Bus Service Expansion, BRT Program with Transit Oriented Development

This initiative emphasizes the use of transit as a key transportation mode complemented by transit oriented development. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a high performance transit service that functions more like light rail than a local bus. BRT systems typically incorporate elements such as limited stops, priority treatment at traffic signals, bus lanes to bypass traffic at key congested locations, an identifiable brand name and color scheme and station amenities such as real time arrival/departure information, attractive shelters, park-and-ride lots, benches and in some cases restrooms and other services. BRT systems are complemented by local buses, sometimes referred to as feeders, to bring passengers to the high performance BRT routes. A reliable and efficient transit system would be more attractive to riders who would otherwise utilize cars for their trips – known as choice riders – while simultaneously improving the transit experience for those that have to use transit such as those without access to a car.

To further encourage the use of transit, Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is encouraged at BRT or other transit service stations. Transit Oriented Development is generally defined as mixed-use development (development that mixes residential, retail, office, open space, and public uses) within walking distance of a transit stop that encourages travel on foot or by public transportation instead of by car.

A “big initiative” encompassing BRT and TOD in the Capital District could be pictured as one that would accelerate the planned NY 5 BRT deployment, increase the frequency of service, enhance the range of amenities at the stations and on vehicles and link that with similar new services on other corridors. Such an initiative would require supplemental operating resources as well as up-front capital investment. At a scale and cost approximately five to ten times the scale of the initial NYS BRT program, the twenty-year budget of a “big initiative” of this type would approach $200 M for capital and $400 M for supplemental operating expenses for a BRT system approaching 100 linear miles.

Rationale: In the 2000 Census, the Capital District ranked 13th of the 100 largest metro areas in terms of reliance on transit for work trips; this orientation is a strength of the region. A substantially-increased commitment to transit through innovative service design such as BRT would provide a flexible, sustainable transportation system for the region while improving access to jobs and education for many residents. A more extensive transit network would support the region’s commitments to urban revitalization, making a carless urban life feasible.