadway replacement needs along the project corridor. Sidewalk improvements will additionally be made along the corridor. Space permitting, a 10’ side path is being proposed that can be utilized by both pedestrians and cyclists. Where there is no space for a side path, sidewalks with varying width from 6’ to 8’ are proposed. Sidewalk less than 6’ in width require a variance request from the COH. Drainage improvements will also be part of the project. The design of the street will meet the latest post-Harvey City of Houston requirements.

What are the potential traffic changes or planned lane closures?

The project will impact current lane configurations to accommodate the transit-only lanes and incorporate street safety improvements for the driving public and pedestrians. These are some of the proposed enhancements:

- One of the general-purpose (car) lanes in each direction along the corridor will become a dedicated transit-only lane. For most of the corridor, the center lanes will become a dedicated transit-only lane. Please note that emergency vehicles will be able to fully utilize these transit-only lanes.
- Unprotected left turns along the routes will be eliminated. Signalized intersections will allow for safer U-turns and left turns. Cross streets will have access across the corridor at signalized intersections.
- New signalized intersections may be added where existing signals are spaced over about ½ mile apart. METRO is looking at adding additional signals at several locations throughout the project corridor that were recommended during public engagement meetings.
- METRO is also working with the City of Houston to add safe pedestrian crossings at mid-blocks.
- Construction phasing and sequencing will be coordinated to minimize the number of traffic switches and maintain local access. Detours will be provided for major routes, and local access will be maintained.

For more information on the location of signals and the number of lanes, please refer to the segment schematics found on the resource page of the project website [HERE](#).

Will traffic flow be impacted by making one lane a transit-only lane?

The University METRORapid project design incorporates a multimodal approach that allows for METRO to utilize the public right-of-way. This type of design maximizes the number of persons that can move within the existing space available on Houston roadways, by avoiding costly and disruptive acquisitions that are often associated with lane additions. This conceptual design accommodates all modes of travel, including car traffic, high-capacity transit, pedestrians, and bicycles, while making it safer for all travelers. Since general purpose lanes will be reduced, the project team’s analysis indicates that longer wait times could be experienced during peak periods but will be partially offset by improved traffic signal coordination, and changes in travel modes along the project corridor.

What impact is this going to have on current travel patterns?

The METRORapid University project will provide an additional transportation option for both residents and area visitors along the project corridor. Overall travel pattern impacts are expected to be minimal. By providing this service, local trips may shift from taking a car, to utilizing one of the added transportation options, such as METRORapid, biking, or walking along the project corridor. It is also expected that some car traffic will seek alternate routes, specifically during peak periods; however, getting across streets will be substantially safer as cars will be re-directed to signalized intersections with mid-block openings within medians eliminated.

Why is METRO proposing to repurpose one lane of traffic along the University project corridor (Richmond, Wheeler, Lockwood) when this was not needed for the METRORapid Silver Line?

The METRORapid Silver Line was a roadway project led by the Uptown Management District, that included transit lanes. The Uptown Management District was able to keep three traffic lanes in each direction and adding transit lanes, by narrowing the existing traffic lanes, purchasing private property along Post Oak Boulevard and removing significant portions of the median. Along the METRORapid University corridor, METRO's goal is to minimize the impacts to private property by maximizing the use of the existing right of way to serve all modes. As a result of this design paradigm, which is different than the one used on the Silver Line, the number of general-purpose lanes would be reduced, exclusive METRORapid lanes and shared use paths added, and the overall corridor would be designed to maximize the throughput of people, with safety and accessibility in mind. METRO is also working with residents along the corridor to minimize impacts to medians and trees in medians as we progress the design on the corridor.

Station Design, Access and Safety

Where will the METRORapid stations be located, and how are these locations being determined?

The station locations can be found in the documents shared with the community during the various public meetings [here](#). Locations of METRORapid stations were determined based on their ability to connect to other transit modes including METRORail, local bus, METRORapid, transit-oriented facilities (i.e., Transit Centers and Park and Rides), and activity centers (i.e., universities, employment centers, etc.). Current ridership and boarding trends were also analyzed to ensure that the new METRORapid line will be utilized. As the project progresses, there may be some minor adjustments made to minimize land acquisition.

How will the stations be named?

Intersection names are currently being used to provide a reference point. However, METRO has a process and policy for naming stations that involves seeking public input and requires METRO board approval.

How will METRO address vagrancy and loitering at and around METRO facilities?

The METRORapid project will incorporate crime prevention through environmental design – a design process that enhances safety through urban and architectural design. This includes, but is not limited to, eliminating places that individuals can hide, adding kiosks where customers and residents can call the police, installing CCTV at all stations providing 24-hour surveillance, and increasing lighting at METRORapid stations.

As METRO service is expanded, METRO Police (MPD) presence will be increased on these new routes. METRO is developing a plan to provide coverage on the new line. MPD plans will incorporate personnel deployment, utilization of technology, patron/employee reporting and safety tips for patrons. Additional details will be shared as the project develops.

How will METRO handle light pollution, noise, and crime?

METRO utilizes the principles of safety through environmental design. This means that when designing the METRORapid stations, METRO does it in such a way that mitigates the potential for crime. Lights will meet City of Houston standards. The route will also be beyond the utility easement, and adjacent to the road. The METRORapid buses are electric, which are considerably less noisy than diesel-fueled buses. Environmental analysis conducted doesn't indicate any additional noise is expected from the project corridor.

Will there be an Arts in Transit program like what has been implemented on previous projects?

METRO's Arts in Transit Program is committed to the highest aesthetic standards and the broadest involvement of Houston-based artists to contribute to the visual character and texture of METRO projects, and the communities that they serve. Community artists will be paramount to the program's success.

What will happen if there is an accident, or a vehicle breaks down on the general-purpose lane?

When an accident occurs or a vehicle breaks down in the general-purpose lane, the local emergency personnel (Police/Fire/EMT) will take over the operations to make conditions safe for all road users. This may include utilizing the transit only lanes to provide safe circulation in the area.

Pedestrian and Bike Access and Safety

Will bicycles be allowed on METRORapid vehicles?

Yes, there is a bike-designated area inside of the METRORapid vehicle; similar to what you see on METRORail vehicles today.

What kind of pedestrian signals will there be, and what safety measures will be put in place for pedestrians and cyclists?

The pedestrian crossing design treatments are still being defined in coordination with the City of Houston as part of the next phase of design. However, there will be dedicated mid-block crossings throughout the project corridor to ensure better access to METRORapid stations.

There are a multitude of safety features that will also be included at each METRORapid station, such as:

- Accessible sidewalks and ADA ramps along the entire corridor.
- Additional bike and pedestrian crossings as well as design treatments for safer crossings which are of paramount importance along the corridor.
- METRO is also looking at the High Injury Network (HIN) to determine what additional roadway modifications should be made to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety.

A METRORapid station access plan is being created to prioritize pedestrian and bikeway improvements within a ½ mile of the station platforms. When available, information on the station area plans will be shared with the public.

The METRORapid University BRT route is expected to serve a lot of schools. What will METRO do to make sure that students can safely access school campuses?

There will be dedicated pedestrian crossings specifically added along the project corridor near schools. METRO has identified all of the schools along the project corridor and is actively coordinating with them to ensure that school traffic, in all its forms, is being accommodated.

Will there be on-site parking for cars or bicycles at the various METRORapid stations?

There will be parking at the METRO facilities along the route (Westchase Park & Ride, Lower Uptown Transit Center, Gessner Park & Ride, Hillcroft Transit Center, and Tidwell Transit Center). No dedicated parking spaces will be provided at the stations. Bike parking and amenities around stations will be considered as part of partnership opportunities with management districts along the project corridor.

Service and Vehicle Information

How frequently will buses run, and what kind of late-night services will be offered?

METRORapid service is currently proposed to operate every six (6) minutes on weekdays from approximately 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Service before and after these hours, and on weekends, is proposed to be every 12 minutes. METRO's service plan currently outlines that buses will operate from 4 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. on weekdays, and from 5 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. on weekends.

What is the anticipated ridership for the METRORapid University BRT route?

At this phase, METRO is still looking at different iterations and considering several factors that impact ridership such as: number and location of stations, signal timing, etc. Projected ridership for this project is estimated to be around 19,000 for average daily boardings.

How long will it take to get from the Westchase Park and Ride to the Tidwell Transit Center?

The end-to-end run time for this METRORapid corridor is in the range of 70-75 minutes. It should be noted that this route is designed to move riders to many interim destinations along the corridor such as universities, colleges, and several employment centers. This service will also connect riders to multiple local bus routes, three METRORail lines, and the existing METRORapid Silver Line, making important transit connections faster and more reliable.

What type of vehicle will be used for the METRORapid University route? Is METRO considering autonomous vehicles?

The METRORapid project will use articulated (60-foot), 5-door buses (to serve the center platforms). It is expected that the fleet will be exclusively comprised of low/no-emission buses.

METRO is always planning for future vehicle needs, so if a similar vehicle design is used, autonomous vehicles could potentially be an option for service.

Environmental and Tree Impacts

Is the METRORapid University line going to cause major environmental impacts?

The National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process is being finalized and the analysis conducted thus far indicates that there are no significant environmental impacts. The environmental analysis has been submitted to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for review. METRO will make the NEPA document available on the project website for public access in the summer of 2023 when approval is expected.

Why is a Categorical Exclusion needed and will it be made available for review?

A Categorical Exclusion (CE) is a federal requirement for funding of a project with federal funds. It is a process conducted to determine a project's environmental impacts in several areas: biological, historical, archeological, traffic, water resources, noise and vibration, acquisitions and displacements, environmental justice, and hazardous materials.

The CE will be placed online for public viewing after FTA review.

There are a lot of mature trees along this alignment. What will be done to preserve them?

METRO is mindful of the natural resources along the corridor. Tree protection is being addressed in several ways:

- Attempts will be made to preserve trees in medians, and in pedestrian spaces where the width of the right-of-way allows us to do so.
- Wider pedestrian spaces are being proposed and METRO hopes to create a better experience through the addition of shade trees along the corridor.
- Additional trees will also be planted above and beyond the current City of Houston tree ordinances.

Construction and Right-of-Way Impacts

How long will construction last? And will it be done all at once, or by segment?

Construction is expected to begin in late 2024 starting with utility relocations, followed by street and bridge construction. Construction is expected to be completed in 2029. Construction will begin concurrently on multiple segments and METRO will inform communities of the staging and sequencing of construction activities, working on a block-by-block basis so everyone along the project corridor is informed of construction plans and work together to minimize impacts.

How will METRO minimize impacts to businesses during construction?

METRO will be preparing a detailed construction phasing and sequencing plan once design progresses over the next year. METRO will engage businesses along the corridor to understand their operations and needs so construction plans can be developed with sensitivity to business operations and a focus on minimizing impacts and providing safe access during construction.

Will the project require right-of-way acquisition through eminent domain?

The project goal is to stay within the existing right-of-way as much as possible. However, METRO anticipates some right-of-way will need to be purchased to accommodate stations, at elevated structures, to address left turns at certain locations for vehicle traffic, and to improve universal accessibility and meet current City of Houston standards. METRO's intent is to minimize the need for these acquisitions. Please refer to the maps provided on the resource page of the University project website for more information. Please note these are preliminary right-of-way needs identified and METRO will be working on reducing these needs as project design progresses. METRO will follow the **Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act** when property acquisition is needed.

How will the construction of the METRORapid University project be different from the construction of the METRORail Green Line which impacted businesses along Harrisburg?

The METRORapid University project is a Bus Rapid Transit project. The dedicated lane is for buses, not light rail vehicles. Therefore, there isn't a need to build rail infrastructure on the ground or overhead electric lines as built for the METRORail Green Line. Construction for this project will be like any road construction project occurring in the city today. Construction phases for this project are minimal compared to light rail construction and the overall construction period is shorter.

METRO will engage businesses along the corridor to understand their operations and needs so construction plans can be developed with sensitivity to business operations and a focus on minimizing impacts and providing safe access during construction.

Community Engagement

How is community input being utilized in project development?

METRO conducted public meetings to receive direct feedback from the community. Comments and survey results collected were reviewed to determine further analysis needed and if design changes were required. This was the case for the segment 3 alignment. The analysis conducted resulted in the alignment moving from Blodgett to Wheeler between Almeda and Ennis. Another example is in segment 4 where the overpass design at Harrisburg has been changed to an underpass design in response to community feedback. All community feedback is documented as part of the public record.

What opportunities will there be for additional public involvement?

METRO will continue public engagement and outreach efforts at all phases of project development and construction. There will also be public involvement opportunities as part of the urban design process, and implementation of the Arts in Transit program. METRO encourages the public to stay connected and visit RideMETRO.org/University for project updates and resources, public involvement opportunities, and upcoming events and activities.

Segment Specific Questions

Segment 1

Why was the Westpark portion of the alignment selected? How will people access the service in this area?

METRO owns the right-of-way along Westpark and has preserved this right-of-way for transit use. There will be stations along this project corridor that access north-to-south-running bus routes and other transit centers, such as Hillcroft, where connections can be made to other routes. Pedestrian access will be facilitated between the METRORapid service and these routes.

Will the Danny Jackson Family Bark (dog) park that is currently on METRO Right-Of-Way (ROW) be impacted?

The alignment is being proposed to move out of the METRO-owned ROW and onto Westpark Drive around I-610 to minimize any impacts to this park.

Will the project impact the existing power transmission lines along Westpark Drive?

Yes, there will be some impacts to existing utilities along Westpark Drive. METRO is coordinating with Center Point Energy regarding the relocation of these utilities. Center Point Energy will evaluate and determine where to best relocate their utilities as the design of this project progresses.

Segment 2

How will traffic on Richmond Avenue be improved with this service?

- Traffic is projected to increase along this corridor whether there is a METRORapid project or not. Widening Richmond to accommodate the growth of single occupancy vehicles only would require full acquisition of private properties, impacts to trees and additional drainage. METRO and the City are focusing on moving people via various modes, not just vehicles.
- Some intersections along Richmond Avenue will improve METRO and the City are looking at improving signal timing. Based on existing traffic counts and ridership estimates, if the METRORapid Project was operating today, more people would move through a typical intersection during rush hour, versus moving along Richmond Avenue as it currently is.

Will the streets that cross I-59/69 maintain their existing turn lanes to utilize the bridge?

All the existing signalized intersections on Richmond Avenue will remain signalized and will have access to I-59/69. This includes Montrose, Mandell, Dunlavy, and Woodhead.

Will there still be local buses (25-Richmond and 84-Buffalo Speedway) operating on Richmond Avenue to serve locations between the METRORapid stations?

METRO is currently evaluating local bus routes along the entire METRORapid University corridor. The goal of the METRORapid University line is to provide superior service to what existing customers are currently experiencing and introduce new transit options to future customers.

Has METRO considered adding a traffic light at Jack St?

METRO has reviewed the location and met with the City of Houston to discuss a potential signal at Jack Street. The review concluded a new signal is not recommended because it is too close to signals at Richmond at Spur 527 and Richmond at Stanford. Jack Street is approximately 350' from Spur 527. METRO and the City agreed to consider a pedestrian crossing at Jack Street.

Has METRO considered keeping the light at Hazard St.?

METRO and the City of Houston agreed to re-examine the light at Hazard.

Segment 3

What is happening with the Wheeler Transit Center?

METRO will be opening a public process to evaluate Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and/or joint development opportunities for the Wheeler Transit Center. In the interim, the METRORapid University project plans include a station on Wheeler between Main Street and Fannin Street. METRO is currently coordinating with TxDOT to minimize service disruption while US59 is reconstructed as part of the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP), which crosses the southern portion of the Wheeler Transit Center.

Why did METRO decide to change the Segment 3 alignment from Blodgett to Wheeler between Almeda and Ennis?

METRO selected the modified alignment because it provides the maximum benefit for the fewest impacts. This updated alignment (presented to the community) will better serve the universities and the Third Ward community while minimizing residential property needs. Please refer to the Wheeler alignment board on the University resources page to see the analysis conducted in the [2023 project presentation](#).

How will the METRORapid University Project connect to Texas Southern University (TSU)?

TSU will be served by a proposed station at Ennis and Wheeler.

How will the METRORapid University project impact the residents of Cuney Homes?

Residents of the Cuney Homes will be able to access the METRORapid University line from the proposed station located on Alabama and Ennis creating improved access to more frequent, reliable transit connections to major employment centers such as LBJ Hospital, the University of Houston, and other important services. Because the alignment does not travel along Alabama, residential parking will not be impacted.

Segment 4

How is the METRORapid University BRT service going to help with mobility in the area near railroad crossings where cars are often stopped? How will cars be able to turn around at railroad crossings?

METRO is increasing mobility by providing a fast and efficient transit option by grade separating the exclusive transit-only lanes at railroad crossings. The grade separated transit-only lanes will accommodate emergency vehicles to ensure that trains do not impede emergency services, which has been an ongoing concern of the community. METRO will explore the possibility of limited-use of the transit-only lanes to benefit vehicular traffic during times of extended train blockages. As part of ongoing public engagement, METRO will continue to update the community on project coordination at railroad crossings as project design progresses.

Why was the Lockwood alignment selected?

In comparison to other alignments, the Lockwood alignment provided the most benefit while minimizing overall project impacts. For more detailed information on the alternatives analysis, please go to the resource page to find the analysis [report](#).

How is this project going to impact the City of Houston (COH) project on Lockwood and Navigation?

Phase 1 of the COH project is moving forward. It is scheduled to start construction in the Fall of 2023.

Segment 5

What is happening at the Evergreen Negro Cemetery?

As part of the planning phase, and as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Antiquities Code of Texas, the METRORapid University project team conducted background research that required subsequent due diligence investigations through on-site trench scraping of the median of Lockwood Drive. Through this process, Project RESPECT, a community-based non-profit, who is the caretaker of the cemetery, was contacted to coordinate the archaeological investigations. The investigations resulted in 30 locations being identified with evidence of previous disinterment and four locations appeared to be intact burials.

The archeology team notified METRO and the Texas Historic Commission. METRO then notified the City of Houston and the Federal Transit Administration. METRO will submit the required Archeological Survey Technical Report and the Archeological Workplan outlining the process to follow, to FTA and the Texas Historic Commission (THC). METRO will coordinate with Project Respect and the COH on next steps once FTA and the THC approve the Archeological Survey Technical Report and the Archeological Workplan. The review and approval of these documents is expected to occur between April and October of 2023.

What is happening at the Tidwell Transit Center?

METRO received a grant from the FTA's "Pilot Program for Transit Oriented Development Planning" to create a plan for Transit Oriented Development at the Tidwell Transit Center. For more information, visit the METRONext System Enhancements [page](#).

Will access for pedestrians be improved along Tidwell Road and Jensen Drive?

This project is in line with the Vision Zero Plan that the City of Houston adopted in 2022. Sidewalks will be improved throughout the project corridor, as well as adding ADA ramps so riders with disabilities can adequately access METRORapid stations. Bike and pedestrian crossings will also be designed for safer crossings along the corridor.

Will there be a METRORapid station added along Tidwell Rd. between Lockwood and Jensen Dr.?

METRO is currently evaluating local bus routes along the entire METRORapid University corridor. The goal of the METRORapid University line is to provide superior service to what existing customers are currently experiencing and introduce new transit options to future customers. Specifically, along Tidwell Rd., METRO is reviewing service provided by the existing local bus routes: 45-Tidwell and the 80-MLK/Lockwood.