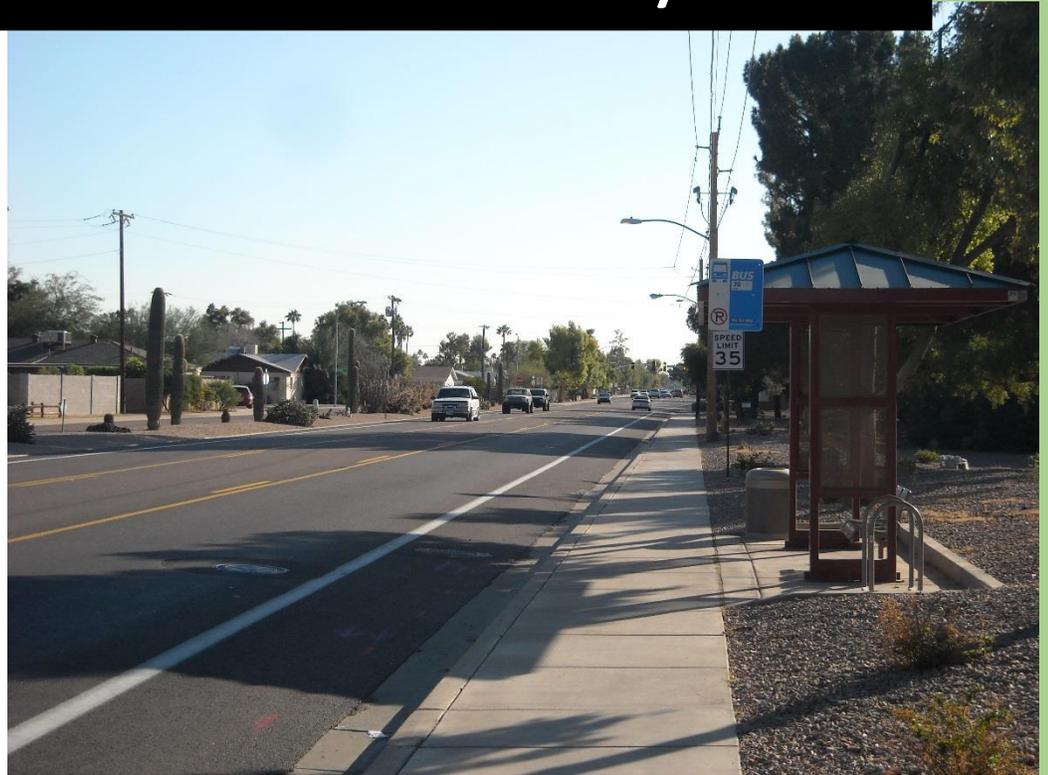


# Achieving Transit Accessibility Now



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## **A. Program Goal**

Providing safe and equitable accessibility to the transit system across the region with immediate results and long-term sustainability.

## **B. Where We Are**

There is a need for accessibility improvements at many of the transit stops across the Maricopa Region. When there is a lack of consistent system-wide accessibility to and from transit stops it can hinder individuals from getting to jobs, services and quality of life experiences. Better accessibility to transit stops will enable some people to reduce or eliminate reliance on costly paratransit service as their only option for mobility.

The region has been proactive in responding to the needs of the community through the public involvement process. On May 17, 2016, members of the community attended the MAG Transit Committee and provided feedback on the need for improved accessibility to transit stops and stations in the region. On June 22, 2016, the MAG Regional Council approved the availability of a total of \$2.5 million in regionally allocated funds in fiscal years 2016 and 2017 for improving accessibility to transit per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The funds will require at least a 20% local match.

The region is currently conducting a study to inventory the transit stops in the region to evaluate their compliance to ADA standards and accessibility. Product deliverables include a regional transit stop standard, and an inventory of non-compliant stops. The study is expected to conclude in July of 2017; in the interim, a process to distribute funding for ADA compliance/transit stop accessibility improvements is needed.

## **C. Background and Challenges**

In 1990, Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act. Many of the transit stops in the Maricopa Region were designed and constructed prior to 1990. Updates on federal guidance for transportation potentially introduce additional areas of compliance that need to be reviewed and addressed. There have been various challenges to meeting ADA standards and improving accessibility, including:

- Availability of funding: Currently, no Transit Life Cycle (TLCP) funds are allocated directly towards ADA or transit stop improvements. Funding for transit stops was deleted from the TLCP during the Great Recession when PTF revenues began to fall significantly short of original projections. Meeting the needs of the public and fulfilling the federal requirement became the responsibility of the local agency. Federal funds have not been utilized previously due to the additional cost and time necessitated by environmental clearances.
- Right-of-way: Many of the existing transit stops in the region are located on narrow streets with high traffic volume and/or limited right-of-way.
- Local ownership: Each Valley Metro transit stop is owned by individual cities member agencies with maintenance and upkeep the responsibility of the local jurisdiction. Local agencies have varying levels of funding available given the context of competing interest and needs.
- Lack of a regional model: Many local agencies have local standards for transit stops and ADA accessibility. Coordination between agencies is not a requirement.

Individual transit stop improvements as a federally funded project are typically categorized as a small project. Federal funds have not been utilized in the past to achieve better accessibility and ADA requirements due to challenges and requirements that include as examples:

- Davis-Bacon Act: wage requirements under the Davis-Bacon Act can cause significant cost increases to small projects.
- Reporting: federal funds reporting requirements are challenging for local agency staff, particularly at smaller agencies.
- Grant management: small federal projects create additional burden due to the administrative requirements of managing a grant for the Designated Recipient, the City of Phoenix.

## **D. Potential Outcomes**

To meet these challenges in the short-term, a solution is proposed that is intended to:

- Provide immediate near-term solutions and improvements that bring selected transit stops into improved accessibility to the transit network with "shovel-ready" projects.
- Increase fixed-route ridership by improving access to fixed routes.
- Control Dial-a-ride utilization through increased fixed-route utilization.
- Increase local economies through improved accessibility to business, commerce and jobs.
- Create ladders of opportunity by improving transportation to education and jobs.
- Generate positive media by reinforcing the role of government and partnerships.
- Increased partnerships with private entities by encouraging jurisdictions to work with local businesses and property owners.
- Improve passenger experience.

## **E. Short Term Program (September 2016 – June 2019)**

The short-term program goal will focus on gaining momentum, addressing the locations with critical deficiencies and moving forward the projects that are "shovel-ready". The process is meant to reduce barriers of entry for local agencies to implement accessibility improvements quickly. Agencies are encouraged to highlight the community significance of projects, partnerships, and other collaborative efforts. The program will:

- ✓ Establish a simple application and approval process.
- ✓ Allow high level of agency discretion in spending.
- ✓ Show immediate results.
- ✓ Limit funding to a short cycle (12 month award to drawdown).
- ✓ Provide opportunities for project savings in executing multiple improvements at the same time.

### *1. How will the process work?*

A request for funding form has been developed and will be made available on the MAG website on an on-going basis. Local agencies may fill out the request and return to MAG staff for review at any time. MAG staff will review the initial requests for eligibility and request additional information as needed. The Transit Committee will review all the requests for funding and recommend project award and funding on a six month rolling application process.<sup>1</sup> Applications may be submitted anytime; requests will be reviewed and awarded every six months. The recommendations will be further reviewed by the MAG Transportation

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<sup>1</sup> Final dates to be determined.

Review Committee, MAG Management Committee and MAG Regional Council. Agencies would have pre-award authority to move forward with project implementation upon MAG Regional Council Approval.

## 2. *Application Due Dates (TBD)*

There will be a rolling application process with \$500,000 federal or regional funds available on a six month rolling submittal and award schedule. Agencies that are awarded funding are expected to expend all awarded funds within 12 months of Regional Council approval of the funding. Any funds not expended will be rolled into future funding pools for reprogramming.

## 3. *Funding per location*

- Maximum per stop location/stop: \$40,000 federal<sup>2</sup>/\$10,000 local match. Minimum local match is 20% of total project costs. Local match may exceed 20%.
- Minimum per request (can include multiple agencies) \$100,000: \$80,000 federal/\$20,000 local. Minimum local match is 20% of total project costs. Local match may exceed 20%.
- No single agency can be awarded more than 70% of available funding at that issuance if other eligible requests have been submitted.

## 4. *Minimum project parameters*

Minimum parameters for locations are defined as a means to address the most critical needs of the region, given the amount of funding available at this time.

- Stops served by routes that have had continuous service for over 3 years.
- Infrastructure -ready projects (no environment clearance requirements or right-of-way needed).
- Improvements that increase the accessibility for transit users and are within 1/4 mile of a transit stop.

## 5. *Eligible Activities*

The programed funding is available for construction, and procure and install activity that improves accessibility for peoples with disabilities to existing transit stations, stops and services. Below are some typical activities that may be included for funding.

- Cross walks (provided at needed locations and NOT provided at unnecessary locations)
- Directional ramps (two per corner as opposed to a single)
- Lighting, signing, striping/markings, information, fencing
- Median cuts/pedestrian refuge areas (with proper slopes, domes and push button availability)
- New/Improved shelters, benches, trash receptacles
- Pedestrian heads (visual and audible)
- Properly sized landing pad
- Protective barriers to surrounding conditions
- Push buttons (tactile and audible)
- Sidewalks (designed to meet longitudinal and cross-slope minimum requirements)
- Transit stop slope and cross slope
- Truncated domes (at all crossing locations, from an approved products list)
- Visibility and/or safety improvements
- Wheelchair clearances

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<sup>2</sup> Funding will be regional or federal and announced at call for projects.

## 6. *Project Tracking*

The project tracking requirements are meant to provide data for future planning and programming purposes. Collecting this data will help define best practices as the region moves forward with a long-term implementation program. Awarded applicants are expected to provide the following information:

- Project locations
- Description of improvement(s)
- Before/after photos and descriptions
- Ridership before/12 month after completion
- Total project amount
- Total construction costs
- Number of participating agencies
- Time from start to completion of project

## 7. *Project Evaluation*

Projects will be evaluated based on the criteria below. Each Criteria is worth 5 points, giving a total possible score of 25 points. All members of the MAG Transit Committee will have the opportunity to score applications. Application scores will be tabulated and presented to the Transit Committee prior to a funding recommendation being made.

- Will the proposed improvements attract riders and improve passenger experience?
- Does the project serve areas with demographic need?\*
- Does the project achieve ADA compliance and improve ADA Accessibility?
- Is the proposed project schedule achievable – can it be built in the 15 month timeline allotted?
- Does this application meet the program goal or potential outcomes?

## **F. Available Resources**

Valley Metro Capital and Service Development Division planning staff is available to assist in any technical analysis as well as perform the capital infrastructure work for the improvements. Economies of scale are gained when several projects are consolidated and managed under a single regional contract. In order to achieve this Valley Metro will assemble projects for \$100,000 or more from different jurisdictions into a single construction package.

The regional planning partners, including MAG, Valley Metro, and City of Phoenix as the Designated Recipient are always available to provide assistance. In addition, local agencies are encouraged to make use of the information available in regional studies, tools and reports.

- RPTA Bus Stop Program and Standards ([http://www.valleymetro.org/images/uploads/misc\\_reports/Bus\\_Stop\\_-\\_Design\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.valleymetro.org/images/uploads/misc_reports/Bus_Stop_-_Design_Guidelines.pdf))
- Designing Transit Accessible Communities Study (<https://www.azmag.gov/Projects/Project.asp?CMSID=4215>)
- Transit Standards and Performance Measures ([http://www.valleymetro.org/publications\\_reports/transit\\_standards\\_performance\\_measures](http://www.valleymetro.org/publications_reports/transit_standards_performance_measures))
- “Better On-Street Bus Stops” ([http://www.tcrponline.org/PDFDocuments/tcrp\\_syn\\_117.pdf](http://www.tcrponline.org/PDFDocuments/tcrp_syn_117.pdf))

## **G. Long-term (June 2019 and beyond)**

The long-term program goal will be to implement the findings of the regional Transit Stop Inventory and Accessibility Study and to work towards upgrading all transit stops in the region to meet both federally required ADA accessibility standards and regionally sensitive standards. To that end, the following process is recommended:

- Implement long-term programming guidelines based on findings of the regional Transit Stop Inventory and Accessibility Study
- Inclusion of funding for ADA compliance and accessibility in future Regional Transportation Plans
- Develop and implement performance measures
- Focus on Title VI communities
- Evaluate short-term successes and identify other best practices
- Develop a long-term programming methodology utilizing information from the Valley Metro Regional ADA Study that meets federal requirements
- Annual Program Evaluation and report