



# City Council Report

**Date:** December 9, 2024  
**To:** City Council  
**Through:** Scott J. Butler, Assistant City Manager  
**From:** Jodi Sorrell, Transit Services Director  
**Subject:** Rio East – Dobson Streetcar Extension Locally Preferred Alternative Recommendation  
District 3

## Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this report is to seek a recommendation from the City Council on the Rio East – Dobson Streetcar Extension Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The LPA includes recommendations for a specific transit technology and alignment to advance the streetcar investment in Mesa and Tempe.

## Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of an LPA that extends the streetcar line from the current terminus at Marina Heights and Rio Salado in Tempe, heading east on Rio Salado Parkway to Dobson Road in Mesa. The alignment will continue south on Dobson Road, concluding at Main Street. This alignment is expected to enhance regional transit connectivity and spur economic growth in key Mesa districts.

## Background

Expanding streetcar service in the East Valley has been a long-standing discussion, evolving over more than a decade. In 2017, Mesa began studies to evaluate high-capacity transit options in West Mesa. The objectives of these studies were to:

- Connect key districts like Mesa Riverview and the Fiesta District to downtown Mesa's light rail and Tempe's destinations.
- Support local planning priorities in transportation, land use, and economic development.
- Enhance regional transit connectivity with potential future projects in Tempe and Chandler.
- Improve access to public transit for high-use bus route areas experiencing population growth.
- Benefit transit-dependent populations and address travel demand in Mesa, Tempe, and Chandler.

In 2017, Mesa, in collaboration with Valley Metro, launched the Fiesta District Alternatives Analysis (FDAA), encompassing an area that included Loop 202 to the north, Mesa Drive to the east, Baseline Road to the south, and Loop 101 to the west. The study used a two-tiered evaluation approach:

- Tier 1 Analysis: A qualitative, mode-neutral review, narrowing from 11 corridor options based on ridership, land use potential, and cost considerations.
- Tier 2 Analysis: A quantitative, mode-specific analysis evaluating criteria like mobility improvements and economic development impact. The resulting recommendation identified Dobson Road/Southern Avenue/Country Club Drive as a promising corridor.

The study began by evaluating 11 corridors around the Fiesta District as possible options for transit improvements, including light rail, streetcar and enhanced bus service in and around the Fiesta District. The Tier 1 analysis resulted in four corridors advancing to a Tier 2 analysis. After completing the Tier 2 analysis, the Dobson Road/Southern Avenue/Country Club Drive corridor resulted in the study recommendation. It did not specify a transit technology to be used; this would be determined by future efforts

In 2018, the city, in partnership with the city of Tempe and Valley Metro, initiated the Tempe/Mesa Streetcar Feasibility Study (TMSFS). The study area was bound by Loop 202 to the north, Country Club Drive to the east, Baseline Road to the south and Priest Drive to the west and identified new potential streetcar corridors that could serve as extensions to the Valley Metro Streetcar in Tempe. This study began with 13 potential streetcar corridors. Using the same criteria used in the Tier 1 analysis for the FDAA, five corridors were recommended to move into a Tier 2 Analysis. The five corridors were scored and ranked in the following order:

- Rio Salado Parkway East (currently known as Rio East-Dobson Extension or REDE)
- Rural Road
- Dobson Road/Southern Avenue/Country Club Drive
- Mill Avenue
- Rio Salado Parkway West

The City Council reviewed findings in November 2020 and approved funding with Valley Metro in February 2023 to proceed with this phase of the REDE project.

## **Discussion**

Adopting an LPA is essential for pursuing Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Grant funding. The proposed LPA extends streetcar service from Marina Heights in Tempe to Main Street in Mesa, covering 4.4 miles and reinforcing connectivity.

The TMSFS highlighted the land use and economic development characteristics of the study area as well as key demographics. This report was updated in July 2024 as part of the REDE Alternatives Analysis and reconfirmed that the REDE corridor is ideally suited for streetcar.

The LPA Report (Attachment A) highlights several key data points supporting this alignment for streetcar operations. They include:

- **Projected Growth:** The REDE area population is expected to increase by 55% and employment by 45% by 2050, surpassing regional averages.
- **Mixed-use development** is projected to increase from 17% in 2020 to 25% in 2050. Much of the mixed-use development, both existing and future, is or will be located on Rio Salado Parkway between Rural Road and Dobson Road.
- **Transit-Dependent Populations:** Approximately 58% of households in the study area have 0-1 vehicles, indicating a strong need for enhanced transit options. This is higher than the metro Phoenix region, as well as the cities of Mesa and Tempe as a whole.

Currently Valley Metro operates streetcar operations in Tempe have exceeded expectations, with over 793,000 riders in FY24 and consistent weekday and weekend ridership.

### **Alternatives**

The City Council could opt to delay or not approve the LPA at this time. However, delaying the LPA may hinder opportunities for federal funding and slow transit and economic development in the East Valley.

### **Fiscal Impact**

Approval of the LPA will not have immediate funding implications for the City. A \$16M Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant will support preliminary engineering and environmental assessments. The City Council will receive regular updates as the project progresses.

### **Coordinated With**

Coordinated with Valley Metro and the City of Tempe