

2055 Transit System Plan

MOVING
FORWARD
TOGETHER



May 2025

METROPOLITAN TRANSIT COMMISSION



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INTRODUCTION

The 2055 Transit System Plan: Moving *Forward* Together

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) is the public transportation organization serving the Charlotte, NC metropolitan area. CATS plays a vital role in connecting communities across Mecklenburg County and beyond. CATS operates a comprehensive network of local and express bus, light rail, streetcar, microtransit, and paratransit services, all aimed at providing safe, efficient, and accessible transportation. CATS is committed to enhancing the quality of life for residents and supporting the region's economic development through reliable transit solutions.

Mecklenburg County is on track to reach over two million residents by 2055. There's a growing need for better, more efficient public transit that supports vibrant, connected communities. As a strategy to accommodate this growth, CATS has updated and combined its primary transit plans (the *Better Bus Plan* and the *Rapid Transit Corridor System Plan*) into the **2055 Transit System Plan: Moving Forward Together**. This plan improves the frequency and reliability of bus service, increases paratransit service, enhances the rider experience with investments in bus stop facilities, vastly expands the microtransit program, and delivers on the light rail, streetcar, and commuter rail visions created over the past 20 years. The **2055 Transit System Plan** outlines a financially feasible implementation strategy that aligns with our community's needs and priorities. This initiative is particularly timely as regional leaders have collaborated with the North Carolina General Assembly to authorize a local sales tax referendum. If approved, this dedicated funding source would enable the implementation of these investments in public transit.

CATS' mission, *Moving People Forward*, reflects its commitment to serving the community. The **2055 Transit System Plan** represents how we're building a better future with a shared vision—one that includes everyone in the Charlotte region. It reflects the voices, hopes, and ideas of the community, and it looks ahead to the next 30 years to ensure our transit system grows in a way that supports connections, opportunity, and sustainability for all, delivering on our promise of ***Moving Forward Together***.



About CATS

OUR MISSION

Moving People *Forward*

OUR VISION

To create a seamless transit experience that improves the lives of individuals, fuels economic growth, builds a connected region, and fosters a sustainable future for all.

OUR GOALS

Serving Our Customers & Communities

Transit is customer-focused first, providing reliable, equitable service that prioritizes dignity, comfort, and convenience—improving lives by expanding access and enhancing the travel experience.

Advancing Economic Mobility

Transit is an economic equalizer, increasing access to jobs, housing, education, services, and the broader region—connecting people to the full diversity of opportunities available.

Fostering Sustainability & Innovation

Transit drives mobility, innovation, and sustainability by expanding travel options, enhancing connectivity, and reducing car dependency. It shapes equitable growth, supports inclusive communities, and promotes environmentally responsible urban development.

A History of CATS Transit

Highlights from 1998 to present day.

FOUNDATIONS & FIRSTS

- The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County created the 2025 Integrated Transit / Land Use Plan, establishing the role of rapid transit in advancing land use goals.
- County-wide 1/2 cent sales tax for transit is approved by voters, forming the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS)
- Significant bus network and service expansion

CONTINUED GROWTH

- 9.3-mile Blue Line Extension opens, doubling the light rail system and connecting UNC Charlotte to Uptown
- Envision My Ride bus network redesign sets the stage for future investments in Better Bus efforts
- MetroRAPID Enhanced Bus Service launches
- Gold Line streetcar Phase 2 opens for service, extending the streetcar system through Uptown west to Johnson C. Smith University and east to Sunnyside, for a total of four miles

present day

1998



EXPANDING OPTIONS

- 2030 Transit System Plan adopted
- Blue Line opens as NC's first light rail, extending 9.6 miles from Uptown through South End to I-485
- Sprinter airport bus service launches, providing enhanced bus service from Uptown to the CLT airport
- Gold Line streetcar Phase 1 opens as NC's first streetcar system, providing service from Charlotte Transportation Center to Novant Presbyterian Hospital



FUTURE-READINESS

- Better Bus planning effort lays the groundwork for transformational bus investments, including microtransit
- City of Charlotte purchases Red Line Corridor from Norfolk Southern
- CATS Micro launches, serving North Mecklenburg
- Renewed commitment to the region's 30-year vision through the adoption of CATS 2055 Transit System Plan



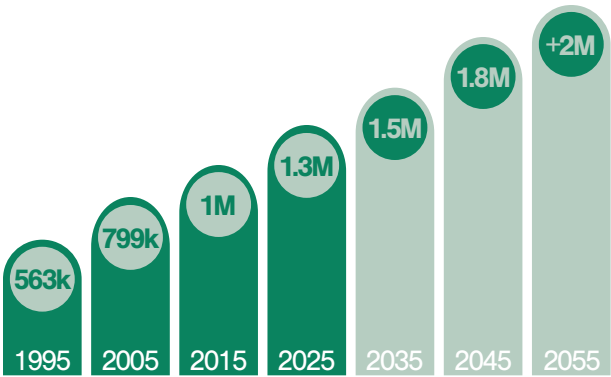


A Growing Region

Charlotte’s metro area is experiencing rapid growth, with forecasts projecting an influx of about 725,000 new residents by 2055. This rapid increase will place substantial demands on the city’s infrastructure, housing, and transportation networks, necessitating targeted investments in transit, roads, and pedestrian oriented infrastructure to accommodate the expanding populace and maintain Charlotte’s high quality of life.

Providing transit for a growing population

The Charlotte region has successfully made the linkages of transit and land use since the approval of the 2025 Integrated Transit/Land-Use Plan in 1998. These efforts are apparent along the Blue Line in LoSo, South End, Optimist Park, and NoDa. The community continues to focus land use planning efforts to support growth along future rapid transit lines.



725k+ new residents expected between now & 2055

Transit-Oriented Communities

As our population grows over the next 30 years, the planning for Transit Oriented Communities (TOCs), linked to the implementation of high-quality transit along major travel corridors, is at the center of the region’s growth strategy. By integrating residential, commercial, and recreational spaces within a short walk of transit stations, these areas promote diverse, vibrant neighborhoods where people can live, work, and thrive without depending on a car.

TOCs provide all people, regardless of socio-economic status, the opportunity to live near transit stations and experience the benefits of development and access.

When implemented effectively, TOCs provide access to opportunity through frequent transit service and foster public health, sustainability, economic development, and the creation of enduring places that draw people and activity.



TOCs are walkable neighborhoods near transit stops.



Community Input

Community input has been the cornerstone of the 2055 Transit System Plan from its inception. CATS spearheaded an extensive outreach campaign to engage residents at every stage of the planning process. This comprehensive effort included a variety of engagement methods such as public meetings, neighborhood conversations, surveys, transit intercept events, and virtual engagement sessions.

By employing these diverse strategies, CATS ensured voices from all corners of the community were heard and considered. This allowed residents to play a pivotal role in shaping transit priorities and exploring various investment options, that resulted in the recommendations for the transit system.

12,000+ touchpoints with the community

1560+ survey participants

93% agree that more transit options are needed

87%
support Transit System Plan priorities

Top Community Priorities

All feedback gathered during this outreach was shared with the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), CATS' governing board, at its April 30, 2025 meeting. Community input played a critical role in

shaping the evaluation process and refining the priorities of the Transit System Plan, which was adopted by the MTC at its May 28, 2025 meeting.

I want to see light rail connect to the airport!

I support transit expansion!

I want Bus Frequency and Reliability to be improved!

Rail has Long-Term Benefits for my community!

I want Light Rail to reach East Charlotte!



2055 TRANSIT SYSTEM PLAN



A Commitment to Service

The **2055 Transit System Plan** includes both the *Better Bus Plan* and the *Rapid Transit Corridor System Plan* to create a balanced and comprehensive program of short-, mid-, and long-term transit investments. The projects that make up the full system plan presented in the **2055 Transit System Plan** reflect the region's long-term transit vision, with a subset of the plan identified as the 30-year fiscally constrained transit program.

A comprehensive financial analysis was conducted to support the identification of the proposed program of projects. This evaluation included the development of a long-range financial model designed to align program costs with forecasted revenues over a 30-year horizon.

This financial forecast indicates that, with the approval of a new 1-cent countywide mobility sales tax—of which 0.60 cents would be allocated specifically for transit—CATS would have the financial capacity to support both the proposed system expansion and increased service levels throughout Mecklenburg County.

The financial analysis uses conservative assumptions to account for economic risks while ensuring that capital expansion, operations, state of good repair, and debt repayment obligations remain within anticipated revenue streams. This disciplined approach ensures compliance with legislative requirements to deliver a financially sustainable and impactful transit program.

BETTER BUS PLAN

The Better Bus Plan is CATS' bold commitment to modernize and reimagine the Charlotte region's bus network as the backbone of an equitable and connected transit system. It responds to urgent calls from the community for faster, more reliable, and more frequent bus service—especially in areas where transit is a lifeline to opportunity. As the largest comprehensive increase in service throughout CATS history, the Better Bus Plan lays the groundwork for broader investments in light rail, streetcar, and commuter rail over the next 30 years. Rooted in public feedback and data-driven analysis, the plan focuses on delivering meaningful improvements in access, reliability, and rider experience—with **major service upgrades to be implemented within the first five years of the plan.**

The Better Bus Plan delivers one of the most significant equity-driven transit transformations in Charlotte's history—expanding access, simplifying service, and creating faster, more reliable options across the region. By redesigning the network around where people live and work today, the plan ensures that CATS can serve more people with better service, more often.

Better Bus Service

Expanded Service

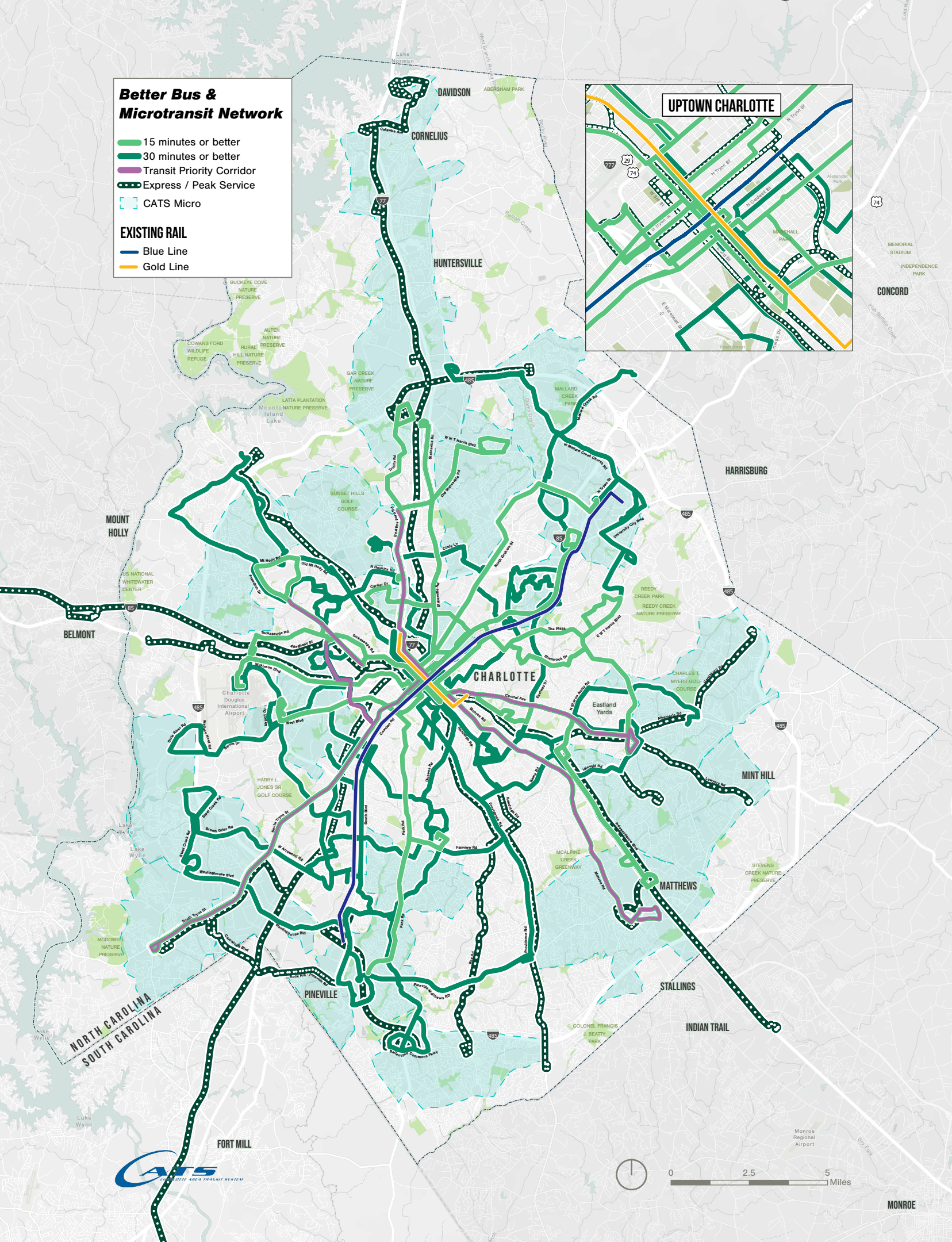
- **High-Frequency Network:** 15 bus routes improved to 15-minute or better frequency.
- **Expanded Service Hours:** Longer hours of service on weekdays and significantly enhanced weekend service to better support second- and third-shift workers.
- **91,000 more low-income individuals will have access to 15-minute frequency** compared to 19,000 today. **200,000 more people of color have will have access to 15-minute frequency** compared to 40,000 today.

Bus Priority Corridors

The plan identifies key corridors for bus priority infrastructure, including transit signal priority (TSP)—reducing delays and improving reliability.

Improved Regional Connectivity

Continued investment in express routes including upgraded vehicles and park-and-ride facilities, supporting commuting across the Charlotte region.



BETTER BUS PLAN SYSTEMWIDE ENHANCEMENTS



Microtransit Expansion

To complement the fixed-route network, the Better Bus Plan introduces **microtransit service across more than 100 square miles**, bringing flexible, on-demand transit options to neighborhoods and job centers that previously had little or no service. This innovative expansion improves first-mile/last-mile connections to high frequency services and ensures access in lower-density areas that traditional bus routes can't effectively reach.

89 new fleet buses

72% of Mecklenburg County covered by 30-minute service

450k people with high frequency bus access

5 service increased within 5 years

15 routes improved to 15-minute frequency

Bus Stop & Amenity Upgrades

Over the next decade, CATS will improve up to 2,000 bus stops in its system, with new shelters, benches, lighting, and accessible waiting areas.

320k more jobs with 15-minute bus frequency

2,000 bus stops with benches and/or waiting pads within 10 years



SERVICE AREA ENHANCEMENTS

CATS is improving its bus service areas to ensure a more efficient and reliable commute. These enhancements aim to reduce travel times, increase accessibility, and better connect neighborhoods with key destinations. With these improvements, CATS is committed to fostering a more sustainable and connected community.

North Mecklenburg

Davidson, Cornelius, & Huntersville

CATS Micro zone currently serving:
All Downtowns, Davidson College, Circles 30, Catawba Ave, Birkdale Village, Northcross, Bryton Town Center, CATS Park and Rides

Improved express frequency with midday service:
Huntersville (48X)(63X), Cornelius/ Davidson (77X), New Hambright Park and Ride

North Charlotte

Priority bus corridors with signal priority and enhanced stops:
Beatties Ford Road corridor

CATS Micro zones serving:
Northcross

Improved express frequency with midday service:
Northlake/ Prosperity Village (S3X)

Five routes improved to 15-minute or better frequency:
LaSalle St / Norris Ave (3), Beatties Ford Rd (7), N Tryon St (11), Statesville Rd (21), Graham St (22)

East Mecklenburg

Mint Hill

CATS Micro zones serving:
Matthews-Mint Hill Rd, Lawyers Rd

Improved express frequency with midday service:
Lawyers Road (40X)

Matthews

Priority bus corridor with signal priority and enhanced stops:
Monroe Rd/ John St

CATS Micro zones serving:
CPCC Levine, Brace YMCA, Downtown Matthews, Windsor Square

Two routes improved to 15-minute or better frequency:
Independence Blvd (17), Monroe Rd/John St (27)

Improved express frequency with midday service:
Matthews (64X)

East Charlotte

Priority bus corridors with signal priority and enhanced stops:
Central Ave, Monroe Rd

CATS Micro zones serving:
Albemarle Rd, Harrisburg Rd, Independence Blvd, Lawyers Rd

Five routes improved to 15-minute or better frequency:
The Plaza/ WT Harris (3), Central Ave (9), Commonwealth/ Independence (17), Shamrock (23), Monroe Rd (27)

Improved express frequency with midday service:
Lawyers Rd (40X), Harrisburg Rd (46X), Idlewild Rd (52X)

South Mecklenburg

South Charlotte

Priority bus corridors with signal priority and enhanced stops:

S Tryon St

CATS Micro zones serving:

Ballantyne, Park Crossing, Starmount / Quail Hollow, Steele Creek

Improved express frequency with midday service:

Steele Creek (41X), Providence Rd (61X), Rea Rd (62X), New Ballantyne Express

Two routes improved to 15-minute or better frequency:

S Tryon St (16), Park Rd (19)

Pineville

CATS Micro zone serving:

Downtown Pineville, Carolina Place Mall, Highway 51, Park Rd

One route improved to 15-minute or better frequency:

Park Rd (19)

West Mecklenburg

West Charlotte

Priority bus corridors with signal priority and enhanced stops:

Ashley Rd, Beatties Ford Rd, Freedom Dr, Remount Rd, S Tryon St

CATS Micro zones serving:

Ashley Park, Coulwood, Paw Creek, Steele Creek, West Blvd

Six routes improved to 15-minute or better frequency:

Wilkinson Blvd / Morehead St (Sprinter Airport), Beatties Ford Rd (7), Tuckaseegee Rd (8), West Blvd (10), S Tryon St (16), Freedom Dr (34)

Improved frequency to 30-minute or better; Service extended to the River District:

All routes

Improved express frequency with midday service:

Steele Creek (41X), Mountain Island (88X)

Major expansion of bus stop amenities & development of a mobility hub:

Freedom Dr, Ashley Rd

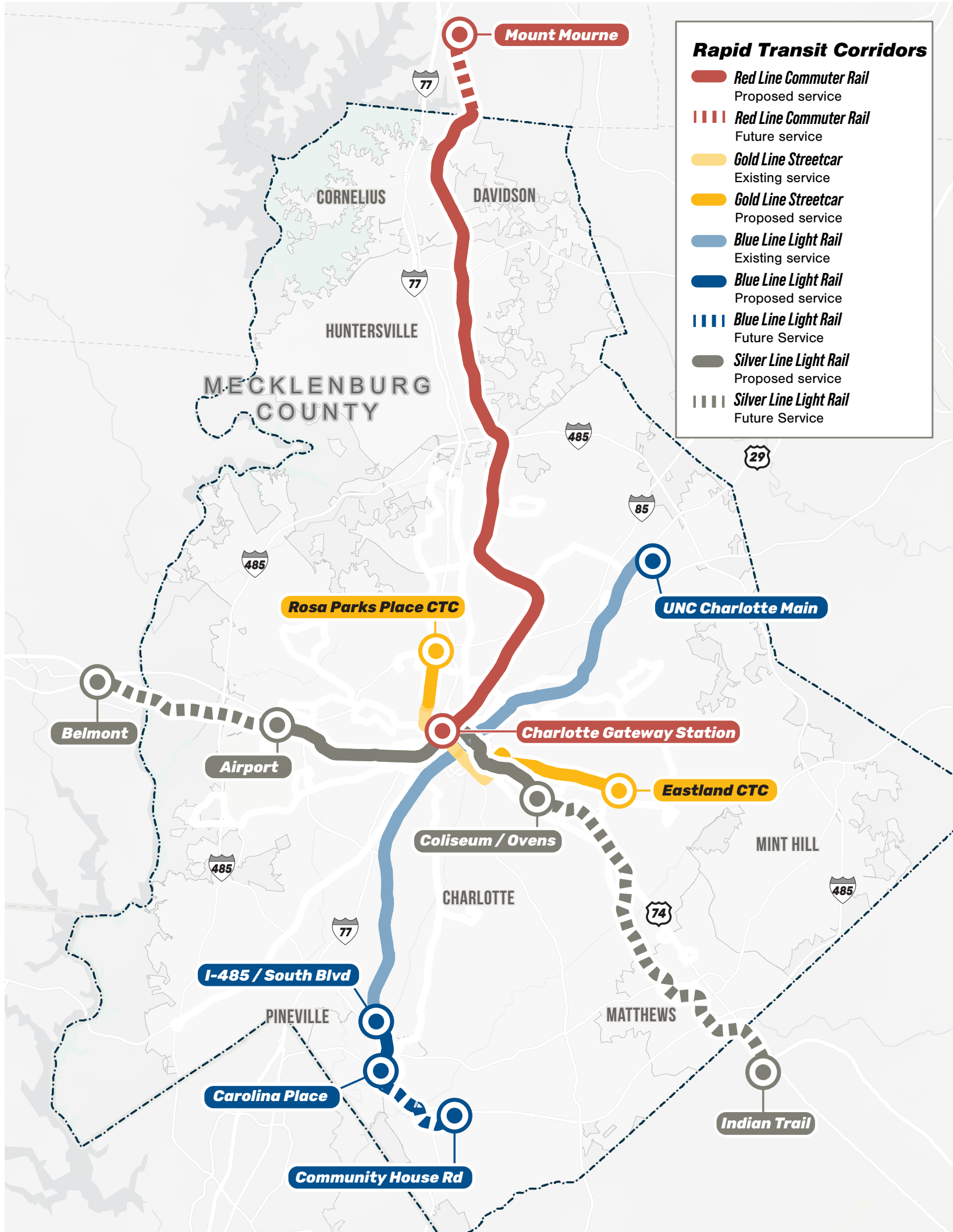
RAPID TRANSIT CORRIDORS



The **Rapid Transit Corridor System Plan** was developed incrementally over the past 20 years based on community engagement and technical analysis as a strategy to enhance regional mobility in the face of anticipated growth. This plan identifies a network of rail investments in the region’s major growth corridors (the “Rapid Transit Corridors”) that connect key economic centers across the Charlotte Region.

These rail investments include commuter rail, light rail, and streetcar projects that provide frequent, reliable, high-capacity transit with a premium rider experience that comfortably connects people to housing, jobs, healthcare, educational opportunities, shopping and entertainment.

Each Rapid Transit Corridor includes a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), which is the desired **future** vision for the full system plan adopted by the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC). The Silver Line and the Blue Line Pineville-Ballantyne Extension also include a minimum operable segment (MOS), which is a shorter portion of the LPA that can function independently while providing meaningful service. For these corridors, the MOS reflects the **proposed service** included in the fiscally constrained program.



470k jobs within ½ mile
access to rail stations

RAPID TRANSIT CORRIDORS SYSTEMWIDE ENHANCEMENTS



Improved Access

Including projected growth, the proposed program of rail investments will reach 340,000 people and 470,000 jobs within a 1/2 mile of rail stations by 2055.

340k people within ½ mile
access to rail stations



Expanded Coverage

As part of the fiscally constrained program within the 2055 Transit System Plan, a phased implementation of the adopted rapid transit corridors was identified that includes 25 miles of commuter rail, 12 miles of light rail, and 6 miles of streetcar to be built within the next 30 years.

2 new rail corridors to serve more
customers than ever!



Concept image

Red Line Commuter Rail

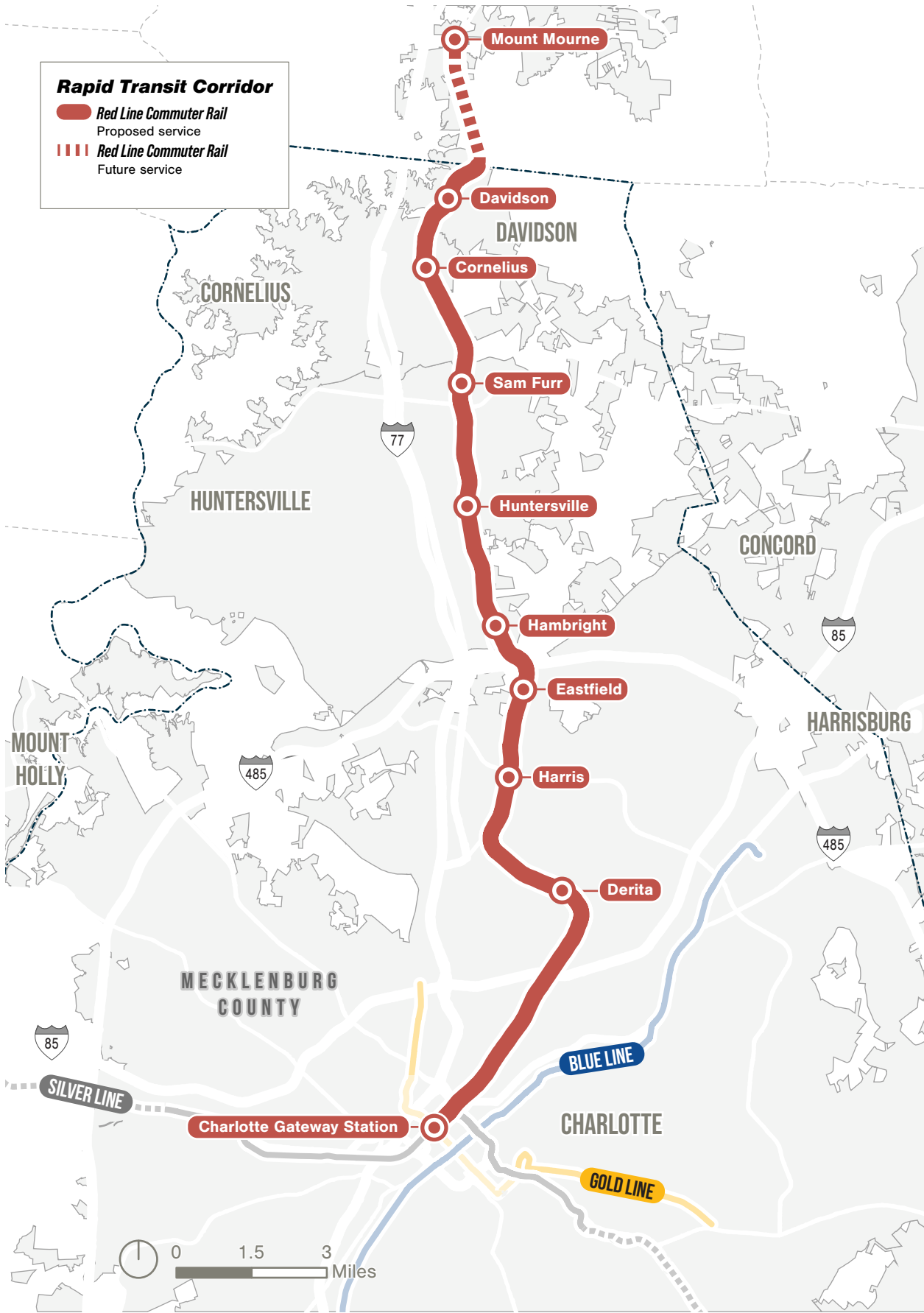
The Red Line is a proposed 25-mile commuter rail program set to operate within an existing freight rail corridor recently acquired by the City of Charlotte. Offering a premium ride to exciting regional destinations, the Red Line will provide

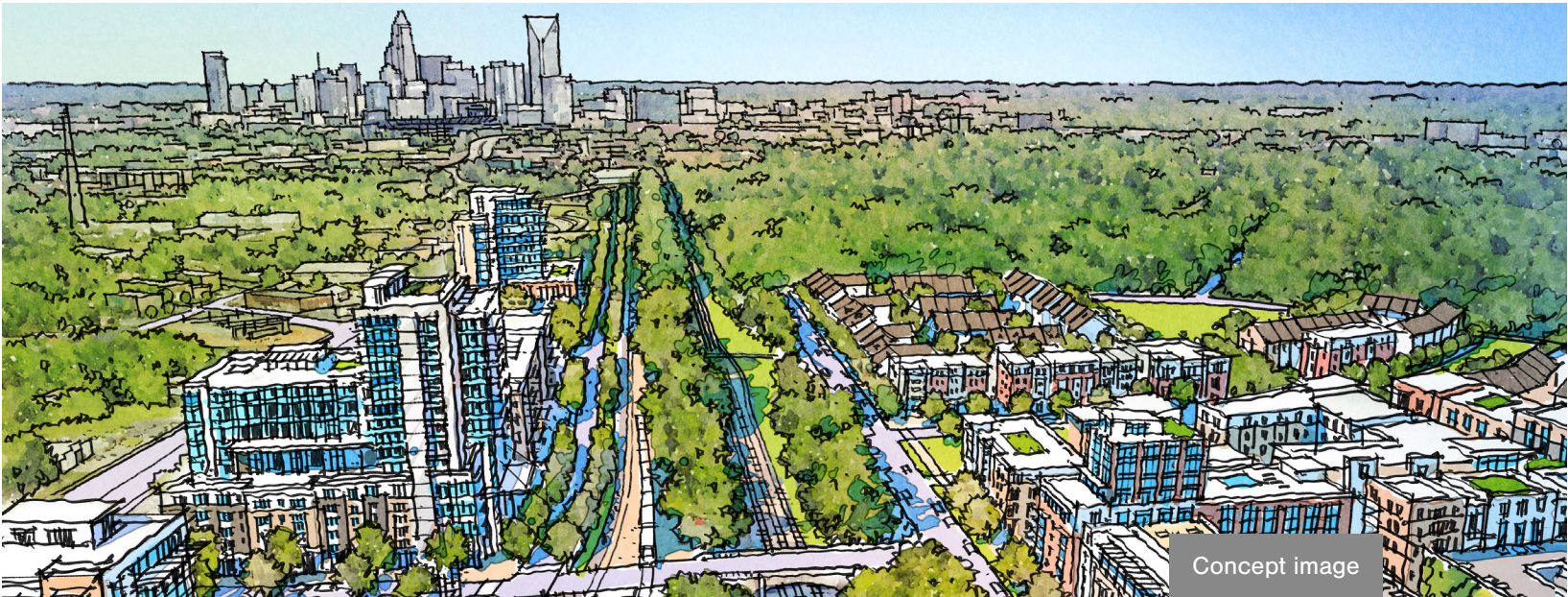
congestion-free access between North Mecklenburg towns and Center City Charlotte. With up to 21 round trips a day, trains will run every 30 minutes during rush hour and hourly the rest of the day and on weekends.

Key Destinations

Charlotte Gateway District	Truist Field
Cornelius Town Center	Davidson College
Davidson Town Center	Johnson & Wales University
Huntersville Town Center	Bank of America Stadium

Connections to future Silver Line, Gold Line, CATS bus, AMTRAK, and Greyhound/ Intercity bus





Concept image

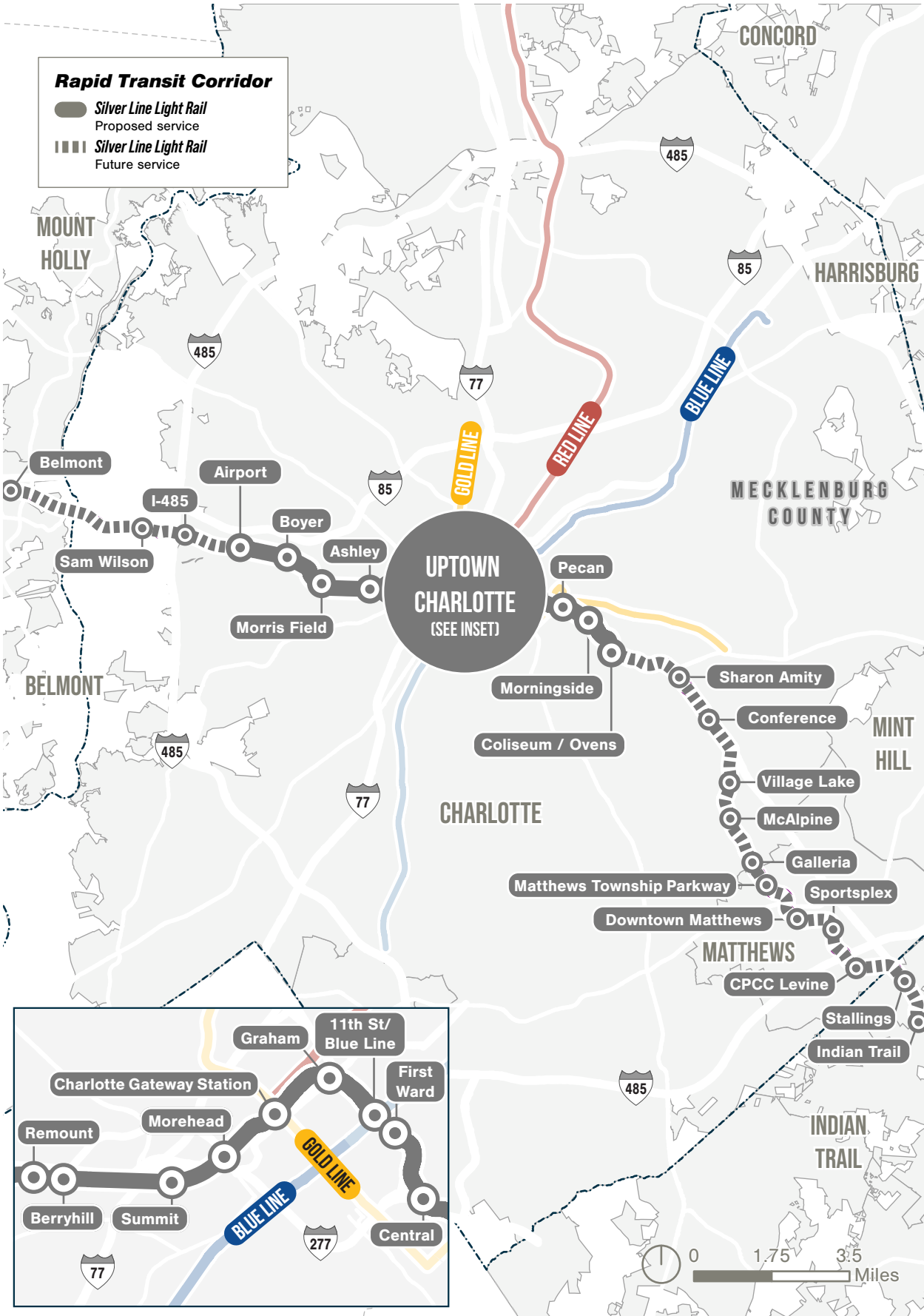
Silver Line Light Rail

The Silver Line light rail is one of the most ambitious transit programs pursued in the Charlotte Region. The Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), which is the **future** long-term vision for the full system plan adopted by the MTC, is a 29-mile light rail alignment connecting the City of Belmont to the Town of Indian Trail via 30 stations through Uptown Charlotte. The Silver Line also includes a minimum operable segment (MOS), which is a shorter portion of the LPA that can function independently while providing meaningful service. The MOS reflects the **proposed service** included in the fiscally constrained program.

The Silver Line MOS offers a comfortable one-seat ride between CLT Airport, Uptown Charlotte, bustling urban neighborhood centers on the east and west sides, and entertainment venues in East Charlotte. As congestion increases along the southeast and west corridors, this dependable light rail service will consistently provide 10-minute peak frequency and 15–20-minute frequency off-peak and weekends.

Key Destinations

Charlotte Douglas International Airport	Bank of America Stadium / Truist Field
Goodwill Opportunity Campus	Center City Charlotte's Iron District
Charlotte Gateway District	UNC Charlotte City Center Campus
Central Piedmont Community College	Plaza Midwood Social District
XCLT Trail / Little Sugar Creek Greenway	Bojangles Coliseum & Ovens Auditorium
Connections to Blue, Gold, & future Red Line, CATS bus, AMTRAK, and Greyhound/ Intercity bus	





Gold Line Streetcar Extension

The Gold Line streetcar extension is an essential part of Charlotte’s long-term vision for a comprehensive, multimodal transit system. Designed to connect East and West Charlotte neighborhoods to employment, educational opportunities, healthcare services, recreation, and

entertainment venues, the Gold Line is easy to navigate and serves as the city’s modern streetcar network. The Gold Line streetcar extension will complete the 10-mile Gold Line streetcar system, providing an intuitive rider experience with planned frequent 15-minute service.

Key Destinations

Charlotte Gateway District	Johnson & Wales University
The Spectrum Center	Charlotte Transportation Center
Eastland Community Transit Center	Johnson C. Smith University
Novant Presbyterian Hospital	Plaza Midwood Social District
Little Sugar Creek Greenway	Elizabeth Avenue’s business district
Central Piedmont Community College	Rosa Parks Place Community Transit Center

Connections to Blue Line, future Silver Line, future Red Line, CATS bus, AMTRAK, and Greyhound/Intercity bus





Blue Line Light Rail Extension

The Blue Line Pineville-Ballantyne extension Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is a proposed 5-mile extension of the existing Blue Line light rail service from the current terminus at I-485/South Boulevard. The LPA, which is the **future**, long-term vision for the full system plan adopted by the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), connects the Town of Pineville and the Ballantyne community to the existing 18.6-mile Blue Line, providing access to LoSo, South End, Center City Charlotte, NoDa, University City, and UNC Charlotte.

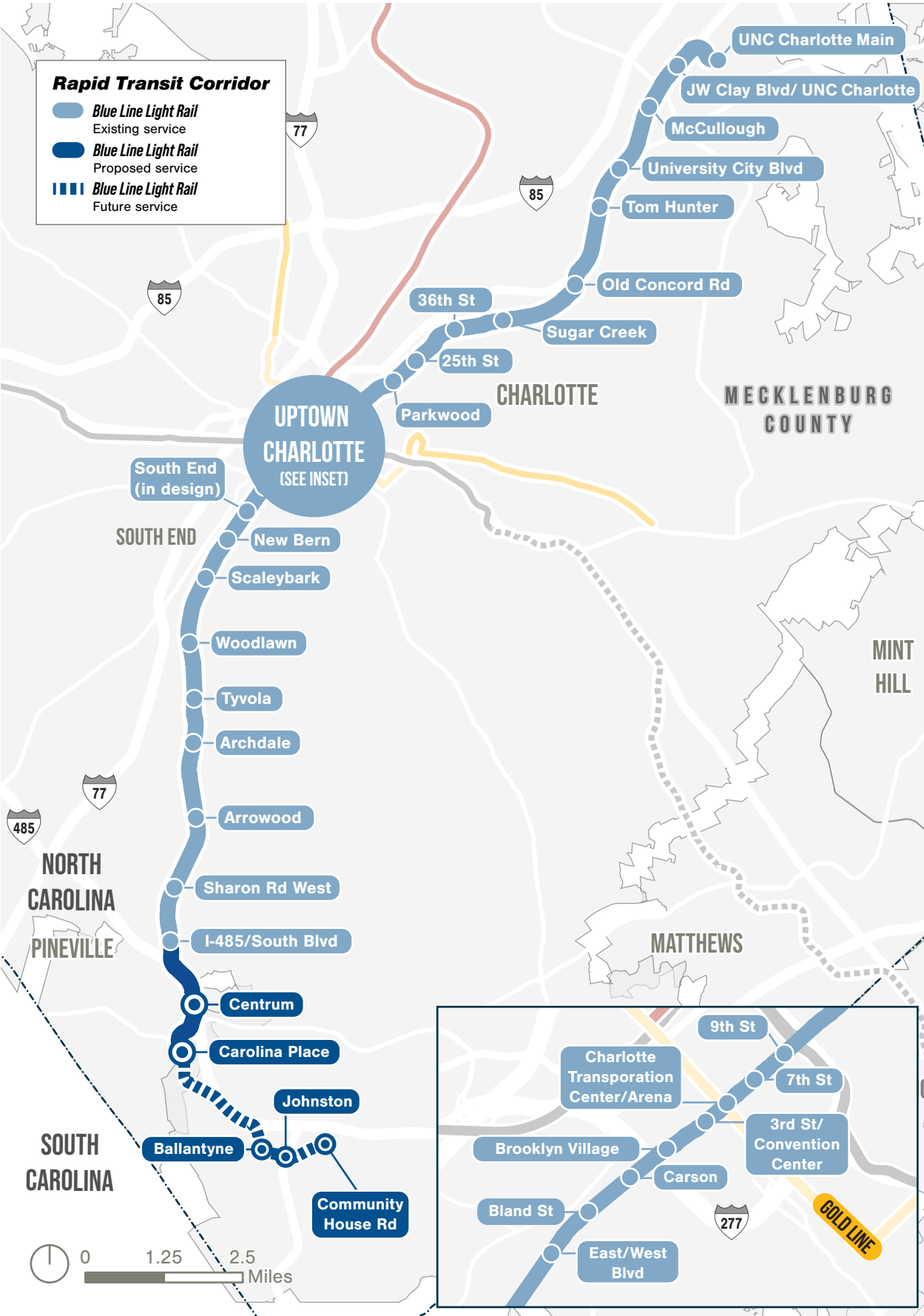
The Blue Line Pineville-Ballantyne extension also includes a minimum

operable segment (MOS), which is a shorter portion of the LPA that can function independently while providing meaningful service. The MOS reflects the **proposed service** included in the fiscally constrained program.

The Blue Line extension will extend light rail service from I-485/South Blvd to Carolina Place in the Town of Pineville. This dependable service will offer 10-minute frequency during rush hour and 15–20-minute frequency the rest of the day and on weekends.

Key Destinations

Carolina Place Mall	Blue Line to Uptown Charlotte
The Centrum in Town of Pineville	Blue Line to UNC Charlotte



IMPLEMENTATION

Moving *Forward*

Moving people forward takes more than just planning—it requires smart, sustainable investment. The conservative financial analysis conducted as part of the **2055 Transit System Plan** ensures that the funds made available with the approval of a new 1 cent countywide mobility sales tax—of which 60% would be allocated specifically for transit—helps deliver better transit options, stronger connections, and long-term value for our community.

By aligning our funding strategy with the priorities of the **2055 Transit System Plan**, we're laying the groundwork for a future where the public can get where they need to go—safely, affordably, and reliably. A phased implementation plan has been developed that prioritizes the rapid rollout of the **Better Bus Plan**, while larger rail investments are incrementally opened based on financial and construction capacity, legislative requirements, project readiness, and input from the public and stakeholders.

This strategy capitalizes on CATS' ability to deliver the bus improvements quickly because they largely use existing road infrastructure, requiring less disruptive and costly construction — all of which provides immediate benefits to the community. Complex rail projects take more time to complete and require greater levels of investment, but provides long-term capacity benefits in growing transportation corridors.



Next Steps

The following callouts highlight short-, medium-, and long-term implementation targets that will improve transit service and frequency throughout the service area.



Short-Term Better Bus & Initial Expansion

- Improve **frequency for bus and rail services**, expand **microtransit**, and enhance **bus infrastructure and customer experience**.
- Begin **Red Line** commuter rail service. Start construction of the **Silver Line**.



Mid-Term Expand & Maintain

- Begin **Silver Line** light rail service. Start construction and begin service on **Gold Line** extension.
- Expand **platform capacity and extend service** on the **Blue Line** to Pineville.



Long-Term Extend as Financial Capacity Allows

- Expand **Better Bus Plan** based on future growth and ridership
- Extend **Silver Line** (East) to Matthews and Union County. Extend **Silver Line** (West) to I-485 and Belmont. Extend **Blue Line** to Ballantyne.



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