



Starter Project Criteria

The starter project criteria are intended to outline priorities in the development of a streetcar system and justify which potential alignment serves as the best starter project. These criteria have been developed over time, through several discussions between Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members, with Downtown Alliance Stakeholders, and through the 4-day SmartWaySA public workshop at the beginning of September. The criteria are addressed both subjectively through the planning process, and objectively through the analysis of data. Once they were established, the criteria were categorized under community and stakeholder benefits, service benefits and operational impacts, and financial capacity. The criteria have been developed concurrently with five potential starter lines, and applied to those potential lines by TAC members, based on their observations and extensive knowledge of the area, the project, and many other factors.

The community and stakeholder benefits include important characteristics in considering the general purpose of the streetcar, and more specifically, the starter project as it stands to benefit the community. Service benefits and operational impacts include a starter line's ability to integrate into the regional network, and minimize impacts to traffic, while improving overall mobility within its respective corridor. The financial capacity addresses the impact of capital and operational costs, with the financial capacity to fund a starter line. Below is a brief explanation of the criteria that have been outlined in this process:

1. Community and Stakeholder Benefits

A. **Expanding Opportunities** - These criteria are intended to ensure that the streetcar project addresses concerns and desires across a wide spectrum of the community.

1. **Meets the interests of a diversity of stakeholders**

Stakeholders are identified as property owners, employers, and neighborhood residents that have a stake in the affects of implementing a streetcar. This criterion ensures that the starter line does not benefit just a single group of stakeholders, but several.

2. **Connects neighborhoods, employment centers, and cultural assets**

Inner-city neighborhoods maintain relatively dense populations; many cultural assets and key destinations are located in the inner-city, and there is a high concentration of employment centers located in and around downtown San Antonio. This criterion ensures that as many of these assets are connected as possible.

3. **Encourages mixed-income housing**

Housing for individuals at a variety of income levels located in relative proximity to one another can occur in new development scenarios as well as infill development. This criterion ensures that there are several opportunities for this type of development to occur.

- B. **Neighborhood Revitalization & New Development** - These criteria are intended to make sure that there is high potential for *economic development* to occur along the starter line for both new development and revitalization.
1. **Potential mixed-use development & increased density**
Mixed-use development includes a mix of land-uses such as office, retail, and residential within the same structure or vicinity. Increased density refers to an increase in the number of units per acre relative to the surrounding area, which can imply a full range of densities. This criterion ensures that there is potential for this type of development to occur.
 2. **Development of under-utilized property**
Under-utilized property is that which has high or complete vacancy, or is not occupied to the capacity of its highest and best use. This criterion ensures that a starter line be placed in proximity to large amounts of under-utilized property for the purposes of being redeveloped into an active community asset.
 3. **Enhance value of existing property**
Enhancing the value of property not only refers to the assessed property tax value of newly developed properties, but the enhanced inherent value of all property due to its proximity and access to cultural and community assets, retail, and services, by virtue of being located along a streetcar line.
 4. **New opportunities in existing neighborhoods**
There are several existing neighborhoods located along potential starter lines. This criterion specifically targets potential for revitalization in bringing new neighborhood employment opportunities and community assets along potential streetcar alignments.
- C. **Economic Development** - These quantifiable criteria are related to population, employment, destinations, and regulations that make economic development viable in a given corridor.
1. **Accessibility to Population, Employment, and Community Assets**
This criterion has several aspects that can be quantified such as projected (2015) population and employment densities; the number of major employment centers and employees; number of higher-education institutions and their enrollments; linear feet of adjacent River and Creeks; and the number of local destinations, which include arts and entertainment venues, civic and educational facilities, healthcare centers, historical assets, major retail centers, major transportation facilities, parks, and public spaces.
 2. **Zoning, Land-Use, Development Potential, and Funding Ability & Method**
This criterion quantifies current mixed-use zoning; future land use as prescribed in adopted neighborhood plans; development potential and announced development; assessed property values; and the extent of a potential starter line that is within a tax increment reinvestment zone (TIRZ). Current mixed-use zoning includes properties zoned as downtown (D), mixed-use districts (MXD), infill development zone (IDZ), form-based zoning districts (FBDZ), and arts & entertainment district (AE). Proposed future land uses include mixed-use, transit-oriented development, vacant, high density residential, and institutional.

II. Service Benefits & Operational Impacts

- A. **Service Benefits** - These criteria are more directly related to the *service* that would be provided, its usefulness, and the streetcar's relationship to the rest of the transit network.
1. **Integrates inner-city with regional transit system**
Though an individual starter line might be directly limited in its extent to a small part of the inner city, its location and orientation may allow for better future connections to other routes and transportation infrastructure throughout the region, compared to others. This criterion favors the potential starter line that has the most opportunity for multi-modal interaction.
 2. **Establishes new service for new & existing customers**
By virtue of being the first Modern Streetcar route in San Antonio, the starter line would itself, be a new service. New service though, also refers to the route, what it connects, and how frequently it operates. Not only should the starter line offer a new service, but also enhance existing service, provide a new link for existing customers, and be attractive to new customers.
 3. **Has potential for high ridership**
Each of the potential starter lines has some degree of existing service and ridership along their alignment. This criterion considers existing ridership, as well as new ridership that could be generated by virtue of the starter line being located in proximity to new development, existing employment centers, and local destinations.
- B. **Operational Impacts** - These quantifiable criteria are related to the physical constraints, traffic, and relationship of a starter project to the rest of the transit network.
1. **Physical Constraints, and Traffic Impacts**
This criterion quantifies projected (2015) roadway congestion as identified in the MPO's *Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2035*, the existing number of traffic lanes on a roadway, the number of bridges a line would have to cross, the number of low-clearance underpasses, and the number of freight rail crossings that would require new grade-separation.
 2. **Existing Ridership & Potential Feeder Network**
This criterion takes in to account the existing ridership from boardings along the segments in question, the number of potential bus routes that would feed into the streetcar line, and the pedestrian and bicycle networks that feed into each potential starter line.
- C. **Implementation** - These criteria directly relate to the *physical implementation* of the starter line.
1. **Fewer specialized solutions required**
Physical constraints represent characteristics along the starter line that have a higher cost to accommodate, retrofit, implement, and maintain. Track switches, turns, bridges, property, utility work, and so on, each result in higher capital costs, while solutions to specific constraints may require continued specialized maintenance. This criterion favors potential starter lines with few constraints.

2. Opportunity for future connectivity and expansion
Though most potential streetcar alignments likely have good opportunity for future extensions and connectivity to the transit network, some of the potential starter lines might be better suited for future expansion than others. Future expansion is not limited to a starter project's connection with the transit network, but the physical constraints, costs, and development potential of line extensions.

III. Financial Capacity

- A. **Funding Opportunities** - These criteria were developed by the TAC and the workshop process, and relate potential starter lines to how the *capital expenses* might be funded.

1. Opportunity for local funding to have high impact on cost
Local funding options might include establishing improvement districts (property owners agree to tax themselves to pay for a portion of the capital expense), leveraging tax increment, or issuing bonds. Each potential starter line has a different capacity to take advantage of these funds, insofar as how much funding can be leveraged relative to the cost of implementation.
2. Ability for project to qualify for Federal funding
The Federal New Starts program provides opportunities for Federal Transit Administration grants to pay for substantial portions of capital costs. To qualify for these grants, a project must significantly improve mobility, increase the operational cost-effectiveness of transit, and be adjacent to transit-supportive land-uses among other factors. Each potential starter line has a different capacity to meet these requirements.
3. Maximizes the potential for public/private partnerships
Public-private partnerships are contractual agreements formed between a public agency and a private sector entity, that allow for greater private sector participation in the delivery and financing of the project. Each potential starter line has a different capacity to make this type of arrangement attractive to both public and private sectors.

- B. **Financial Constraints** - These criteria identify costs and quantifiable financial capacity for VIA to fund a starter line, including the use of other funding instruments.

1. Minimal impact to capital & operating costs
Capital costs include the cost of construction, which can be influenced by physical constraints; the proximity of a starter line to a potential maintenance facility and the size of such a facility; and the number of vehicles required to operate the system. Operating costs relate to the number of operations and maintenance personnel, and the maintenance facility requirement, relative to the size and complexity of a starter line. This criterion favors the option that has the lowest capital and operating costs.
2. Financial Capacity of VIA
This criterion outlines VIA's financial capacity to fund a starter line, while maintaining the ability to fund other current and future capital projects. This may be a constant, regardless of which potential starter line is addressed.

3. Other Possible Financing Options

This criterion outlines the capacity of other financing options to have an impact on each of the possible starter alignments. Some of these options may be constant, while others will vary according to the alignment. All of the options carry the assumption that each given alternative financing option is available to the fullest extent possible.