



Nashville Area MPO

SCOPING MEETING

PROJECT SUMMARY SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT STUDY NASHVILLE TO MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

The Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is undertaking a study of transportation improvements called the Southeast Corridor High Capacity Transit Study. The purpose is to study potential transit systems that could be built in the corridor between Nashville and Murfreesboro. Based on the existing pattern of roads, homes, retail, commercial, and industrial development in the study area, the MPO anticipates that any type of transit system will require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). EIS documentation is required by federal law, specifically, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

NEPA requires that “scoping” be conducted very early in the planning process. The term *scoping* means a process by which interested individuals, organizations, stakeholders along with federal, state, and local agencies can provide input into the project planning. This input will help guide the study and ensure an open planning process.

Under the scoping process for the Southeast Corridor, the MPO and FTA invite any interested individuals or organizations to participate in determining the project’s purpose, identifying the range of alternatives, and how the analysis should be performed. The public is invited to comment on the types of alternatives to be considered; the different technologies to be evaluated; possible locations for the roadway or tracks, including station locations; and what other types of things should be considered such as the environmental, social, or economic impacts. In addition, we hope to get ideas on how best to evaluate the many options and choose the best transit solution (also called the Locally Preferred Alternative) for the study area. Comments at this stage of the study should focus on the transportation issues and what type of transit alternatives to study. If you have a preference for a particular type of transit, such as light rail or bus rapid transit, you should express these opinions during the comment period for the Draft EIS, which will be prepared sometime after the Southeast Corridor Transit Study is complete. The Draft EIS will include an analysis of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the type of transit selected during this process as the Locally Preferred Alternative.

Southeast Corridor High Capacity Transit Study Background

The MPO is a multi-county agency responsible for transportation planning in Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson, and Wilson counties. The MPO has adopted plans for a high capacity transit system to operate in the five corridors radiating outward from downtown Nashville. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the agency charged with construction and operation of this system, is about to begin construction of the East Corridor between Nashville and Lebanon. The other four corridors will connect Nashville with the cities of Murfreesboro, Gallatin, Kingston Springs, and Franklin.

Current Study

The focus of this scoping process is the Southeast Corridor that connects Nashville to Murfreesboro. The region generally follows the Murfreesboro Road and Interstate 24 (I-24) corridor. The study's purpose is to examine the high capacity transit alternatives best suited for this corridor. It is important to gather input early in the process from the public, governmental entities and other stakeholders. There will be additional opportunities for public comment throughout the study.

The MPO and its consultant team have started to review and evaluate transportation options, possible routes or alignments, and station locations, as well as costs, funding, ridership, economic development, land use, engineering feasibility, and environmental concerns.

Description of the Corridor

The Southeast Corridor links Nashville in Davidson County with LaVergne, Smyrna and Murfreesboro in Rutherford County, all of which are within the MPO's area of responsibility for transportation planning. This is an active corridor with many high traffic destinations such as employment centers, commercial and retail developments, educational institutions and housing.

Nashville is the fastest growing metropolitan area in Tennessee with a central city population of approximately 570,000. The central business district is home to the state capitol, numerous state office buildings and the Tennessee Titans football stadium, all of which attract visitors from across the state. In addition, approximately 132,000 residents commute daily to Nashville for work with about 25,000 traveling from Rutherford County. Murfreesboro, which is about 30 miles from Nashville, is the southernmost terminus of the study corridor. Murfreesboro, which has a population of approximately 75,000, is home to Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). The university has an enrollment of about 21,000 students. However, only 3,500 students live on the campus. The remaining 17,500 students are day students traveling to Murfreesboro or live in the surrounding area. Smyrna has a population of approximately 25,600, and LaVergne has an approximate population of 18,700. The estimated population along the corridor is 260,050.

The primary north-south thoroughfares within the corridor are Murfreesboro Road, also known as US 41/70S, and Interstate 24 (I-24). This corridor experiences heavy traffic congestion during rush hour periods. In fact, the 30-mile segment of I-24 between Murfreesboro and Nashville handles between 91,000 and 133,000 cars per day, depending on the area. Murfreesboro Road averages between 20,600 and 37,400 annual daily trips.

Several of the potential commuter destinations along the corridor include the Nashville International Airport, MTSU, major employers such as Dell Computer, and downtown Nashville as well as regional shopping malls, commercial services, office parks, and hospitals. LaVergne and Smyrna form a major employment area known as "Interchange City," which is home to a Nissan manufacturing plant, Bridgestone and other major industries.

Few options exist in the corridor that would provide alternatives to driving in heavily congested conditions. Improvements are needed to address traffic volumes and congestion that are increasing every year. The study will examine transportation options, potential routes or alignments, bus or rail station locations, cost, funding, ridership, economic development, land use, engineering feasibility, and environmental concerns. The MPO also will evaluate transportation improvement options that do not involve significant capital investment.

Alternatives

The scoping meetings, additional community meetings and written comments from stakeholders will be a major source of data in considering the transit alternatives. Initially, the transportation alternatives proposed for consideration in the Southeast Corridor include:

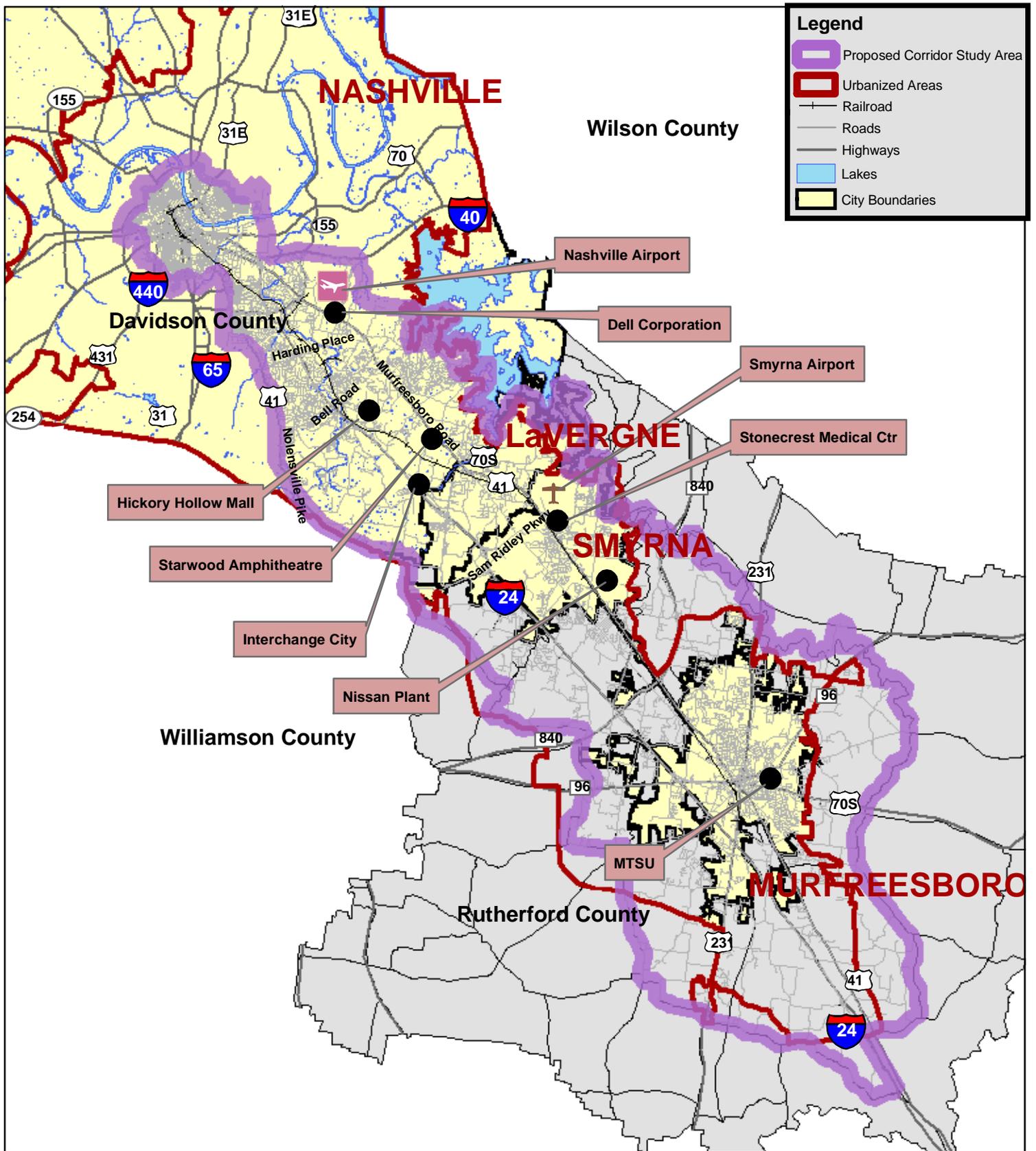
1. No Action Alternative: An alternative would be developed based on projects included in the regional transportation improvement plan (TIP) and the financially-constrained long-range transportation plan, with no new transportation services or facilities in the area beyond already committed projects.
2. Transportation System Management Alternative: A *low-cost* alternative that would include minor improvements to intersections, traffic signals, demand management and system management programs, bus services and facilities and other modifications to the transportation system that can be made without major investments in infrastructure or equipment.
3. Build Alternatives: Three alternatives will be developed, combining various types of major investments to meet the travel needs of the corridor. These "build" alternatives most likely would include the development of busway or bus rapid transit, light rail transit, and/or commuter rail transportation options along various existing rights-of-way in the corridor.

Based on public and agency input received during scoping, variations of the above alternatives and other transportation-related improvement options will be considered for the Southeast Corridor.

The MPO and FTA hope that you will provide comments on the Southeast Corridor Alternatives Analysis. Comments may be submitted orally or in writing at the Scoping Meetings, or by e-mail or mail on or before August 14, 2004 to:

Jim McAteer, Transit Planner,
Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
730 2nd Ave South, Nashville, TN 37201
Phone 615-862-7204, Fax 615-862-7209, e-mail james.mcateer@nashvillempo.org.

A map of the project corridor is included on the next page.



Southeast Corridor Study Area
Southeast Corridor Alternatives Analysis

6/15/04

