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CITY OF PHOENIX CITIZENS TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION Agenda Item 7 – Summary Meeting Minutes December 4, 2025

7. CAPEX Light Rail Options

The Commission received a comprehensive presentation on the Capitol Extension (CAPEX) and I-10 West Extension light rail projects. Presenters included:

- Amber Williamson, Deputy City Manager
- Markus Coleman, Light Rail Administrator
- Jessica Mefford-Miller, CEO, Valley Metro
- Trevor Collon, Chief of Capital Development, Valley Metro

Presentation Overview:

The presentation included discussion on the significance and history of the light rail extensions, route alternatives, financial considerations, community engagement, and outlined two options for the Commission's consideration:

- Option 1: Recommend a locally preferred alignment for the CAPEX project and continue in the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Capital Investment Grant (CIG) process.
- Option 2: Exit the CIG process and reevaluate other high-capacity transit alternatives for West Phoenix.

Three alignment alternatives were presented, discussed and illustrated for Option 1:

1. 16th Avenue North
2. 16th Avenue South
3. 7th Avenue North

Each alignment alternative was evaluated through a multifaceted lens to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its feasibility and impact. Each evaluation considered the projected cost of construction and the availability of funding sources, including local and federal contributions. Economic development potential was a key factor, with projections estimating the level of investment and tax revenue each alignment could generate over time. Environmental review requirements were also assessed, particularly the need for either reevaluation or a full restart of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, depending on the alignment chosen. Community feedback has also played a significant role, with input gathered through public meetings, stakeholder engagement, and over 1,400 submitted feedback forms to date. Finally, each alignment was analyzed in terms of its compatibility with the federal grant timeline, particularly the need to meet the FTA's Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program deadline of April 2026 to remain eligible for funding.

The 16th Avenue South alignment was projected to generate the highest economic return and had the second strongest community support. 16th Avenue North alignment

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has the most community support of the three options but has the lowest economic return. The 7th Avenue option has the least community support with the second highest economic return. Presenters emphasized that the CAPEX project is currently in the FTA's CIG pipeline with a "medium-high" rating, making it eligible for federal funding if it proceeds on schedule.

Public Comments:

Multiple speakers addressed the Commission, all in support of continuing the CAPEX project:

City of Phoenix Councilmember Anna Hernandez (District 7) emphasized the importance of fulfilling promises made to voters under the T2050 plan and warned that exiting the CIG process could jeopardize future light rail expansions. She noted that over \$20 million had already been invested in the project and that development interest in the corridor was growing.

Ventura Herrera, Kaitlin Wright, and Michelle McCormick, residents of the Woodland Historic Neighborhood, expressed strong support for Option 1 and the 16th Avenue South alignment. They cited minimal displacement, better development potential, and concerns that reevaluation of other high-capacity transit alternatives would lead to indefinite delays or cancellation. They also noted that the north alignment would interfere with community events and potentially require the demolition of a building.

Staff noted that over 1,400 community feedback forms have been submitted so far, with 63% supporting continuation of the CAPEX project and 37% favoring reevaluation. Among alignment preferences, 16th Avenue North was the most favored.

Commission Discussion and Presenter Responses:

Commissioner Panaitescu made a motion to recommend Option 1, citing the urgency of maintaining eligibility for federal funding and Phoenix's strong track record in managing federal grants. She emphasized that delays could result in lost funding opportunities and that the city's performance history made it a strong candidate for continued federal investment.

Commissioner Douglas seconded the motion and spoke in favor of continuing the project, highlighting the long-term benefits of light rail and the importance of connecting transit to civic institutions. He noted that while construction can be disruptive, the South-Central Extension had already proven successful in ridership and economic impact.

Commissioner Vallo expressed support for the project and the 16th Avenue South alignment, referencing her community involvement and familiarity with the area. She emphasized the need to move forward without further delay.

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Commissioner Steinmetz asked about previous studies on alternative routes. Mr. Coleman clarified that the Indian School corridor was part of a separate federally funded alternatives analysis and not directly related to the CAPEX/I-10 West project. However, he noted that Council could direct staff to revisit that corridor as part of a broader reevaluation under Option 2.

Commissioner Perez-Pawloski noted her concerns about legislative interference. She asked about what might happen if the legislature blocked the project after significant investments. Ms. Mefford-Miller responded that while the project currently has a favorable “medium-high” rating from the FTA, federal funding is not guaranteed until a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) is executed. Exiting the CIG process would forfeit the project’s current rating and require restarting the process from scratch, which could delay the project by years and jeopardize future funding.

Mr. Coleman added that while no federal funds had yet been obligated, the project’s inclusion in the FTA CIG pipeline was a significant milestone. He noted it is important for the City and Valley Metro to maintain the good working relationship with the FTA that has been developed over the years. In addition, exiting the process would require notification to FTA Region 9 of the City’s decision to evaluate other options if Option 2 is selected. He also confirmed that the T2050 plan was built on the assumption of federal participation and that failure to secure it could impact other projects.

Ms. Mefford-Miller further explained that Phoenix’s history of delivering projects on time and on budget strengthens the case for continued funding. She noted that the project’s economic development potential and ridership projections were strong, and that the FTA had been engaged throughout the planning process. She also provided insight into the national funding climate, noting the CIG program remains a priority in the President’s and Senate’s budgets with a proposed increase in funding, despite the House proposing a decrease in the CIG budget, and noted she is always cautious with federal funding.

Commissioner Huckins proposed a substitute motion to recommend Option 2, citing the need for flexibility and the risk of legislative opposition. Commissioner Perez-Pawloski seconded the motion and reiterated concerns about potential state-level barriers. She emphasized that reevaluation would not eliminate the project but would allow time to reassess a best path forward.

Vice Chair Princell asked for clarification on the role of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) and the Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA). Staff confirmed that JLBC must approve station locations within the Capitol Mall area and that ADOA has zoning authority in that district, adding complexity to any alignment that enters the Capitol core.

Motions and Votes:

- Substitute Motion (Option 2 – Reevaluation):
 - Motion: Commissioner Huckins
 - Second: Commissioner Perez-Pawloski

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- Vote: 4 Yes – 5 No → Motion failed
- Original Motion (Option 1 – Continue the CIG Process for the CAPEX Project):
 - Motion: Commissioner Panaitescu
 - Second: Commissioner Douglas
 - Vote: 4 Yes – 5 No → Motion failed

As both motions failed, the Commission did not reach a consensus, and no formal recommendation was made to City Council. Staff confirmed that the vote results and public feedback would be forwarded to Council for consideration.