



Beyond the East Busway Policy Brief: BRT Recommendations in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs

We at Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT) conducted an intensive GIS planning survey with more than 500 residents-- principally Port Authority transit riders-- of the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs over 2019 and 2020. 16 community leaders from the region were hired to conduct the outreach at bus stops, food pantries, health centers, and Community Days to develop recommendations for rapid transit corridors to serve key destinations and to address existing transportation barriers.

This process and these recommendations are supported by organizations, businesses and elected officials throughout the Mon Valley, including; Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh, Borough of Braddock, Borough of Homestead, Borough of Wilksburg, Carl Lewis, Businessowner in Rankin Borough, Council of the Borough of East Pittsburgh, Constance Tinsley, Turtle Creek Borough Councilwoman, The Jefferson Foundation, Lloyd Cunningham, Vice President of Homestead Borough Council, Mary Carol Kennedy, East Pittsburgh Council Vice President, Mayor Laura Joelisa McDonald of Rankin Borough, Mayor Nickole Nesby of Duquesne, Mon Valley Initiative, Pearl and Larry Hughey, Rankin residents, Patricia DeMarco, Vice President, Forest Hills Borough Council, Ruby Grant, Councilwoman, Rankin Borough Council, Take Action Mon Valley, Tina Doose, Braddock Borough President, and the Wilkins Township Board of Commissioners.

Recommendations	Implications
1. To implement the on-street bus rapid transit (BRT) extension of the East Busway to Monroeville via Braddock and East Pittsburgh, and to build out the full 61C transit corridor through the Mon Valley as	On-street bus rapid transit along these corridors will move riders as quickly and reliably as a grade-separated dedicated busway for a significantly lower cost and would be a natural extension of our region's existing dedicated transit corridors. This proposed transit alignment would reinvest in and reconfigure underutilized streets, revitalize business districts, and convey workers to existing employment hubs in the

<p>on-street BRT passing through Homestead, Duquesne and ending at the McKeesport Transit Center.</p>	<p>Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs. In the Beyond the East Busway Survey, the Monroeville via Braddock & Turtle Creek Corridor was the corridor in highest demand for improvement for residents of the Mon Valley.</p>
<p>2. To support future project planning designed around the concepts of a bus lane on the shoulder of Route 376 and a slip ramp to the busway at Edgewood, similar to the examples demonstrated in the <i>SmartMoves Connections</i>¹ study recently completed by SPC.</p>	<p>This will create an express regional transit connection between the Eastern suburbs, the Churchill Westinghouse site and Downtown Pittsburgh, making better use of existing infrastructure.</p>
<p>3. To build quality BRT transit stations and to begin developing an equitable and transit-oriented communities (TOC) in Homestead, Duquesne, McKeesport, Braddock, East Pittsburgh and Monroeville.</p>	<p>Planning for higher density, mixed income development and critical amenities around transit stations would allow these communities to welcome new residents and grow their municipal tax base. This would allow local business and employment hubs like Keystone Commons, the proposed Amazon facility at the Westinghouse site in Churchill, the Monroeville Mall, the Forbes and UPMC East hospitals, and the Waterfront to expand their workforce pool. Finally, this would be a way to repurpose the expansive and underutilized parking lots at the Waterfront and Monroeville Mall and make them into thriving multimodal hubs that are generating income both for the local businesses and the broader community.</p>

What is the problem that rapid transit in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs solves, and the opportunity that this presents?

¹<https://www.spcregion.org/programs-services/transportation/smartmoves-long-range-plan-transportation-improvement-program/>

For Equity and Transit Usage:

1. There is an extremely high percentage of transit commuters in the Mon Valley. In fact, five of the municipalities with the highest transit usage *in all of Pennsylvania* are within these corridors. #1 is Homestead for transit commuting (40.2%), #3 is Rankin (35.5%), #5 is East Pittsburgh (31.6%), #8 is Swissvale (24.9%), and #10 is Braddock (24.4%). Moreover, five of the ten routes with the highest ridership increases for Port Authority from FY2019 to FY2020 were in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs (P68 Braddock Hills Flyer, 52L Homeville Limited, 69 Trafford, P67 Monroeville Flyer and 55 Glassport). This indicates that the number of people who rely on transit is rising in these service areas.
2. However, transit access is poor for most of these communities. From Braddock to downtown, a bus trip averages 70 minutes. A car trip, by contrast, takes 20 minutes. From McKeesport Transit Center to downtown Pittsburgh takes 75 minutes on the bus, and many riders don't have downtown as a final destination. Because commute times are the single most important indicator of household economic mobility², providing faster and more efficient transit service in high transit usage communities will increase opportunities for employment and economic development. The Southwest PA Commission (SPC)'s 2014 simulation of transit signal priority on Rt 51 -- just one improvement among many that we're calling for -- estimated travel time savings of 14% for PM peak riders on that corridor.
3. This is a critical equity issue: there are high percentages of older adults, of people with disabilities, high poverty rates, and significant minority populations in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs.

For Transit Operations, Air Quality and Congestion Mitigation Benefits:

4. Transit priority streets ensure that transit runs on schedule and allows buses to move quickly without idling at lights and behind traffic. Speeding up a single bus trip by only a few minutes saves Port Authority hundreds of thousands of operating dollars every year, which can be reinvested into expanded service in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs.
5. Efficient transit service from the McKeesport Transit Center and Monroeville to downtown will allow buses from outlying counties like Fayette and Westmoreland Counties to drop their passengers at these outlying nodes to be brought quickly into Pittsburgh via Port Authority transit. This will stop the duplication of multiple transit services running through Allegheny County, as well as the additional emissions and congestion that these buses cause through the county and in downtown Pittsburgh. This

²<https://usa.streetsblog.org/2016/10/10/what-the-equality-of-opportunity-project-actually-says-about-commuting/>

will also free up significant operating dollars for outlying transit agencies to expand their own regional transit services.

For Workforce and Economic Development Benefits:

6. Extending transit service at the quality and speed of the East Busway and the Downtown to Oakland BRT will open up significant employment opportunities for Mon Valley residents in the City and Oakland. It will also invite reverse transit commuting to employment hubs like Keystone Commons in East Pittsburgh, the Monroeville Mall and hospital systems, the proposed Amazon hub in Churchill and the Waterfront.
7. Quality transit stops along a BRT will support dense, mixed-income transit oriented communities, and allow for a revitalization and repurposing of vacant or underutilized land. Many of the communities in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs would be great commuter neighborhoods for Pittsburgh workers if transit was efficient and easily accessible.

How much will it cost?

- On-street BRT improvements make intelligent use of existing roadway infrastructure through modern street design and signal technology. Projects like these are highly cost-effective while being transformative for the communities they are built within. On-street BRT projects also present cost-sharing opportunities with other infrastructure renewal projects such as water, sewer, electrical, and telecommunications infrastructure while also creating a safe, accessible, and walkable neighborhood environment.
- Completion of the 61C corridor in the Mon Valley as BRT through Homestead, Duquesne and terminating at the McKeesport Transit Center: 8.4 miles, cost range \$24M - \$58M³
- Buildout of on-street BRT beyond the East Busway, through Braddock, East Pittsburgh, Turtle Creek and into Monroeville: 10.2 miles, cost range \$28M - \$66 M⁴
- Development of 376 shoulder transit priority lanes and a slip ramp onto the Edgewood portion of the East Busway: 6.0 miles, cost range \$36M – 58M⁵

³ Non-validated estimate range based on comparable BRT project costs published by the FTA.

⁴ Non-validated estimate range based on comparable BRT project costs published by the FTA.

⁵ Non-validated estimate range based on comparable BRT project costs published by the FTA.

How did we develop these recommendations?

This project was developed and designed in all stages-- including the goals of the planning effort-- by leaders in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs. Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT) worked alongside the GIS planning firm CivicMapper and architecture firm evolveEA to develop a grassroots planning tool for transit riders and residents to envision better public transit in these corridors. This [innovative transit mapping tool](#), entitled ***Beyond the East Busway***, came from the belief that those most impacted by planning decisions are best-suited to design solutions for their communities. In tandem with this participatory planning tool, PPT mobilized two classes of 16 paid Busway fellows, who are resident leaders from the Eastern Suburbs and Mon Valley.

The Busway fellows facilitated nearly 600 transit riders in those communities to participate in this community planning process: to identify their preferred on-street BRT routing, key destinations that are underserved by transit, and existing barriers to transit usage. This project demonstrated that transit riders can be successful in complex transit planning around BRT given the right tools and with community-based facilitators, and that it is possible to collect high levels of quantitative and qualitative data from those transit riders about both their experiences and aspirations.

Further research was conducted with a [Heinz College Systems Project](#) team to support these investments, using the data collected through this survey process. The *Beyond the East Busway* planning effort also significantly influenced the Southwest Pennsylvania Commission's subsequent [Smart Moves Connections planning survey](#) with CivicMapper and evolveEA.



Image of 1st "Beyond the East Busway" Community Organizing Cohort. Bottom left to right: Joel Malloy, Annie Regan, Debra Green. Middle left to right: Silas Switzer, Mercedes Williams, Matthew Holiday III, Precious Chambers, Mary Carey. Top center: Joshua Malloy

Why was the *Beyond the East Busway* process and the subsequent proposed BRT solutions better than the [previous East Busway extension study](#)?

Community leaders, riders, and residents have long advocated for improved public transit in the Mon Valley and Eastern suburbs. However, the only previous engineering solution for extending the East Busway looked very narrowly at the possibility of a grade-separated guideway parallel to the existing railroad. That approach had several limitations that make it undesirable:

- Improvements would be limited to two stations in Braddock and North Braddock without improved service to other areas of the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs.
- Stations would be in inconvenient locations that are not connected to destinations important to riders.
- The solution would be prohibitively expensive and take years to realize.

By contrast, the Beyond the East Busway survey involved a representative group of planning participants who actually live in the study area-- the vast majority of whom were transit riders-- and who are reflective of the area's demographics and geographical spread. The rider-led solution proposes:

- Improvements that can be made to priority corridors connecting significant destinations throughout the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs
- Prioritized investment near locations that are important to riders
- Solutions that can be implemented for moderate to low cost and implemented quickly.
- Improvements that can be phased, rather than implemented all at once. Every intersection or portion of the corridor that is improved will provide an immediate benefit to transit riders.

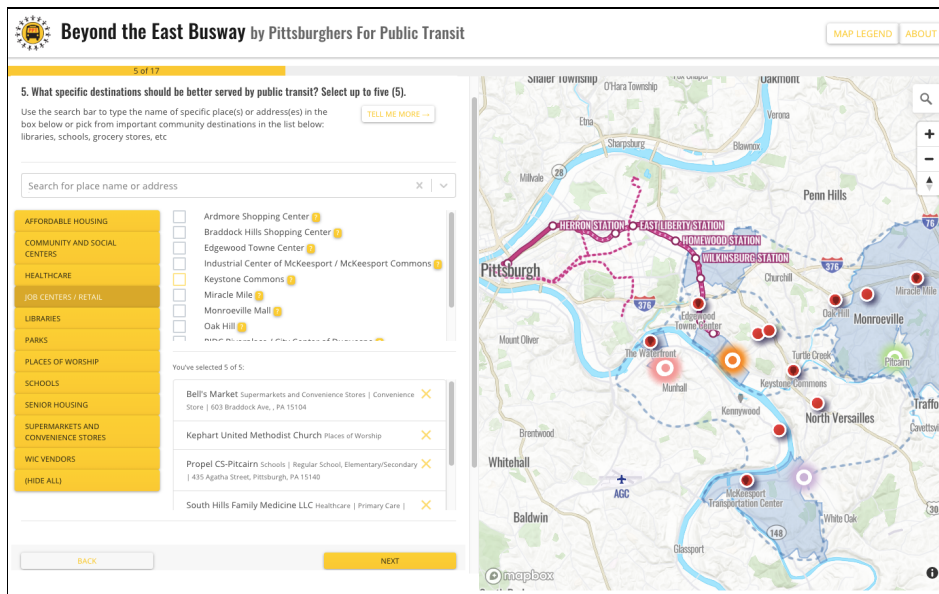


Image of the Beyond the East Busway Tool, with categories of community-serving locations for riders to select, and a map with highlighted regions and destinations selected by the user.

Other reports supporting these recommendations

Both the SPC and Port Authority have named the extension of the East Busway to Monroeville and McKeesport as transportation priorities in recent reports ([SmartMoves For a Changing Region](#), long-range plan by Southwestern Pa Commission: [Final Report of the Southwestern PA Partnership for Mobility](#), co-chaired by Port Authority CEO Katharine Kelleman).

Concurrently, the boroughs of Braddock, East Pittsburgh, and North Braddock worked to produce a 10-year Joint Comprehensive Plan that specifically identifies the on-street extension of the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway as being of critical importance for those communities to thrive.