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Bus rapid transit system moving forward

[By Josh Baugh](#) - Express-News

Web Posted: 05/25/2010 12:00 CDT

VIA Metropolitan Transit is on track to start its estimated \$57.2 million bus rapid transit service connecting the South Texas Medical Center to downtown by late 2012, according to a federally required environmental study.

VIA has published its draft environmental assessment on its website for public review.

"This will be a tremendous amenity to the public," VIA President Keith Parker said of the biggest project in the agency's history. The service — which transit officials have named VIA Primo — will be a rubber-tire version of light rail that will run in mixed traffic along the Fredericksburg Road corridor.

The vehicles will be "green," Parker said, though officials haven't decided on the exact technology, whether it be compressed natural gas or hybrid electric, for example. They'll also offer state-of-the-art amenities, including wireless Internet, reclining seats and overhead bins.

That, combined with service every 10 minutes, could attract new ridership among motorists who don't consider public transit an option.

"In transit, one of the things you find out is if people have to think about their trip, that's one of the reasons they won't ride," Parker said.

Though the environmental study reviewed the route between the medical center and the outskirts of downtown, VIA officials say the service will run from the University of Texas at San Antonio on the city's far-Northwest side to a West Side multimodal center near the UTSA downtown campus, and through downtown to the Robert Thompson Transit Center by the Alamodome. The full route is about 20 miles long. VIA has planned for eight station locations (16, in all — one on each side of the street) between the medical center and the West Side multimodal center.

VIA spokeswoman Priscilla Ingle said there are no plans for stations between the medical center and UTSA, but there will be unique BRT stops on that stretch.

VIA officials originally envisioned BRT service to run in dedicated right of way. But that plan was jettisoned for the current one that runs the vehicles in mixed traffic. There's a financial benefit to it, and it also allows VIA to retro-fit the corridor with light rail in the future.

Board Chairman Henry Muñoz said he doesn't see it as "scaling back" the project.

"I don't feel like this project has lost anything," he said. "I think it's a better-planned project and one that will bring

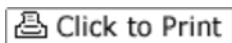
to the Fredericksburg Road corridor opportunities for economic development and efficient transportation services.”

BRT vehicles will reduce travel time by about 30 percent, increasing average bus speed from 10-12 mph to 15 mph, according to the environmental assessment. VIA will drastically scale back its regular bus service in the Fredericksburg Road corridor, Parker said, running regular buses to “complement” the BRT service.

VIA is holding a series of public hearings to gather comments. For more information, including public meeting dates and the draft environmental assessment, visit www.viabrt.net.

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