



## Taking the next step: Port Authority approves \$3.8 billion, 25-year plan to overhaul Pittsburgh transit



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Port Authority approved a long-range plan Friday that projects \$3.8 billion in transit changes that over the next 25 years will aim to reshape the landscape of public transportation in the Pittsburgh region.

The plan, known as NEXTransit, calls for 18 projects to improve transit by adding service to some areas that don't have it now and improving service to other areas.

CEO Katharine Eagan Kelleman, who started her career as a transportation planner, said what is believed to be the agency's first long-range plan will be invaluable to its future. That's especially true if millions of dollars for infrastructure improvements proposed by the Biden administration are approved by Congress, she said.

"I cannot overstate the importance of anchoring the authority's future to a 25-year plan," she said. "This helps us be in competition with our peers across the country and have something to show when [federal officials] ask what we want to do."

The plan anticipates projects moving forward in phases including: extending the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway, first to Braddock and then to McKeesport or Monroeville; improving service along Route 837 between Homestead and McKeesport; and establishing a new transit corridor that links the Strip District to the Overbrook-Carrick area in the South Hills via the Hill District, Oakland and Hazelwood.

Longer-term projects include extending the T light rail system from the North Side on wings to Bellevue and Ross; using the Parkway East and Parkway West to add bus-only lanes from Monroeville to the East Busway in Edgewood and from Pittsburgh International Airport to Downtown; and extending the West Busway to Bridgeville.

Before any of those projects can begin, the agency says it needs to add a fifth maintenance garage at a cost of cost \$177 million to \$234 million so it can handle more buses and a Downtown transit center as a central transfer point that could cost \$60 million to \$118 million.

Other projects include improving neighborhood service by establishing local feeder routes so riders don't have to take lengthy trips to Downtown or Oakland and then transfer to get to a destination in a neighboring community; analyzing the entire bus route system to find and address inefficiencies; and studying what to do with the Silver Line on the T, which has low ridership and needs extensive repairs.

The plan also commits the agency to eliminating carbon emissions by switching to an all-electric fleet by 2045.

Advocacy group Pittsburghers for Public Transit praised the plan for taking into account several key issues raised by riders, including continuing to study where to extend the East Busway and committing to developing a fare policy to help low-income riders. The final draft of the plan would have extended the busway to McKeesport but now leaves open the possibility of Monroeville instead and would have reviewed the possibility of a fare policy for low-income riders but didn't make a commitment.

The board also approved several other items Friday:

- a \$17 million contract with CDR Maguire Inc. and Hill International Inc. to oversee construction of the Bus Rapid Transit system. That \$230 million project, expected to begin early next year and open in late 2023, is designed to improve bus service between Oakland and Downtown by creating exclusive bus lanes inbound on Fifth Avenue and outbound on Forbes Avenue.
- new five-year U-Pass contracts with Pitt, Carnegie Mellon and Chatham universities that will increase the fares the universities pay so their

students can get free transit rides. The new deals increase the payment from \$1.25 per ride to \$1.65 initially with annual 3% increases.

- settlement claims for two traffic accidents: \$175,000 to Joseph and Eva Nucci for injuries they received in May 2017 when another vehicle slid on a hydraulic fluid leak from an authority bus in Shadyside and struck their vehicle, and \$125,000 to Anthony Cancelliere for injuries he received in March 2017 when he fell trying to avoid a bus as he was trying to get into his vehicle.

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