

SA's next-generation transit plan clears key hurdle

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W. Scott Bailey

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By W. Scott Bailey – Senior Reporter, San Antonio Business Journal

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Conceptual rendering of VIA's planned Advanced Rapid Transit system

VIA

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The Federal Transit Administration has given VIA Metropolitan Transit the green light to begin the final engineering phase for its first Advanced Rapid Transit, or ART, route.

It's a pivotal milestone for the local transit agency and its efforts to deliver an alternative transportation plan.

The VIA Rapid Green Line corridor project, the first of two planned ART routes, will run from the San Antonio International Airport area along San Pedro Avenue and through downtown to Steves Avenue near Mission Concepcion. It will be the region's first ART line, a new type of mass transit that typically utilizes dedicated lanes outside of regular traffic.

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The project is expected to cost roughly \$446.3 million to construct, with a potential federal contribution of nearly \$268 million. The FTA had initially set a federal match limit at approximately 50% of the project cost. It has since raised that match limit, pending final approval.

"The acknowledgment that VIA may be awarded 60% of the project dollars from the FTA is welcomed news — and a testament to the strength of our project," VIA President and CEO Jeffrey Arndt said.

The FTA's approval is a critical step for transit agencies participating in the federal Capital Investment Grants Program. The required engineering work will allow VIA to reach a final funding agreement with the FTA, potentially by the end of 2024.

With the approval to enter final engineering, VIA has also secured automatic pre-award authority to procure vehicles, acquire property and address utility relocation needs because its National Environmental Policy Act review process has been completed. There are additional steps VIA must take to be eligible for Capital Investment Grants Program funding.

During the engineering phase, the FTA will continue to evaluate VIA's project, ensuring that the agency has the technical, legal and financial capability to deliver the initial ART line.

ART is a key element in VIA's Keep SA Moving plan that voters approved in 2020 to fund transit improvements. It is designed to move more people faster and farther along a 12-mile corridor.



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