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\$56 million from feds expected aboard Fort Collins bus project

By Jeffrey Leib
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Federal officials are expected to name Fort Collins as the winner today of up to \$56 million in funding for Colorado's first bus rapid-transit project, according to local and federal officials.

For seven years, the city has been bidding for Federal Transit Administration support for a 5-mile rapid transit line that will provide high-frequency bus service in dedicated lanes linking Colorado State University locations and key retail, cultural and commercial areas.

The so-called Mason Corridor project is planned as a north-south link in the Mason Street and College Avenue corridors, running from a point just south of Harmony Road to Cherry Street in downtown Fort Collins.

The bus line will run along a Burlington Northern Santa Fe freight rail corridor just west of College Avenue.

The project's total cost is estimated at \$70 million, and the FTA is expected to contribute 80 percent of that expense.

The balance of the cost will be supplied by state and local authorities.

The Colorado Transportation Commission has committed \$4.5 million for the project from a fund to promote mass transit.

Fort Collins and the city's Downtown Development Authority are expected to come up with the local funding needed to get the federal money.

Many transit proponents tout bus rapid transit as a cost-effective alternative to light rail or commuter rail.

BRT, as the express bus service is called, has a separate guideway, like rail transit, but uses rubber-tire vehicles that eliminate the need for track construction.

Fort Collins officials said the 5-mile bus corridor can be built for less than the cost of 1 mile of rail transit. They hope to have the service operating by early 2011.

City officials declined to talk about the federal grant until FTA officials in Washington today announce the winners of funding for transit projects.

At a city website — fcgov.com/mason/ — interested persons can get details of the project and watch a video simulation of the bus rapid transit line.

Fort Collins plans to offer bus service every 10 minutes during peak hours in the Mason Corridor, where 60 percent of all Fort Collins jobs are located, according to city officials.