

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) Route 440 Extension (referred to throughout this document as the “Proposed Project” or the “Preferred Alternative”) is being undertaken by New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ TRANSIT) to improve transit service for existing and future residents of the western waterfront area of Jersey City, Hudson County, New Jersey. The Proposed Project is an extension of the existing HBLR West Side Avenue Branch approximately 3,700 feet to the west, with a new station at the branch’s new terminus (see **Figure 1-1**).

NJ TRANSIT undertaking the Proposed Project in accordance with the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) procedures for new transit projects. As part of those procedures, FTA must make a determination about the project’s environmental impacts in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) before it can approve development of the final design for the Proposed Project and before it can provide funding. This Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared to meet the environmental review requirements for FTA’s funding programs and complies with the requirements of FTA’s Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (23 CFR Part 771), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500), as well as Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act (1966), Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” and other relevant regulations.

1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Proposed Project is to improve mobility for existing and future residents of the western waterfront by providing direct transit access for a new neighborhood planned on the west side of Route 440. The project is needed to support the long-term development of Jersey City’s western waterfront by improving transit access, particularly to the area west of Route 440.

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Jersey City is planning for substantial growth along its western waterfront with a mix of new residential and commercial uses on former industrial sites and vacant parcels. Major projects will include a new mixed-use development known as Bayfront, a new West Campus of New Jersey City University (NJCU), redevelopment of the blocks near Culver Avenue (referred to as the Culver Redevelopment Plan), and proposed improvements to Route 440, a major arterial that runs north-south through the area (see **Figure 1-2**). The success of this new development depends on new or enhanced transit service that creates a convenient connection between the western waterfront of Jersey City and existing transit services, including the HBLR.

1.2.1 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The City of Jersey City has adopted two large-scale land use plans that will replace vacant and underused industrial sites in and near the western waterfront with active residential and commercial uses.

- The Bayfront development will occupy the 99.5-acre waterfront parcel between Culver Avenue and Kellogg Street on the west side of Route 440 that today consists of the City of Jersey City Department of Public Works property, the vacant Honeywell site, and small commercial and industrial properties. The site is being remediated of contaminated materials. Once these efforts are completed and the site has been fully cleared, the Bayfront development will be implemented in phases. Once completed, Bayfront will include a new street grid; commercial, residential, and institutional uses; and parks, plazas, and a riverfront greenway. The approved plan allows for up to 8,100 residential units and 1.8 million square feet of commercial space (office and retail). The plan also identifies a location for an HBLR station. The amount of development permitted at Bayfront depends on whether or not an HBLR station is provided; if there is no HBLR station, less development will be permitted.
- New Jersey City University (NJCU) West Campus will substantially enlarge NJCU, which today is located along John F. Kennedy Boulevard, between Carbon Place and Audubon Avenue. The new campus will be developed on a large site south of Carbon Place between Route 440 and West Side Avenue. The NJCU West Campus will establish a street grid through the now-vacant, industrial site and develop approximately 400,000 square feet of academic uses, more than 300 residential units, nearly 250,000 square feet of retail space, and 100,000 square feet of office space.

Both Bayfront and NJCU West Campus are products of a larger study of the western waterfront, known as the Jersey City Bayside Development Project¹. Bayside was a collaborative and comprehensive planning study that identified substantial redevelopment opportunities both east and west of Route 440. It envisioned a new mixed-use community in the industrial areas of the neighborhood with density supportive of transit-oriented, urban living. As exemplified by the adoption of the Bayfront and NJCU West Campus plans, the City of Jersey City is eager to realize the vision of Bayside, and HBLR service is crucial to the realization of this long-term plan.

In addition to these redevelopment plans, the City of Jersey City has completed the *Route 440/Routes 1&9T Multi-use Urban Boulevard and Through Truck Diversion Concept Development Study* (hereafter referred to as the “Route 440 Study”) to identify options for reconstruction of Route 440 as an “urban boulevard.” The study identifies a boulevard and complete street concept as the Locally Preferred Alternative for the reconstruction of the Route 440/Routes 1&9T corridor. The boulevard portion would run from south of Society Hill Drive to north of Communipaw Avenue. This boulevard portion incorporates a widened corridor with through travel lanes, local travel lanes, dedicated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lanes, bicycle paths, wide sidewalks and extensive landscaping. While constructed at grade, the

¹ http://www.njcu.edu/programs/wsdev/downloads/JC_Bayside_Report_files/frame.html Last accessed September 4, 2012.

elevation of the roadway is increased to remove the roadway from the flood zone, to bring the sidewalk surface to an elevation to match future building entrances, and to provide resiliency against the potential for elevated flood zones due to global climate change. To the north and south of this boulevard portion, the corridor is reconfigured as a complete street, with the addition of sidewalks, bike lanes, pedestrian crossings, BRT stations, an additional dedicated BRT lane northbound between Duncan and Sip Avenues, and a waterfront walkway between Society Hill in Jersey City and Richard A. Rutkowski Park in Bayonne. Overall, the preliminary plan calls for a 232-foot-wide right-of-way for the boulevard portion of Route 440, which includes the point where it would intersect with the proposed HBLR Extension alignment.

The City of Jersey City is also currently developing a modification to the street plan in the study area that would map new streets through the large block bounded by Claremont Avenue, Route 440, Culver Avenue, and Mallory Avenue, and through two blocks to the south. Several of the new streets would run underneath the Proposed Project viaduct at Pollock Avenue. The street modification is being proposed as part of the *Route 440–Culver Redevelopment Plan*, which would designate two sections of Jersey City in the vicinity of the Proposed Project for redevelopment or rehabilitation. The *Route 440-Culver Redevelopment Plan* is evaluating new zoning standards to advance Jersey City’s redevelopment goals by encouraging continued retail/commercial development along Route 440 while furthering improvements to the function and appearance of the Route 440 corridor. These new zoning standards would aim to improve urban design, increase pedestrian circulation and connectivity with light rail transit stations, and protect adjacent residential neighborhoods. The plan includes a number of redevelopment objectives, including recognizing the significant opportunities for residential and commercial redevelopment afforded by the area’s proximity to West Side Avenue I Station and the anticipated Route 440 Boulevard, preserving right-of-way for the proposed HBLR extension and Route 440 redesign, and providing for the conversion of vacant land and industrial land uses and buildings to a modern mixed-use community.

1.2.2 MOBILITY NEEDS

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) projects that population in the western waterfront and adjoining neighborhoods will increase by approximately 42 percent by 2035. The areas that will realize the most intensive growth are located west of West Side Avenue, where population is projected to grow by more than 300 percent, or by 20,000 new residents.² However, as stated in the Jersey City Master Plan Circulation Element, the capacity of Route 440, Communipaw Avenue, Routes 1&9, and local streets will not be sufficient to meet anticipated demand.³ The plan calls for roadway improvements, including new streets and enhancements to existing roadways, to alleviate congestion, but notes that a decrease in vehicular volumes is vital to the long-term sustainability and success of the area. In surveys conducted as part of the Jersey City Master Plan, many stakeholders agreed that mass transit in

² North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority 2010-2035 Interim Projections. Data provided to AKRF in December 2009.

³ City of Jersey City, Jersey City Master Plan: Circulation Element, July 2009.

the City had several shortfalls, and that improvements are needed to provide better neighborhood connectivity within Jersey City, and enhanced service to the region.

1.2.3 TRANSIT SERVICE NEEDS

A comprehensive Jersey City bus study was prepared in response to community concerns that “portions of the Jersey City local bus network were collapsing as private carriers cut back or eliminated service in its entirety.” The study, which was prepared by NJ TRANSIT’s Bus Service Planning division in coordination with the City of Jersey City, Hudson County, and the NJTPA, cites several issues with existing bus service in the study area and suggests near-term fixes to alleviate these problems.⁴

- The bus study found that routes operating along West Side Avenue are overcrowded with unreliable headways. Crowding is particularly problematic during peak periods when both NJCU students and commuters use the service. The study suggests that better coordination of headways for the A&C Society Hill route and NJ TRANSIT’s No. 80 route could alleviate conditions in off-peak hours, but crowding will remain a problem during peak periods.
- The bus study found that existing routes will not be adequate to serve planned future development along Route 440 south of Hudson Mall, including Bayfront and the NCJU West Campus. The study suggests that existing bus routes will need to be modified or new service be implemented to serve this development.
- The bus study found that existing service is very limited north of the study area in the vicinity of Communipaw Avenue. It suggests that the A&C Route 440 Shopper service be modified to provide alternate weekday service between western Sip Avenue and Broadway to enhance transit access for underserved communities.

The bus study recommendations are intended to enhance service in the study area to meet existing demand, but a comprehensive transit solution is needed to support the long-term success of the area’s redevelopment.

1.2.4 PEDESTRIAN SAFETY NEEDS

Route 440 is a major arterial roadway through the study area and serves high volumes of both car and truck traffic. In its current form, Route 440 is not a pedestrian-friendly environment. It is wide (up to six traffic lanes with a center median), and traffic signals are spaced far apart to support high-speed traffic. Sidewalks are absent along much of the roadway. Crosswalks are available at some intersections, but traffic signals do not provide ample time for pedestrians to fully cross Route 440. Furthermore, high volumes of vehicles turn onto and off of Route 440, which endangers pedestrians crossing the street.

As a wide, high-volume roadway, Route 440 acts as a physical and psychological barrier between the residential communities to its east and the existing and proposed uses to its west. As new residential and commercial development occurs along the Hackensack River, it will be necessary to provide a safe and convenient connection for new residents and workers to reach the existing transit infrastructure, including HBLR service east of Route 440.

⁴ NJ TRANSIT, *Jersey City Bus Study*, November 2009.

In accordance with the recommendations articulated in the Bayside planning study, Bayfront Redevelopment Plan, and Jersey City Master Plan Circulation Element, the City of Jersey City has conducted the Route 440 Study, described above. In addition to improving pedestrian safety, the redesigned Route 440 is also intended to integrate transit improvements such as the Proposed Project.

1.3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Based on needs identified above as well as its own operational requirements, NJ TRANSIT has developed goals and objectives for the Proposed Project, identified in the *Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Route 440 Extension Final Alternatives Analysis Report* (February 2011). The Proposed Project has three goals: 1) improve transit service and access to support existing and future development on the western waterfront; 2) provide transit improvements that minimize adverse effects on HBLR operations; and 3) minimize adverse impacts on the built and natural environment. These goals, and their supporting objectives, are shown in **Table 1-1**.

**Table 1-1
Goals and Objectives**

Goal	Objective
Support existing and future development on the western waterfront	Improve access to existing destinations in the study area
	Increase ridership on HBLR system
	Support the Bayfront Redevelopment Plan
	Support the New Jersey City University Master Plan
	Support the planned redevelopment of Route 440
Minimize adverse effects on existing and proposed HBLR operations	Provide improved transit access continuing from the existing West Side Avenue terminal
	Avoid substantial compromises to existing HBLR timetables
	Minimize capital and operating and maintenance costs
	Implement within a reasonable timeframe
	Accommodate other planned system-wide HBLR capital improvements
Minimize adverse impacts on the built and natural environment	Avoid property acquisition to the maximum extent feasible
	Avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts on historic resources
	Minimize encroachment on view corridors
	Maintain access to existing and future residences and businesses in the study area
	Reduce vehicular congestion, emissions, and noise
	Avoid impacts to Route 440 operations to the extent feasible
	Minimize construction impacts to the extent feasible
	Avoid impacts on parklands, open space, natural features, and coastal waters

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