



Transit



# Community-Oriented BRT: Urban Design, Amenities, and Placemaking

## Background

Beyond the obvious goal of providing transportation benefits, a rapid transit project is a long-term investment that can shape and enrich a community for years to come. Indeed, when rapid transit projects are treated as valuable opportunities for creating or enhancing public space, they can become a driving force for city building and design. In many respects, “placemaking” through rapid transit is a matter of urban design, which blends architecture, landscaping, and planning concepts to purposefully shape the public realm. Transit facilities that are designed to the scale of people and provide safe, comfortable, and attractive environments encourage people to walk and use transit and can serve as focal points for community life. In addition, transit’s ability to draw pedestrians to an area may activate adjacent land uses, support business, and encourage development. Unfortunately, while these benefits are routinely considered as an essential part of major rail projects, they are frequently overlooked with respect to bus facilities. However, because bus rapid transit (BRT) generally involves greater investment with more permanent infrastructure than that of conventional bus service, BRT can play a major role in creating and revitalizing the public realm. Well-defined running ways, attractively-designed stations, streetscape enhancements, and ample pedestrian amenities can create a more welcoming, accessible environment and engender a stronger sense of community ownership. These improvements also convey a sense of permanence and demonstrate a strong public commitment to quality in the corridor, which may, in turn, attract private investment and contribute to the revitalization of existing neighborhoods and downtowns. Thus, BRT presents a powerful opportunity to decisively shift urban development in a positive direction.

## Objectives

Information for this effort was gathered through a literature review; a detailed questionnaire that was administered to transit agencies in the United States, Canada, and Australia; and in-depth profiles of the following BRT systems:

- Metro Orange Line, Los Angeles—The Orange Line was designed to be more than just an improvement over conventional on-street bus service and is similar to a rail alignment in terms of design. The corridor was conceptualized as a “greenway ribbon” that would convey a unified design theme while also beautifying and blending into the San Fernando Valley. Design features include architectural stations, pedestrian linkages, extensive public art, bicycle and pedestrian paths, and an ambitious landscape beautification project.

- Emerald Express, or “EmX,” Eugene, Oregon—The EmX was guided by an overarching vision of “greening the corridor,” with community integration, concern for the environment, and appreciation of Eugene’s history and natural beauty identified as primary design goals from the outset of the project. To incorporate these goals into the design of the EmX, LTD consulted arborists, urban foresters, concrete specialists, architects, and landscapers during every phase of the project. Agency staff also worked closely with cycling groups and people with disabilities to design a system that would be accessible to everyone.
- HealthLine, Cleveland, Ohio—Construction of the HealthLine included a complete streetscape renovation of Cleveland’s historic Euclid Avenue, a once-grand boulevard that had fallen into a decades-long state of decline and disrepair. The design approach was to bring an active and engaging street life to Euclid Avenue by creating open space amenities and developing the corridor into a linear park. The project has been credited with catalyzing more than \$4 billion in investments along the Euclid Avenue corridor.

## Findings and Conclusions

*Through a literature review, system profiles, and a questionnaire, this report offers information on the relationship between BRT and the public realm.*

While the literature review provides historical background on the relationship between transit projects and the public realm, the questionnaire that was used to gather data from transit agencies focused specifically on the interaction between BRT and public space. The system profiles provide a detailed account of agency experiences, along with recommendations and lessons learned with regard to community outreach, stakeholder engagement, infrastructure and public space enhancements, and safety and maintenance.

## Benefits

This report serves as a resource for communities that wish to learn how others have successfully used BRT as a tool for enhancing the public realm. Rather than offering detailed instructions of the type that would be found in design manuals or other highly-technical literature, the focus is on sharing the experiences of agencies that have been successful in designing and building community value into BRT projects. While every project detailed within this report is unique, there emerged some key lessons and recommendations that can be generalized to any U.S. city.

### Project Information

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