

Project Acronyms

Common Project Phrases or Wording

BCDCOG (Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Council of Governments): BCDCOG is an association of, by and for local governments that was established to assist Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester county leaders in working collaboratively. The three-county regional planning agency is also the federally-recognized project sponsor for Lowcountry Rapid Transit.

BRT (Bus Rapid Transit): Bus Rapid Transit is a high-quality, bus-based transit system that leverages modern technology to deliver fast, efficient and reliable service that may include dedicated lanes, busways, traffic signal priority, off-board fare collection, elevated platforms and enhanced stations. Sometimes referred to as “light rail on wheels.”

CARTA (Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority): CARTA operates the Charleston metro area’s public transportation system. It is the state of South Carolina’s largest public transportation provider.

CHATS (Charleston Area Transportation Study): CHATS is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for our region. CHATS is staffed by BCDCOG, which facilitates the MPO’s programs and initiatives.

CIG (Capital Investment Grants Program): FTA’s CIG program is a discretionary and competitive federal grant program. Through the FTA, CIG funds approximately \$2 billion per year to construct new and expanded rapid rail, commuter rail, light rail, streetcars, bus rapid transit, ferries and more. This program will fund up to 80% for major transit construction projects. LCRT will compete for these funds and, as the system expands, funding can be pursued through the program to fund future BRT corridors identified in the Regional Transit Framework plan

FAST Act: The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act is a funding and authorization bill to govern federal surface transportation spending. It was passed in December 2015.

FTA (Federal Transit Administration): The Federal Transit Administration is the lead federal agency providing financial and technical assistance for the LCRT project. FTA also oversees the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which is ultimately the deciding factor in whether or not to permit projects.

FTA NEW Starts Program: This is one of the discretionary programs in the CIG grant program. New Starts is for large investments over \$300M and/or seeking more than \$100M

in CIG funds. It is required that 50% of the project's guideway must be exclusive, meaning it must run in dedicated lanes.

HDR: The lead engineering consulting firm for LCRT project. HDR provides extensive experience with successful BRT and other major transit infrastructure projects across the United States and globally. Recently opened projects include those in Albuquerque, Minneapolis, and Louisville.

LCRT (Lowcountry Rapid Transit): The Lowcountry Rapid Transit project is a proposed bus rapid transit system connecting Charleston, North Charleston and Summerville that would provide reliable travel, connect communities, and energize economic opportunities along the corridor.

MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization): A Metropolitan Planning Organization is a federally funded organization that is required to carry out short- and long-term transportation planning for the urbanized portions of metro areas.

NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act): The National Environmental Policy Act is the primary law governing the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) environmental protection process. The NEPA process must be followed in order to qualify for federal funding and the act has four primary purposes:

1. to declare a national environmental policy;
2. to promote efforts to protect the environment;
3. to improve national understanding of environmental issues; and
4. to establish the Council on Environmental Quality.

Related Organizations

SCDOT (South Carolina Department of Transportation): SCDOT is a state government agency that provides systematic planning, construction, maintenance and operation of the South Carolina highway system, as well as the development of a statewide mass transit system that is consistent with the needs and desires of the public. The majority of the roads and right-of-way in the LCRT corridor are controlled by SCDOT.

SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office): The State Historic Preservation Office was created by the federal government under the [National Historic Preservation Act](#). The purposes of a SHPO include surveying and recognizing historic properties, reviewing nominations for properties to be included in the [National Register of Historic Places](#) and reviewing projects for their impact on historic properties in addition to supporting federal organizations, [state](#) and [local governments](#), and the private sector.

Transit and Operations

STOPS Model (Simplified Trips-on-Project Software): The FTA Simplified Trips on Project Software (STOPS) application is a ridership estimation modeling tool designed exclusively for fixed guide-way systems such as commuter rail, light rail, subway, BRT and streetcar. STOPS was developed by FTA to assist project sponsors in developing ridership forecasts for their New Starts or Small Starts projects. STOPS is also used by FTA to evaluate ridership forecasts and level the playing field for all projects (whether they use STOPS or another tool) applying for New Starts and Small Starts funds. (Note: LCRT is pursuing FTA New Starts funding.)

TOD (Transit Oriented Development): Transit Oriented Development and design strategically focuses redevelopment and new construction into areas where transit is convenient, attractive and easy to access. This type of planning supports the preservation, redevelopment and new development of distinct community centers where people can live, work and play with greater access to reliable public transit.

LCRT Definitions/Descriptions

Alternatives Analysis: The evaluation of all reasonable alternatives and general alignment options for identified transportation needs in a particular, broadly defined travel corridor. (In the case of LCRT, that corridor is the I-26 Corridor.)

Bi-directional Bus Lane: A single bus lane, typically in the center of the road, that enables peak-direction buses (those traveling the same direction as the majority of vehicles at a given time) to have priority over congested traffic. Locations with limited right-of-way may be a candidate for this type of application.

Bus Rapid Transit: Bus Rapid Transit is a high-quality, bus-based transit system that delivers fast, reliable and efficient service that may include dedicated lanes, busways, traffic signal priority, off-board fare collection, elevated platforms and enhanced stations. Sometimes referred to as “light rail on wheels.”

BRT Corridor: A section of road or roads served by a bus route or multiple bus routes that includes dedicated bus lanes.

Class of Action: A class of action indicates the seriousness of the impacts and the resulting level of documentation required in the NEPA process. The three classes of actions, in order of increasing complexity, are: Categorical Exclusions, Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements. The current class of action for LCRT is a Documented Categorical Exclusion (DCE). A DCE is a type of Categorical Exclusion that requires additional detail, but does not involve significant environmental impacts to require the level of documentation of an Environmental Assessment.

Edge of Pavement: The extent of pavement, including concrete, asphalt, gravel, or landscaping, and the location of curbing for a project.

Fixed Guideway: A fixed guideway is any public transportation infrastructure that uses and occupies a separate right-of-way for the exclusive use of public transportation and other high occupancy vehicles. BRT incorporates fixed guideways to improve reliability and travel speed along the corridor.

Transit Dependent Communities: Communities with populations that rely on public transit due to a lack of access or the inability to use personal transportation like cars or vehicles.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD): Transit oriented development and design strategically focuses redevelopment and new construction into areas where transit is convenient, attractive and easy to access. This type of planning supports the preservation,

redevelopment and new development of distinct community centers where people can live, work and play with greater access to reliable public transit.

Transit Stations: LCRT is planned to have transit stations along the corridor that are more substantial than standard bus stops, including, for instance, large, custom-designed canopies/shelters, security cameras, level boarding, ticket vending, passenger information signage, canopy lighting, protective bollards at crosswalks, crossing signals and more.

Project Development & Operations

30% Engineering: The level of project design that typically includes: advanced concept design defining edge of pavement, hydrological and geotechnical studies, final form and material selection for station designs. 30% engineering also sets the federal funding match for FTA grants. LCRT will need this level of design to understand key cost drivers.

Capital Investment Grants Program (CIG) Project Rating: The CIG Project Rating is the score FTA uses to determine whether to approve a project's advancement into the next phase in the New Starts and Core Capacity approval process. It is based on a defined set of criteria. FTA computes this overall project rating by averaging the summary ratings of the project justification criteria and local financial commitment criteria.

Design Criteria: To assist the engineering team, design criteria are developed to document general requirements or regulations that cover project elements like stations, roadway, storm water, street lighting and bike/pedestrian facilities.

Design Exception: A design exception is a documented design decision that does not meet minimum design criteria for a project.

Preferred Alignment: The preferred alignment is the recommended routing that addresses the project's purpose and need, is supported by stakeholders and the community, and can compete for federal funds.

Railroad Agreement: In several locations, LCRT construction will interface with railroad property. Navigating these intersections will require agreements with railroad operators in the region. Railroad agreements identify key considerations related to safety, engineering, customer service, operations, legal and regulatory matters, expense, risk and other issues specific to any proposed project and define a path forward for coordination and construction approvals.

Right-of-Way: The legal right, established by usage or grant, to pass along a specific route through grounds or property belonging to another.

Signal Warrant: A warrant is a condition that an intersection must meet to justify a signal installation. LCRT will follow the SCDOT warrant process, which includes volume requirements, corridor context and safety.

Traffic Signal Prioritization: Traffic signal priority means giving precedence to transit systems at intersections with traffic signals. This means that signals would allow the LCRT to proceed ahead of vehicular traffic, allowing for the rapid, unhindered movement of large groups of transit riders.

Transit Network Analysis: Analysis of the current bus network to develop recommendations for service changes to connect passengers traveling between LCRT and local (CARTA and TriCounty Link) routes.

Transit Service

Commuter Express: A commuter or express bus service is a fixed-route bus characterized by service predominantly in one direction during peak periods, limited stops, use of multi-ride tickets and routes of extended length. Service is usually between the central business district and outlying suburbs.

Contactless Ticketing: Transit customers pay fare through electronic communication that allows two devices (i.e. a mobile phone and fare box on bus) to communicate wirelessly when they are within a specific distance of one another using radio-frequency identification.

Fixed Route Service: Buses, vans and other vehicles that operate on a predetermined route according to a predetermined schedule.

Mobile Ticketing: Transit customers can pay for, obtain and/or validate tickets using mobile phones without the need for a physical ticket.

Off-Board Fare Collection: Transit passengers pay fares before boarding, typically via ticket vending machines on the platform. This increases speed of BRT operations.

Paratransit Service: Any type of passenger transit that is distinct from conventional transit, operating on schedules and routes determined by the needs of passengers rather than a fixed route. Paratransit services function as a “safety net” for persons whose disabilities prevent them from using a regular fixed route system.

Platform Level Boarding: Trains or buses that have interiors that are level with station platforms so that passengers do not have to climb steps to board. This configuration speeds up the boarding process and also allows passengers in wheelchairs to board quickly and easily without any special assistance.

LCRT Frequently Asked Questions

Why has the LCRT project been undertaken? The Lowcountry cannot build its way out of traffic congestion. Our region is growing at three times the national average and our existing transportation network is overwhelmed. Managing traffic growth with multimodal transportation options is vital to achieving an attractive quality of life and keeping the Lowcountry a desirable place to live, work and play.

This corridor, the region's most heavily traveled, uniquely connects the community to health care (five hospitals and major care facilities), education (four colleges and universities) and employment centers. It is not a silver bullet for mobility, but would be a vital tool in a toolbox that also includes, roads, bike-ped infrastructure, van pool programs and transit.

How or why was the preferred alignment identified? [Alignment 1](#), which runs from Summerville along US 78 to Rivers Avenue in North Charleston, connects to King St. Ext. in Charleston, and continues along Meeting and Calhoun Streets into the Medical District, was chosen because it is the most competitive in the FTA Capital Investment Grants program to be eligible for federal funding, which is needed to make LCRT a reality.

This preferred alignment ranks higher because it has the highest annual ridership, minimizes railroad crossings, offers a competitive cost (construction and operating) per rider, connects the highest number of employment areas and requires lower operating expenses. For the size of this project, LCRT must meet ridership requirements and the current alignment does that.

What is bus rapid transit and how is it different from traditional bus service? A bus rapid transit system includes infrastructure improvements along an existing roadway corridor that allow for improved operations and reliability of transit, often in dedicated lanes.

A typical bus service operates in mixed traffic stopping every few blocks; it typically consists of only a sign and a bench or shelter at stops. A BRT system like LCRT will operate in separate, dedicated lanes, stop every half-mile, and run every 10 to 20 minutes. BRT stations offer expanded rider amenities that include enhanced shelters and off-board pre-payment, electronic passenger information and security systems.

Why was BRT identified as the best mass transit option? A year-long study by BCDCOG identified BRT as the best alternative mode of transportation for the I-26 corridor for a number of reasons including current and projected regional population density, system flexibility and ability to expand, and cost effectiveness. BRT is the right fit at the right price to serve our region.

How is LCRT funded? In November 2016, Charleston County voters passed a half-cent sales tax to fund roadway, transit and green space projects. Part of the transit funding identified in the referendum — about \$250 million — will be used for LCRT. About \$180 million is slated for construction and \$70 million for operations over the next 20 years. The local funding will be used to compete for matching federal grants to cover the remaining construction costs of the project. A previous study completed in 2015 estimated \$360 million in total construction costs and an annual operating cost of \$5.9 million. These totals are estimates and may change.

What happens if you don't follow the FTA defined process for project development? The FTA grants program is defined in federal law and has specific rules for project development to receive funding. The project development process must be followed for the project to qualify for federal funding. A project that does not follow the specific rules of the program would be removed from consideration and would not be eligible for funding.

How much competition is there for this grant funding? The current “pipeline” — those projects in various stages of development that are currently pursuing CIG funding — totals approximately \$30 billion; \$12 billion of that includes projects with current grant agreements. There are approximately \$18 billion in outstanding funding requests from projects across the country.

What happens if you miss the two year project development deadline? FTA believes the intent of the FAST Act is for projects to make sufficient progress and move quickly through the approval process. Therefore, project sponsors should complete all of the required project development activities within a two-year timeframe starting on the day FTA accepts the project into the program.

If the required activities cannot be completed within the two-year timeframe due to unforeseen circumstances, FTA may allow extensions on a case-by-case basis. FTA has advised project sponsors should only enter project development when they feel confident they can complete the required activities within the two year timeframe.

Who is designing the system? An experienced team headed by HDR, the lead engineering consultant for the project, is designing the system, with input from community members and other stakeholders. BCDCOG is the federally recognized regional project sponsor representing LCRT.

Why was the Lowline alignment eliminated from consideration? While the Lowline route in downtown Charleston ranked high from a ridership perspective, the City of Charleston expressed its vision for the corridor that included reserving the Lowline as a public park and greenspace. As a transit corridor, the Lowline would present challenges related to speed, as well as separation of vehicles from bicyclists and pedestrians. Additionally, potential environmental cleanup of the former rail corridor could drive LCRT costs and schedule outside grant program requirements and available funding.

Can we use this process and the associated funding to solve other problems along the corridor like flooding? LCRT is designed to address mobility issues within the project corridor and will bring numerous benefits related to transportation, bike and pedestrian safety and transit oriented development. While it will not directly address other issues, such as flooding, regulations prevent it from making problems worse. The project can be referenced separately by other entities when seeking improvements in the corridor.

When will the system be in operation? The current project schedule is based on the federally-mandated grant process and anticipates the system would be operational by 2026.

Is there any way to shorten this process? While the FTA grant program requires a project to work through set phases of evaluation, the approach to complete both the engineering and construction of a project can accelerate a schedule. The LCRT project team is evaluating the most effective project delivery approach to complete engineering and construction efficiently.

Will BRT service be provided to other parts of the region in the future? Possibly, yes. The Regional Transit Framework developed by BCDCOG has identified a network of potential high-capacity bus rapid transit corridors throughout the region. Among them are US Hwy. 52 to Moncks Corner, Dorchester Road, US Hwy. 17 through West Ashley and Mount Pleasant and Folly Road.

Are there similar projects in operation? A number of cities in the United States have successfully implemented BRT systems, including Richmond, Cleveland, Columbus, San Antonio, Orlando, Los Angeles, and Eugene.

Public & Stakeholder Involvement

Will the public have the opportunity to comment on the design? Yes, there have been and will continue to be regular opportunities for the public to engage with the project and project team at public meetings, pop-up events, community workshops and other events, both in person and digitally. Beyond that, the project team is reviewing and responding to public comments outside of the traditional comment periods. The public's feedback is integral to the success of LCRT.

How can business owners along the corridor get involved and/or have input into the system design process? An engaged and highly involved community is crucial to the success of the project. LCRT Communications and Outreach specialist Morgan Grimes is actively working to ensure citizens, businesses and neighborhood associations have open access to two-way communication throughout the process. You can reach her at morgang@bcdcoq.com or at (843) 529-2119 (ext. 5035).

**How can citizens and neighborhood associations get involved in the project?
Can someone come to our meeting to give a project presentation to our**

members? Contact LCRT Communications and Outreach specialist Morgan Grimes at morgang@bcdcoq.com or at (843) 529-2119 (ext. 5035).

What role does the SCDOT play in the approval and development of this project? SCDOT is a key stakeholder responsible for giving this project approval of 30% design, allowing LCRT to move into the next phase of project development as BCDCOG pursues federal funding through the [Federal Transit Administration's](#) New Starts [Capital Investment Grants Program](#).

What role do local counties and municipalities play in the development and implementation of this project? As the current sole funding source for the project, Charleston County is a key stakeholder in the project and in the decision-making process. The county is a member of the LCRT Steering Committee, which serves to inform and approve important project recommendations before they are taken before the BCDCOG Board for approval. In November 2016, Charleston County voters passed a half-cent sales tax to fund roadway, transit and green space projects. Part of the transit funding identified in the referendum — about \$250 million — will be used for LCRT. About \$180 million is slated for construction and \$70 million for operations over the next 20 years. The local funding will be used to compete for matching federal grants to cover the remaining construction costs of the project. The initial construction cost estimate is \$360 million.

BCDCOG is the federally recognized regional project sponsor, but will require the support and participation of stakeholders on key project decisions and final project approval. The town/cities of Summerville, Charleston and North Charleston, along with Berkeley and Dorchester Counties, are members of multiple project stakeholder committees, including the Steering Committee, and have participated in on-going coordination meetings with the project team. Their role is to inform and approve important project recommendations, provide insight into their community and constituent needs and help guide key project decisions before they are taken to the BCDCOG Board for approval.

Project Design

How are pedestrian/bicycle issues being addressed in this effort? By incorporating sidewalks, 10-foot-or-larger shared-use paths and safe pedestrian crossings, the LCRT will promote safety and transform connectivity for residents and businesses. The current concept includes approximately 6.5 miles of new sidewalk and 19.5 miles shared-use paths.

How are safety concerns being addressed in the design? Two LCRT safety studies are currently underway. The first is to analyze road safety, including existing crash history along the corridor for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians. There are several significant areas of concern along Rivers Avenue. The project is working with SCDOT to mitigate many of these identified issues through the design of the project by: reconfiguring and signaling median openings; adding raised medians; improving pedestrian crossings and providing shared-use paths for bike and pedestrians.

The second study focuses on safety and security and is required in the federal grant program. It will look at all parts of the project roadway, station and vehicle operations. Issues identified will be addressed to allow for safe usage by LCRT riders.

Are there dedicated bus lanes for the entire length of the project corridor? If not, why not? In areas of wide-roads with large medians (such as Rivers Avenue), LCRT can construct dedicated lanes. These lanes would be added to the center of the roadway. When dedicated lanes cannot be constructed due to narrow roadway widths, LCRT will operate in mixed traffic. The goal is to improve speed and, most importantly, improve reliability of the BRT. To achieve this goal LCRT would include technology such as signal prioritization, and engineering design enhancements, including reversible lanes and redesigned intersections to improve speed and reliability when operating in mixed traffic. While dedicated lanes are not included throughout the corridor, the current concept still has the most miles of center-running BRT lanes on a high-capacity urban road of any project in the country.

LCRT Features & Operations

How will I be able to tell the difference between a BRT bus and a traditional bus? A traditional bus system typically has stops, benches or bus shelters along the route. Such bus service also strictly operates in mixed traffic lanes. As a result, local route trip time is often much longer than a BRT trip. BRT buses operate in mostly dedicated lanes, have stations approximately every half-mile and run every 10-20 minutes. When travelling in mixed lanes, BRT often uses signal priority systems to improve reliability and reduce delays from traffic congestion.

In typical BRT systems, passengers wait for the bus at high-quality stations and pay before boarding using off-board payment at the station. This experience creates efficient, reliable, frequent and convenient transit service that meets the needs of many types of travelers. In addition, the BRT system will have a recognizable brand that stands apart from local traditional bus service.

How much will it cost to ride? The price for Lowcountry Rapid Transit is projected to remain the same as a one-way local trip on CARTA, which is currently two dollars.

Will the buses be battery electric? The type of vehicle and type of fuel used remains to be determined, though the strong preference is for low- or no-emission vehicles. CARTA is currently converting its fleet to battery electric buses and LCRT will evaluate this for the corridor as well.

Will the buses be equipped to transport bikes? Yes, LCRT is being designed to be bike and pedestrian friendly. For transport, the intention is for vehicles to stow numerous bicycles.

How will you make sure the system stays on schedule? In dedicated lanes, vehicles can avoid idling in traffic and reach destinations sooner than single-occupancy vehicles and traditional buses. In mixed traffic areas, there will be synchronized traffic signals that allow the vehicles to bypass automobile congestion. Through signal priority, the system will be able to advance ahead of cars and other roadway traffic.

What kind of technology will be used by the system and on the vehicles?

Synchronized traffic signals will be used to give buses priority and ensure that the vehicles are on schedule. Passenger information, security systems, WiFi, pay kiosks and corridor lighting are just a few examples of technology to make travel more reliable and prepare the region for the future of transit by supporting autonomous vehicles and other innovations.

How will existing bus service be impacted by the LCRT service? The short answer is positively. CARTA service will undergo a route optimization analysis to integrate its service with LCRT. That may result in modifications to routes, frequency and timespan of service.

Stations

How are station locations being determined? Through a series of workshops, stakeholder involvement, CIG testing, and station analysis we've identified potential station areas along the project corridor. As the project progresses, we will continue to refine the station areas to determine which offer the most connectivity to existing services and employment centers and will provide the most benefit to communities and riders.

How many stations will there be along the route? Approximately 20. Details related to number and locations of stations are being finalized now.

Will stations have parking/storage for bikes? Yes, bike racks and other bike-pedestrian amenities are being planned for stations.

FTA's Capital Investment Grants Program

What does "Project Rating" or "CIG Rating" mean? The [Capital Investment Grants Program](#) (CIG) is a discretionary and competitive federal grant program. Through the FTA, CIG funds approximately \$2 billion per year to construct new and expanded rapid rail, commuter rail, light rail, streetcars, bus rapid transit and ferries and more. This program will fund up to 80% for major transit construction projects. LCRT will compete for these funds and, as the system expands, funding can be pursued through the program to fund future BRT corridors identified in the Regional Transit Framework plan.

What factors are evaluated to determine the project's rating? The CIG Project Rating is the score to determine whether to approve a project's move from one step to the next in the New Starts and Core Capacity approval process. FTA computes this overall project rating by averaging the summary ratings of the project justification criteria and local financial commitment criteria. Key factors in determining the project's rating are overall

project costs and operating costs, ridership, environmental benefits, land use and amount of affordable housing along the project.

How is the rating used by FTA to determine which projects receive funding and how much funding is awarded? To maintain eligibility for federal funding in the CIG Program, projects require an overall rating of Medium or above to qualify for federal funding. The five-point scale ranges from Low, Medium-Low, Medium, Medium-High, High.

Frequently Asked Questions: Lowcountry Lowline

What is the Lowline?

The Lowline is “a vision to reclaim 1.7 miles of abandoned railway track and neglected highway corridor along the backbone of the Charleston Peninsula into a centralized regional park.” The Lowline is envisioned as a “central spine of a regional park and mobility system connecting Downtown to West Ashley, North Charleston and Mt. Pleasant.” (source: <https://lowcountrylowline.org/>)

Who is leading the Lowline effort?

The Friends of the Lowcountry Lowline are working alongside the City of Charleston to develop a plan for the space that highlights the surrounding neighborhoods, addresses city-wide flooding, and gives pedestrians and bicyclists a safe dedicated path.

Was the Lowline evaluated as a potential travel corridor for the overall LCRT project?

The Lowline was evaluated by the Lowcountry Rapid Transit (LCRT) project team in an effort to identify one recommended alignment that best meet the needs of the community, would be competitive for federal grant funding and improved regional mobility. Out of the 12 alignments analyzed, four traveled along the Lowline. The design team also developed several concepts for how LCRT could operate along the Lowline while allowing safe cycling and pedestrian space.

What other options were evaluated within the City of Charleston?

In particular to the City of Charleston, three alternatives were evaluated to reach the heart of the Peninsula and serve as the LCRT end of line. Those three alternatives included:

1. Crosstown - Traveling south on Meeting Street, west on Cypress Street, east on I-26/Septima P. Clark Parkway to reach the Medical District.
2. Lowline - Traveling south on the proposed Lowline bicycle and pedestrian trail, underneath I-26, exiting onto Meeting Street at Sheppard Street, south on Meeting Street, west on Calhoun Street to reach the Medical District.
3. Meeting/Calhoun - Traveling south on Meeting Street, west on Calhoun Street to reach the Medical District.

Why was the Lowline not recommended to move forward as part of the LCRT alignment?

The alignments that traveled through Charleston along the Crosstown were lowest ranking overall when compared with the total 12 alignments, while those traveling along Meeting/Calhoun were highest ranking. When compared to the Crosstown, the Lowline alignments had better travel time, opportunities for connectivity, and closely ranked just below the alignments that traveled on Meeting/Calhoun.

During the evaluation process, the City of Charleston expressed that their vision for the Lowline was to reserve its space as a public park and greenspace. The Lowline organization requested reduced LCRT vehicle speeds along the former rail corridor, which would present challenges to the speed of vehicles, future service enhancements and separating bicyclists and pedestrians from vehicles. The former rail corridor would also allow only one single share lane for vehicles traveling between stations due to space constrictions, which would limit future capacity. Also, the Lowline could require potential environmental cleanup of the former rail corridor, which could impact the LCRT budget and schedule. Based on those findings and the results of evaluating all other alignments, the Lowline was recommended not to move forward as a potential alignment for LCRT.

Did the project team coordinate with the Lowline organization and City of Charleston during the evaluation?

As part of the alignment refinement work for LCRT, the project team has met with key stakeholders, including the City of Charleston and Friends of the Lowcountry Lowline on several occasions, to gather input on our process and recommendations as well as to better understand the vision for the Lowline corridor for the community.

Would the Lowline alignment have been more efficient than the Meeting Street and Calhoun Street option?

The evaluation of the Lowline route produced similar results to the proposed Meeting Street and Calhoun Street alignment. The Lowline did provide an opportunity to not impact parking along Meeting Street and would bypass the congestion at Meeting Street near the US 17 and I-26 ramps. However, the Lowline presented challenges that could impact the system's speed and environmental concerns that could potentially affect the project budget and schedule. Based on these findings, the Meeting Street and Calhoun Street alignment would provide similar benefits without the challenges of the Lowline. The project team is also evaluating ways to improve congestion on Meeting Street that contributes to existing backups.

Will LCRT be a fast and reliable system on Meeting Street and Calhoun Street? How?

Yes, with 70% of the system in dedicated guideway LCRT will be a fast and reliable system. The first goal of the LCRT project is to improve mobility and connectivity. Every project decision is weighed against that goal and includes efforts to make LCRT a fast and reliable transit option for the region. To achieve this goal along Meeting Street and Calhoun Street, the project team will evaluate and implement infrastructure and technology upgrades like transit signal prioritization, reversible lanes, and redesigned intersections.

How will LCRT accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians beyond the bike/ped focus on the Lowline?

LCRT would provide an equitable and accessible transit alternative to all travelers, including bicyclists and pedestrians. The buses and stations will include features to make the system pedestrian friendly and accommodate bicyclists, and the system will include designs that expand connectivity and safety with sidewalks, crosswalks and shared-use paths. The current concept includes approximately 6.5 miles of new sidewalk and 19.5 miles of shared-use paths throughout the corridor. The project team is also working with stakeholders such as Charleston Moves, City of Charleston, City of North Charleston and Town of Summerville to collect feedback on bicycle and pedestrian considerations to incorporate in the design. The Lowline project is not currently a funded project, which means the project team is evaluating how to provide equitable and accessible bicycle and pedestrian connections to the system regardless of whether or not the Lowline project is constructed.