

**Board of Commissioners Special Study Session Agenda  
August 14, 2023 - 3:00 p.m.**



**Virtual Meeting Participation Information:**

Dial: 1-253-215-8782 Meeting ID No. 87928335650

Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87928335650>

**Physical Meeting Location:**

Pierce Transit Training Center

3720 96<sup>th</sup> Street SW

Lakewood, WA 98499

**The Regular Board Meeting will follow this meeting at 4:00 p.m.**

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**Call to Order**

**Roll Call**

**Review and Discussion**

Further review and discussion of the Pacific Avenue/SR-7 Bus Rapid Transit Project, including, but not limited to, value engineering design changes, project scope, schedule and costs as well as further review and consideration to provide Enhanced Bus Service from Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station

Mike Griffus  
Chief Executive Officer

**Public Comment**

*Citizens wishing to provide comment on the proposed Pacific Avenue/SR-7 Bus Rapid Transit Project and/or the Enhanced Bus Service Proposal will be given up to three minutes to speak.*

*To request to speak virtually during public comment, please press the Raise Hand button near the bottom of your Zoom window or press \*9 on your phone. If speaking in person, please sign in at the table at the back of the room. Your name or the last four digits of your phone number will be called out when it is your turn to speak. Written comments may also be emailed to [Djacobson@piercetransit.org](mailto:Djacobson@piercetransit.org).*

**Potential Board Action**

1. FS 2023-030, Authorize the Chief Executive Officer to Pause the BRT Project and Begin Planning to Implement Enhanced Bus Service from Spanaway Transit Center to the Tacoma Dome Station in March 2024

**Adjournment**

Pierce Transit does not discriminate on the basis of disability in any of its programs, activities, or services. To request this information in an alternative format or to request a reasonable accommodation, please contact the Clerk's Office at 253.581.8066, before 4:00 p.m., no later than the Thursday preceding the Board meeting.



PierceTransit  
***Stream***

SR-7/Pacific Avenue BRT Project  
Board of Commissioners Study Session  
August 14, 2023

# July 10, 2023 Study Session Highlights

- Original BRT design unaffordable due to inflation, property impacts, other requirements
- Reimagined BRT design shown; would operate curbside with no transit-exclusive lanes
- Due to FTA policy change requiring use of 2022 ridership figures, project's "medium" rating (needed for FTA funding) is at significant risk
- Corridor has not seen significant investment in decades; modeling shows intersections begin to fail by 2030
- State and City of Tacoma are planning improvements along Pac Ave/SR-7
- Implementation of Enhanced Bus service was recommended as an interim solution to BRT
- There was discussion and a motion was made for staff to return with additional information on the reimagined BRT design and the Enhanced Bus option

# BRT FTA Funding Risks – Rating and Timeline

## Takeaways:

- There are major risks to BRT FTA funding
  - Use of post-COVID ridership numbers
  - Lack of speed and reliability improvements in the design Pierce Transit can afford
  - Likely delays associated with formalizing scope, schedule & budget
- Formally accepting FTA funds knowing that additional delays are likely:
  - Would result in being required to return the federal funding
  - Could negatively affect future funding opportunities

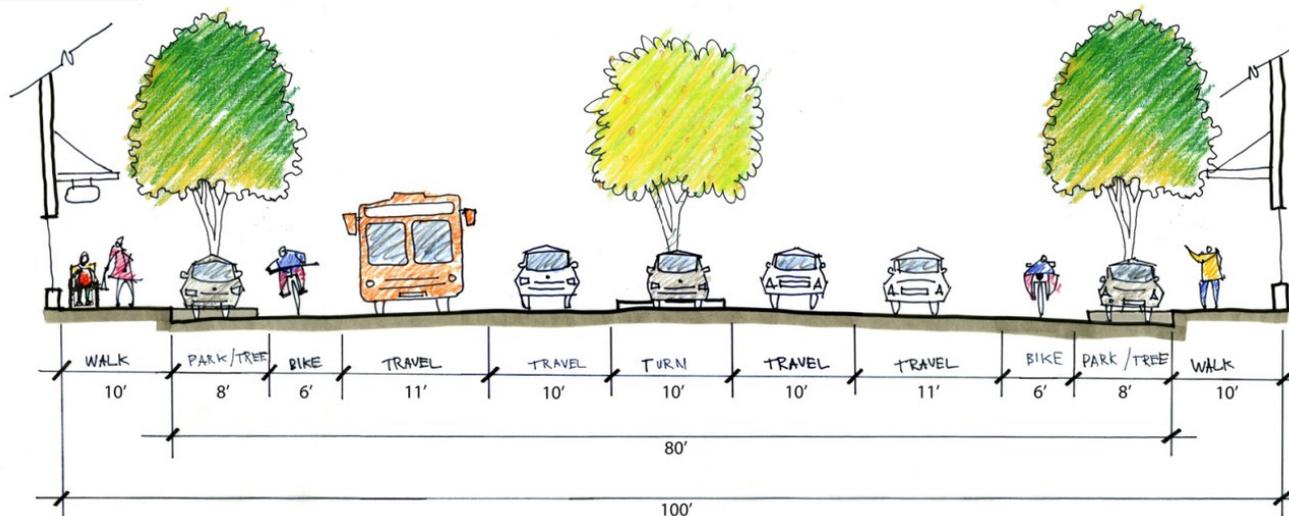
# Planning Coordination Opportunities

WSDOT

State Route 512 Corridor Study - Underway  
Complete Streets – Pending Funding

City of Tacoma

Pacific Avenue Subarea Plan - Underway



Tacoma Mixed-Use Centers  
Complete Streets Design  
Guidelines  
November 17, 2009

# Planning Coordination Opportunities

## Takeaways:

- It makes sense to wait to implement BRT until WSDOT and Tacoma complete their corridor planning, ensuring a coordinated approach and avoiding multiple rounds of construction
- As WSDOT and COT undertake corridor improvements, Pierce Transit would work with them to incorporate BRT as part of the overall plans for the area
- We anticipate future joint BRT/Complete Streets grant opportunities
- The FTA will only provide funding for the corridor once

# Pacific Avenue Enhanced Bus Option

## High-Capacity Transit Service Characteristics

- Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station
- Connections to local and regional services at east/west corridors
- Timed Sounder connections
- An addition to existing Route 1
- Peak commute-hour service – weekday mornings & afternoons
- Stops at 14 major bus stops – **saves 28 mins travel time RT**
- Uses existing bus stops; all will have shelters (2 require upgrade)
- Utilizes existing 40 ft fleet
- Completes Transit Signal Priority (TSP)
- Target March 2024 service change to begin service



# Benefits of Pivot to Enhanced Bus

- Provides improved service at least four years sooner
- Significantly reduces impacts on property owners and businesses
- Provides opportunities to coordinate future planning efforts with WSDOT and Tacoma
- Coordinated future construction, reducing impacts to businesses
- Allows FTA funding to be available in the future
- Allows for significantly better future improvements in line with Complete Streets vision
- Allows adjustments as needed
- Opens a window to re-align MOBI investments with future BRT plans
- Supported by CTAG

## SR-7 Reimagined BRT & Enhanced Service Comparison

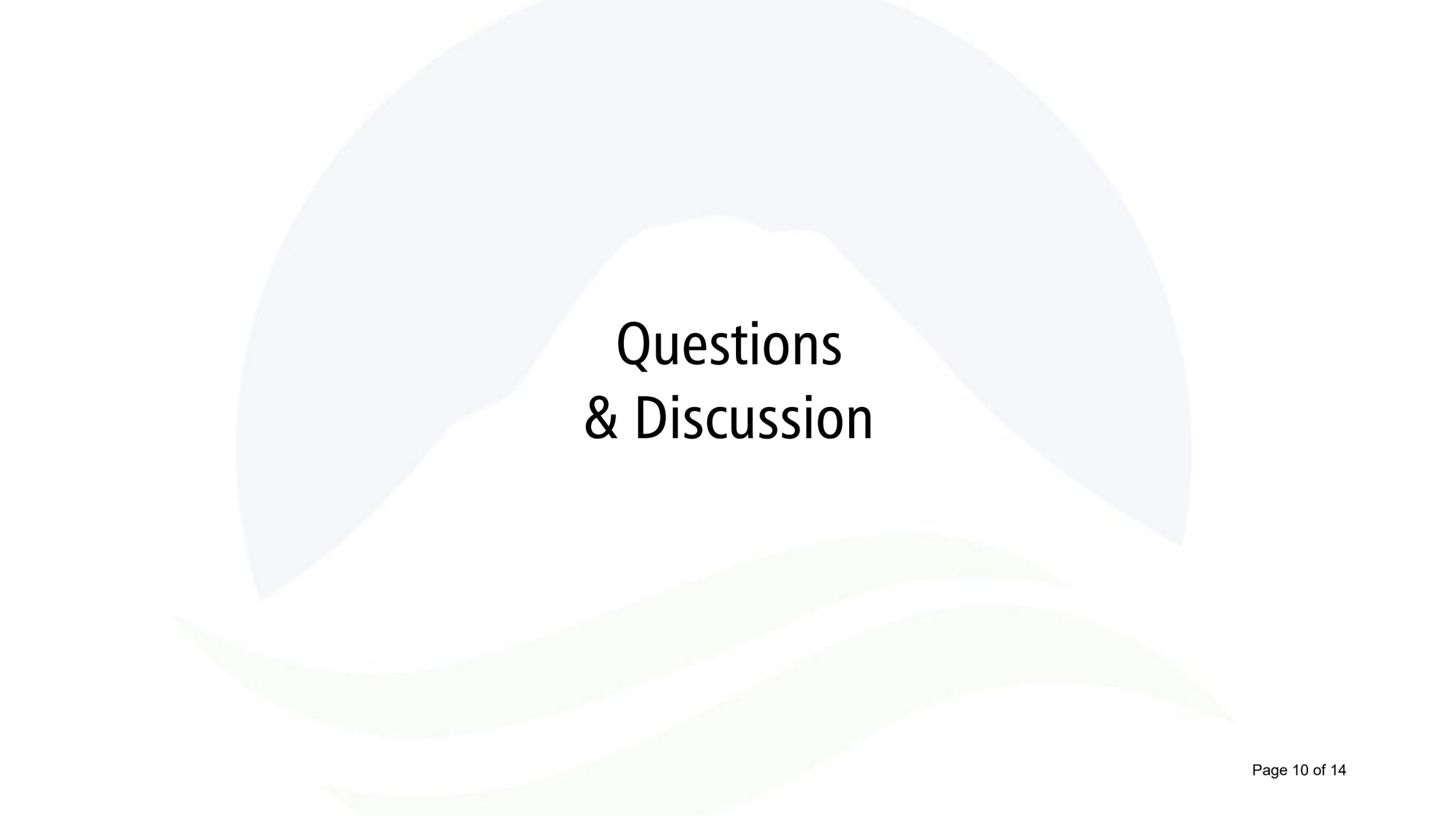
	Reimagined BRT	Enhanced Bus
Cost – Operating	\$14.4M	\$2.3M 20 min frequency
Cost – Capital	\$187M Additional funds needed for speed and reliability improvements	\$48M Speed and reliability improvements and bus stop improvements
Termini	Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station	Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station
Service Delivery Date	2028	2024 Dependent on Operator staffing levels
Estimated Transit Travel Time Savings	24 minutes roundtrip (2030)	22-28 minutes roundtrip (2024)
Estimated Number of Partner Agreements	17	7-8 Dependent on speed and reliability improvements in capital project scope
Meets High-Capacity Transit Definition	Yes	Yes
Transit Signal Priority	Yes	Yes

# Recommendation

Pause the SR-7 BRT project and begin planning to implement Enhanced Bus service from Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station in March 2024.

# BRT Pause – What Would It Look Like?

- Immediately plan for implementation of Enhanced Bus service in March 2024
- Develop scope of Enhanced Bus capital project (speed and reliability improvements, shelter upgrades)
- Work with grantors on retaining eligible grant funding for Enhanced Bus
- Execute outreach plan focused on educating stakeholders on Enhanced Bus program
- Begin lobbying efforts to raise awareness regarding long-term corridor needs
- Address open BRT contracts and bring them to a close



# Questions & Discussion

**TITLE:** Authorize the Chief Executive Officer to Pause the BRT Project and Begin Planning to Implement Enhanced Bus Service from Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station in March 2024

**DIVISION:** Executive

**SUBMITTED BY:** Mike Griffus, CEO

**RELATED ACTION:**

Resolution No. 22-008, Increase the Local Contribution and Overall Total Project Budget for Planned and Budgeted Design and Construction Work for the Bus Rapid Transit Pacific Avenue/State Route 7 Corridor Project

Resolution No. 19-023, Authorized the Chief Executive Officer to Execute a Funding Agreement Providing for Sound Transit to Contribute Funds to Pierce Transit for Bus Capital Enhancements for Speed, Reliability, and Convenience along Pacific Avenue/State Route 7 Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Project.

Resolution No. 19-008A, adopting the Locally Preferred Alternative Running Way Option and Access to Tacoma Dome Station Option for the Pacific Avenue/State Route 7 Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Project.

Resolution No. 18-028, Confirming and Assuring that the Chief Executive Officer has the Authority, and that Pierce Transit has the Financial Capacity to Fund Project Development for the Pacific Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Corridor.

Resolution No. 18-025, adopting the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), Mode, Termini and Alignment for the Proposed Pacific Avenue/State Route 7 Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Project.

**ATTACHMENTS:** N/A

**RELATION TO STRATEGIC PLAN:** N/A

**BUDGET INFORMATION:** N/A

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**BACKGROUND:**

The Pacific Avenue/SR-7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project officially began when the Pierce Transit Board of Commissioners adopted the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) at its July 2018 meeting. The LPA included mode (BRT), termini (Spanaway to Downtown Tacoma) and alignment (Route 1 with modifications). In September 2018, Pierce Transit submitted a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) "Small Starts" grant application to seek 50 percent of the needed project funding at that time. The FTA allocated \$75M to the agency to help complete the project; these funds were also included in President Biden's 2022 budget. The design included nearly 3.5 miles of exclusive or semi-exclusive transit lanes, and eventually required roundabouts at 96th, 121st, 138th, 146th Streets.

The estimated cost of the project increased as staff continued design work with project partners. In March 2020, 30 percent design plans were issued, estimating the project cost at \$170M. In August 2021, after a formal risk review, the project was re-estimated at \$222M with an assumed construction start in 2023. A majority of the cost increases at this time were due to inflation. A second traffic impact analysis was required by project

partners, shifting the construction start date back by a year. This, coupled with additional inflation and property acquisition costs, increased the estimate to \$241.4M.

In July 2022, the Board of Commissioners authorized the updated project budget of \$241.4M. The budget increased the FTA funding request from \$75M to \$118.5M, with the caveat that if it was not approved, the agency would need to identify additional funds to complete the project. A full breakdown of the then-anticipated funding sources is shown below.

Source of Funding	Current Funding Projections
FTA 5309 Small Starts	\$118,466,073
FTA 5307 (Speed & Reliability)	\$1,440,000
FTA 5307 (Coaches)	\$7,000,000
FTA CMAQ	\$6,293,652
2017 State Transportation Package	\$15,000,275
WSDOT Regional Mobility Grant	\$4,200,000
New Move Ahead State Funding	\$7,000,000
Sound Transit	\$60,000,000
Pierce Transit General Fund	\$22,000,000
<b>Total Small Starts Project</b>	<b>\$241,400,000</b>
<b>5309 Funding percentage</b>	49.1%

Since July 2022, projected costs for the BRT project increased to well beyond what the agency can afford with current funding sources and is currently estimated at over \$300M. This is due to a number of factors, including inflation; COVID-related supply chain issues affecting the construction marketplace; additional time needed for new processes, procedures and partnerships; and information gleaned from the work completed to date (e.g., a larger-than-anticipated number of impacted properties and utility moves, as well as required roundabouts and air space leases, bottlenecks at both State Route 512 and S. 38th Street, and a longer-term need to widen State Route 7 to allow for dedicated transit lanes).

In May 2023, Pierce Transit staff engaged in value engineering work with partner agencies to scale the project to available funds. The reimagined, value-engineered design does not have transit exclusive lanes and would operate curbside only. The design that Pierce Transit can afford does not guarantee an FTA “medium” rating, which is necessary to receive FTA funding. Speed and reliability improvements, which would help support a higher FTA rating, would require additional funding.

Also in May 2023, the FTA changed its policy and is now requiring the use of 2022 ridership numbers when evaluating projects. With ridership still suppressed post-COVID, this represents an additional risk and further jeopardizes the project's medium FTA rating. FTA also requires a reliable scope, schedule, and budget for the project. This would need to be completed by September 2023 so construction and the revenue service date do not slip further and jeopardize FTA funding due to more delays. Formally accepting FTA funds knowing that additional delays are likely would result in the agency being required to return the federal funding and could negatively affect future funding opportunities.

Details on the reimagined design and FTA funding concerns were shared with Commissioners at the July 10, 2023, Study Session. At the meeting, staff recommended exploring Enhanced Bus service as an affordable alternative that could be implemented sooner than BRT. It would also allow the agency to phase in additional improvements and implement BRT in the future in coordination with plans for the corridor being developed by the City of Tacoma and WSDOT. The proposed Enhanced Bus service qualifies as a high-capacity transit option, would operate during peak commuter hours from Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station in addition to existing Route 1 service on Pacific Avenue/SR-7, and would save approximately 28 minutes of travel time roundtrip. An additional eight operators would be required to begin Enhanced Bus service in March 2024.

At the August 14 Study Session, staff will hold further discussions with Commissioners focused on the benefits and logistics of pausing the BRT project, given the risks associated with FTA funding, and opportunities for future coordination with WSDOT and the City of Tacoma. Should the Board of Commissioners choose to pause the BRT project and pivot to Enhanced Bus service, it would also provide an opportunity to re-align upcoming Maintenance & Operations Base Improvements (MOBI) infrastructure investments that would be required for BRT service. This would include not proceeding with a new maintenance facility at this time. Pierce Transit would immediately begin planning for the implementation of Enhanced Bus in March 2024 while developing the scope of the capital project. An outreach plan would be implemented to educate stakeholders and the community on the change. In addition, staff would work with grantors on retaining eligible grant funding for Enhanced Bus and bring open BRT contracts and, if applicable, supporting MOBI maintenance facility contracts, to a close.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Pause the Pacific Avenue/SR-7 BRT project and begin planning to implement Enhanced Bus service from Spanaway Transit Center to Tacoma Dome Station in March 2024.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

Direct staff to continue with the BRT project. This alternative carries significant risk as there is a high likelihood of not qualifying for FTA funding with the design that the agency can afford. In addition, any delays surrounding the finalizing of the project scope, schedule, and budget further jeopardize FTA funding.

PROPOSED MOTION:

Move to: Pause the Pacific Highway/SR-7 Bus Rapid Transit project and direct staff to begin planning for Enhanced Bus service from Spanaway Transit Center to the Tacoma Dome Station with an implementation goal date of March 2024.