

# Frequently Asked Questions

## LYNX Silver Line Project

Last Revised: 5/28/21

### OVERVIEW

#### **❓ What is the LYNX Silver Line light rail project?**

The LYNX Silver Line is a proposed 29-mile, 29 station light rail project from the City of Belmont, through Center City Charlotte and the Town of Matthews, into the Town of Stallings and the Town of Indian Trail in Union County.

#### **❓ What are the focus areas?**

CATS divided the corridor into six focus areas to help evaluate the alignment and guide discussion in public meetings. The focus areas are roughly similar in size and reflect the various land use and development characteristics seen in the corridor. Focus area numbering does not imply construction priority, nor does the focus area shading represent the area(s) which may or may not be affected by the proposed LYNX Silver Line.

#### **❓ How was the LYNX Silver Line light rail alignment (or LPA) chosen?**

In 1998, the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), CATS' governing policy board, adopted the *2025 Integrated Transit/Land Use Plan*, the first transit and land use plan that proposed using rapid transit to support and focus future growth in Charlotte's key centers and corridors. The plan identified the West Corridor along US 74 / Wilkinson Boulevard and the Southeast Corridor along US 74 / Independence Boulevard. Subsequent planning efforts refined the recommended corridors and associated transit technologies, leading to the current *2030 Transit System Plan*.

In 2016, CATS completed the *Southeast Corridor Transit Study*, which reconsidered various transit technologies and alignments. The study included a detailed technical evaluation and extensive public and stakeholder engagement. The MTC adopted a locally preferred alternative (LPA) for a light rail project in the 13-mile Southeast Corridor from Center City Charlotte to the Mecklenburg and Union County border.

More recently, CATS completed the *LYNX System Update*, which studied various technologies and alignment alternatives for the West Corridor and Center City Charlotte. The system update included another detailed technical evaluation and engagement effort. In February 2019, the MTC adopted a light rail LPA for the West Corridor and combined it with the Southeast Corridor LPA to make one continuous 26-mile light rail corridor from the City of Belmont to the Town of Matthews, known as the LYNX Silver Line Project. The MTC also directed CATS to evaluate a potential extension into Union County near the Towns of Stallings and Indian Trail.

#### **❓ Why are we refining the LPA and does CATS consider other suggestions for alignments and/or stations?**

Although the MTC adopted the LYNX Silver Line LPA in 2019, CATS last studied the Southeast Corridor in 2016. Since 2016, the region has experienced extensive development and growth, resulting in increased demand for transit and new physical constraints within the project corridor. Also, CATS opened the LYNX Blue Line Extension in 2018, which provided additional local experience in system design that can be applied to LYNX Silver Line planning, engineering, and operations.

Through the refinement effort and public comment periods, CATS has identified and screened over a hundred alignment refinement options, comparing each to the previously adopted LPA.

CATS is documenting the LPA refinement process and evaluation criteria in a separate report, which will be available for public review.

**? Why are we moving forward with the proposed LYNX Silver Line light rail project?**

The Charlotte region continues to see huge population and employment growth; with it comes a congested roadway network with slower travel times. Planning for and investing in high-capacity transit service infrastructure like the LYNX Silver Line is a way to help address equity concerns around limited transportation options for transit-dependent populations, inadequate connectivity and access between and to transit, and affordable housing, employment, and community services concerns.

Advancing the LYNX Silver Line project will also allow the project to stay on track to ultimately enter the federal process and compete for future federal funding

**? Life after the pandemic will be different. Why do we need light rail if people will not be commuting to work every day?**

While we don't know what the future will hold, growth is happening and will continue in the Charlotte region, so we need to plan for it now. To maintain our competitiveness as a vibrant Southeastern city that is both a great place to live and work, it is important that Charlotte invests now in the infrastructure needed to support the future we want to see. Investing in roads alone won't solve the region's growing congestion problem. Light rail offers a congestion-free commute with consistent travel times, even as the surrounding roadways become more congested. Light rail also attracts a diverse customer base, offers a safe and affordable alternative to driving and parking, benefits to local air quality, connectivity between housing, employment and community services, and an opportunity to promote and organize growth consistent with local plans.

**? How do I get information and/or stay informed about the LYNX Silver Line?**

- Information about the LYNX Silver Line can be found on CATS' website at [RideTransit.com/LYNXSilverLine](https://RideTransit.com/LYNXSilverLine)
- by viewing recordings of the live virtual public meetings on [CATS' YouTube page](#) ,
- by calling CATS Customer Service at 704-336-7433 (RIDE), or
- by requesting a virtual meeting for your neighborhood or community group at 704-366-7433 (RIDE) or emailing [LYNXSilverLine@publicinput.com](mailto:LYNXSilverLine@publicinput.com).
- Sign up for electronic notifications by clicking the "Notify Me" button on the CATS website.

## **ALIGNMENT NEAR AIRPORT**

**? Will there be a light rail station at the airport terminal?**

CATS anticipates having a LYNX Silver Line light rail station at the airport in conjunction with the airport's plans to construct a multimodal center that will function like an extension of the main terminal. Per the airport's plans, passengers would use a people-mover transit system between the light rail station and the main terminal. In addition to consistency with the airport's plans for a multimodal center, keeping the LYNX Silver Line along Wilkinson

Boulevard also enables a more direct route to points west of the airport. Detouring the LYNX Silver Line away from the Wilkinson Boulevard corridor would increase the transit trip time between western Mecklenburg County and Gaston County and the rest of the LYNX Silver Line corridor.

## ALIGNMENT THROUGH CENTER CITY

### **❓ Why doesn't CATS build the LYNX Silver Line through the middle of Center City Charlotte?**

The adopted refined LPA is consistent with the City's goals and allows for the expansion of travel markets to support growth in Center City. With an alignment between the freight rail and Graham Street corridors and adjacent to 11<sup>th</sup> Street, CATS is expanding its service area in Center City, as the LYNX Blue Line and CityLYNX Gold Line already serve the College Street / Brevard Street and Trade Street corridors, respectively. Additionally, the LPA allows for a stop at the future Charlotte Gateway Station to make several multi-modal transit connections and allows for a transfer to the LYNX Blue Line at 11<sup>th</sup> Street. This alignment has been approved twice by the MTC as the LPA.

### **❓ Why doesn't CATS build a transfer station between the LYNX Silver and Blue Lines?**

CATS intends to provide a well-connected pedestrian experience between the LYNX Silver Line station platform near 11<sup>th</sup> Street and the LYNX Blue Line station near 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Streets. Specific urban design concepts will be developed with a goal of creating a smooth pedestrian connection.

## ALIGNMENT IN INDEPENDENCE

### **❓ Why doesn't CATS build a transfer station between the LYNX Silver and CityLYNX Gold Lines?**

The adopted LPA which came out of the *Southeast Corridor Transit Study* (2016) follows the north side of Independence Boulevard with a station at Pecan Avenue. The Hawthorne Lane bridge cannot be extended any further based on an agreement reached with the adjacent historic neighborhood as part of a previous Independence Boulevard project. Based on that established bridge length, there is not enough space under the Hawthorne Lane bridge for both the LYNX Silver Line rail tracks and a station platform. Additionally, a station requires pedestrian access from the street level, which would require even more space. There is enough space for a station near Pecan Avenue, and CATS will explore other opportunities for pedestrian connections, such as the Rail Trail, between the LYNX Silver Line and CityLYNX Gold Line stations.

### **❓ Why doesn't CATS build in the median of Independence Boulevard?**

In 2011, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) conducted a study that concluded light rail in the center of Independence Boulevard would not support transit-oriented development. The ULI study recommended to remove the option for rail transit in the median of Independence Boulevard and instead operate enhanced bus routes in the express lanes, while continuing to plan for rail transit elsewhere in the corridor. Following the ULI study, the MTC decided to no longer pursue rail in the median of Independence Boulevard and instructed CATS to study other options for light rail in the southeast corridor.

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS

### **? How do you plan to keep people safe on or near the LYNX Silver Line?**

Safety is a top priority at CATS, and we take the well-being of every patron, employee and of our entire system seriously. At CATS, we begin thinking comprehensively about how to build a transit system that is safe and secure long before a single track is laid, or station is built. Safety and security professionals play a major role in the design and development of our transit projects, participating in the process from the early stages of planning and design, through construction and operations. Currently along our system, CATS has numerous safety measures currently in place, including thousands of cameras and blue light emergency phones that connect directly to law enforcement installed on LYNX platforms and in CATS park and ride facilities and transit centers. We have partnerships with various law enforcement agencies; uniformed and plain-clothes law enforcement officers patrol the entire system including parking decks. We have well-lit train stations and platforms and thousands of cameras systemwide on buses, trains, station platforms, and along the light rail alignments. We also encourage every rider to download the CATS' See/Say mobile app to anonymously report criminal or suspicious activity. The app is monitored by law enforcement at all times.

### **? Does CATS consider noise impacts as a result of the LYNX Silver Line?**

Noise analyses will be conducted during environmental review to identify potential project-related effects to sensitive land uses. The project-related effects are determined by comparing existing or current noise levels with anticipated noise levels after construction of the light rail project.

If noise impacts are anticipated, it may be feasible to mitigate those impacts through the implementation of noise control measures. The feasibility would be determined through technical analyses and as applicable, reported in a NEPA environmental document which would be available for public review and comment.

### **? Will I be displaced as a result of the LYNX Silver Line?**

We are not far enough along in the design to know what the project property impacts will be; however, we will continue to engage with the public throughout the process as the design is refined and more information becomes available regarding potential acquisitions.

### **? How will you prevent gentrification?**

Economic development is generally considered a benefit of rapid transit infrastructure and it brings an undeniable return on investment. However, making sure that our communities are protected while development is encouraged, is a balance the City of Charlotte is working to address. CATS will work to minimize impacts to the natural and human environment through partnerships with other City departments and by conducting studies related to transit-oriented development (TOD) in parallel with the LYNX Silver Line light rail design efforts. As part of the future environmental review in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) phase, the LYNX Silver Line light rail team will evaluate and document potential effects of the light rail project on minority and low-income populations (also known as Environmental Justice populations). Public engagement efforts, including efforts to reach underserved populations, are ongoing and CATS is continuously striving for an inclusive planning process so that decisions are made with an understanding of the desires of the City's many constituents.

### ❓ **How does the property acquisition process work?**

CATS is still very early in the planning and design process. As design progresses and environmental review is conducted, CATS will begin to identify properties that may be needed to construct the light rail project. The environmental review, or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, is designed to avoid and minimize adverse effects to the environment, and CATS will continue to consider design modifications to avoid or minimize potential property impacts.

Once properties have been identified for acquisition following environmental review and advanced design and engineering, CATS will work with the [City's Real Estate Division](#) to acquire property as outlined in the [Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Policies Act of 1970](#), as amended. The "Uniform Act" promotes uniformity and fairness in property acquisition and those who are impacted by acquisitions are entitled to advisory services, appraisals, fair market value for property acquired.

## **COST & FUNDING**

### ❓ **How will the project be funded?**

CATS will develop a cost estimate through the pre-Project Development and Project Development Phases. Once a more complete cost has been developed, funding sources will be determined. As with previous light rail projects, CATS anticipates using a combination of local, state and federal funds. As the project continues to advance through design and a more complete cost can be developed, CATS will continue to engage with the local community about their desires to invest in rapid transit projects and the future of the Charlotte region.

## **SCHEDULE & PROCESS**

### ❓ **When will the LYNX Silver Line be constructed?**

CATS' goal is to construct the project as part of its 2030 plan; however, project and funding decisions to be made between now and that time will dictate the actual LYNX Silver Line program delivery schedule.

### ❓ **What are the next steps after MTC adoption?**

After the MTC adopts the refined Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), CATS will begin developing more detailed engineering plans and a more detailed environmental study under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Current designs are conceptual, with limited to no information about grade separations, cross sections, right-of-way, easements, train operations, travel time, and maintenance facilities, etc. This information will be developed as part of the more detailed engineering plans and environmental studies.

Additionally, following MTC adoption, the transit-oriented development (TOD) team will begin looking at the vision for land use around the LYNX Silver Line stations. CATS will prepare station plans, including more detail related to parking, platforms, site furnishings, shelters, artwork, pedestrian and bicycle amenities, ADA-compliance, etc.

### ❓ **How and when will station locations be chosen?**

Conceptual station locations were identified in the LYNX System Update (2019) based on a review of land use trends, local plans, and considering the need to provide good access to the system while maintaining the goals of a reliable trip with competitive travel time.

Spacing was envisioned to be approximately one mile between stations, and the stations were typically sited at current or future commercial hubs, residential clusters, transfer centers and major interchanges.

The team is currently in the process of refining the LYNX Silver Line, including the confirmation and/or identification of refined station locations. In coordination with a TOD study that will inform planning around stations, station locations and station types will be further detailed in future design phases.

### **What happens once the project enters the federal process?**

The Federal Transit Administration's process for Capital Investment Grant Projects is structured with three phases: Project Development, Engineering and Construction. Project Development must be done within 24 months and includes an environmental review of (at least) the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and No Build Alternative documented in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which would be available for public review and comment. After review of public comments and mitigation measures, the FTA would issue a Final EIS and Record of Decision, and CATS would request entry into the Engineering Phase. Once project design is completed with enough detail to allow FTA to evaluate, rate and approve the designs, CATS can request a Full Funding Grant Agreement, and after signature of that agreement, construction can begin. For additional details about FTA's process visit <https://www.transit.dot.gov/CIG>

## **THIRD PARTY COORDINATION**

### **Will freight railroad coordination be required?**

The LYNX Silver Line will cross the Norfolk Southern Railroad right of way (near Bank of America Stadium) and the CSX Railroad right of way near Pecan Avenue, Village Lake Drive, and again near Matthews Township Parkway in Matthews. These crossings will be grade separated, meaning that the LYNX Silver Line will either bridge over or go under the freight railroad tracks. CATS is working closely with Norfolk Southern and CSX during this process.

### **Will coordination with the Charlotte Department of Transportation (CDOT) or the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) be required?**

CATS has been working closely with both CDOT and NCDOT throughout the alignment refinement process and will continue to do so as the design progresses. A thorough traffic analysis will be completed as part of the environmental review. These agencies are coordinating on current and future projects, including separate projects to replace the bridge carrying automobile traffic on Wilkinson Boulevard over the Catawba River, potential reconfiguration of the I-277 ramps, and widening and reconfiguration of interchanges on Independence Boulevard, among others.

## **OTHER RELATED INITIATIVES**

### **What is the rail trail project?**

In coordination with the LYNX Silver Line light rail project and TOD study, CATS is conducting a study to determine a vision for a pedestrian and bicycle path along the entire LYNX Silver Line light rail project. This would be like the rail trail along a portion of the LYNX Blue Line. Ideally, the rail trail would be adjacent to the light rail line; however, there may be locations where access is diverted to sidewalks, paths, or bicycle lanes on

roadways. The rail trail is very conceptual in nature at this point, and design will be refined as we know more about the light rail project and physical constraints.

**❓ What is the TOD study?**

CATS, in partnership with Charlotte Planning, Design & Development Department, and the municipalities in the LYNX Silver Line corridor, have received a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to study TOD readiness, station area planning and implementation strategies. The TOD team is working closely with the design team to better meet and/or manage goals related to station area locations, land use typology, potential ways to protect affordable housing and historic resources, infrastructure opportunities (including pedestrian and bicycle connections), corridor preservation, etc. It is important to note that CATS, while a City agency, is not in the development business. There may be opportunities to partner with other agencies to help meet shared goals at the station areas.

Building an integrated land use and transit system is key to managing growth in the Charlotte area. This requires making land use decisions that encourage people to use transit as an alternative for their daily and occasional travel. Integrated land use planning and transit-oriented development (TOD) are the cornerstones of the *2030 Transit System Plan*. TOD promotes vibrant, mixed use, pedestrian friendly neighborhoods within walking distance of rapid transit stations. The increased density and mix of residential, retail and employment opportunities make better use of developable land and the existing transportation infrastructure, discourages urban sprawl, and supports the efficient use of limited natural resources.

**❓ How will bus service be integrated with the LYNX Silver Line?**

The LYNX Silver Line will include bus drop-off/pick-up locations at park-and-ride stations and potentially some of the walk-up stations. Bus service along the alignment will be evaluated to find opportunities for optimization of bus service and to provide a seamless connection for our transit customers.

**❓ Can the LYNX Silver Line be extended further into Gaston County or Union County?**

Different types of rapid transit technologies work best depending on the environment and geographic area served. The Centralina Council of Governments, in collaboration with municipalities and county governments, regional planning organizations, and various transit agencies, has embarked on a two-state and 12-county study to develop a bold regional transit vision. The intent is to create a regional transit plan with implementation strategies to guide planning efforts and capital investment projects, including identification of corridors that would be good candidates for new high capacity transit or extension of existing high capacity transit. Learn more about Connect Beyond at [www.connect-beyond.com](http://www.connect-beyond.com).