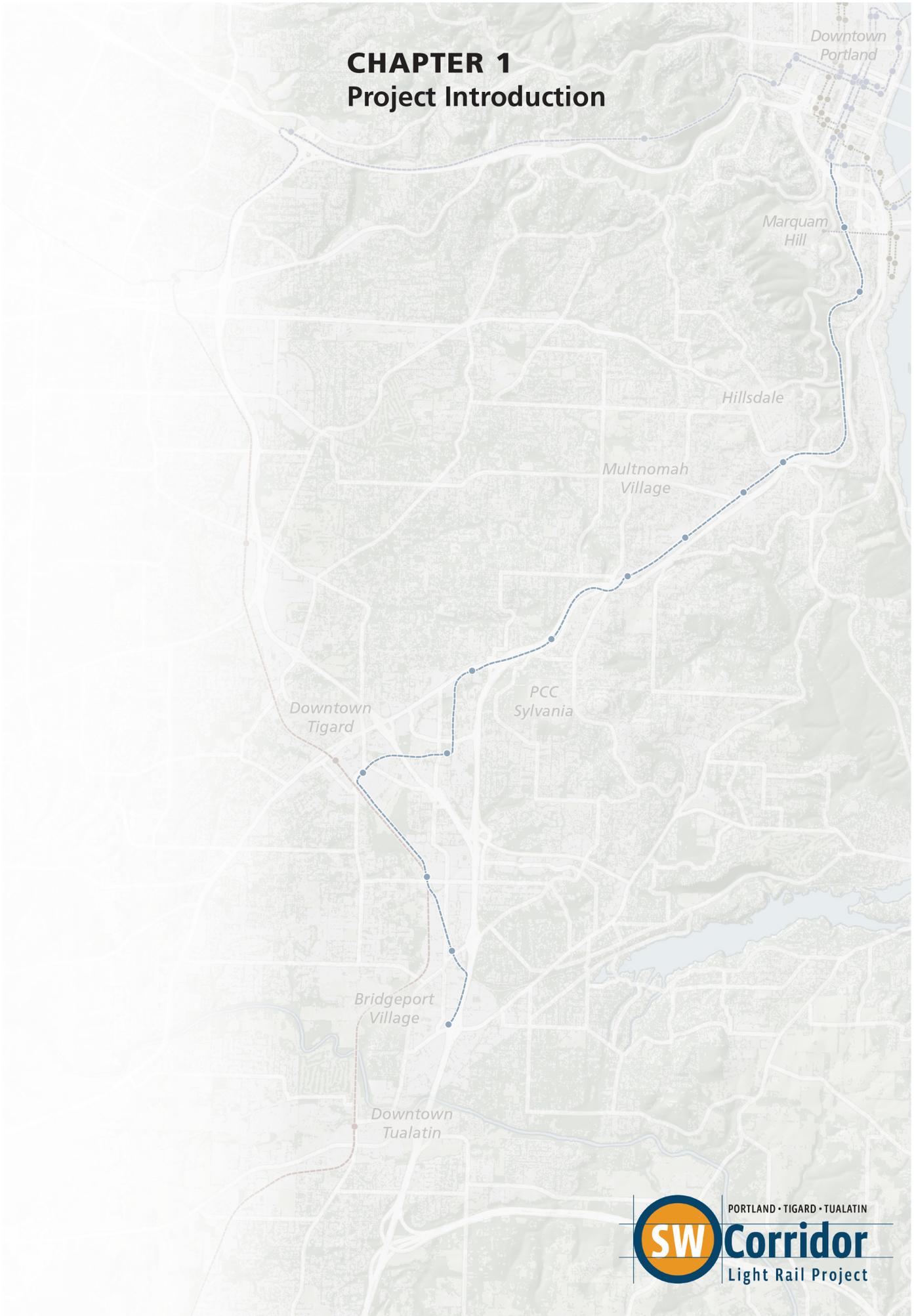


CHAPTER 1

Project Introduction



PORTLAND • TIGARD • TUALATIN

Corridor
Light Rail Project

1. PROJECT INTRODUCTION

This Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project (Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Metro (the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Portland,

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Oregon, region) and the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet) in compliance with the implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). FTA is the federal lead agency for the NEPA process, and TriMet and Metro are the local co-lead agencies. If the Project receives FTA funding, TriMet would be the direct recipient. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is a cooperating federal agency, because the Project would involve the use of land from the federal interstate highway system. This chapter provides an overview of the proposed Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project, the Purpose and Need for the Project, the role and focus of this Final EIS, and next steps.

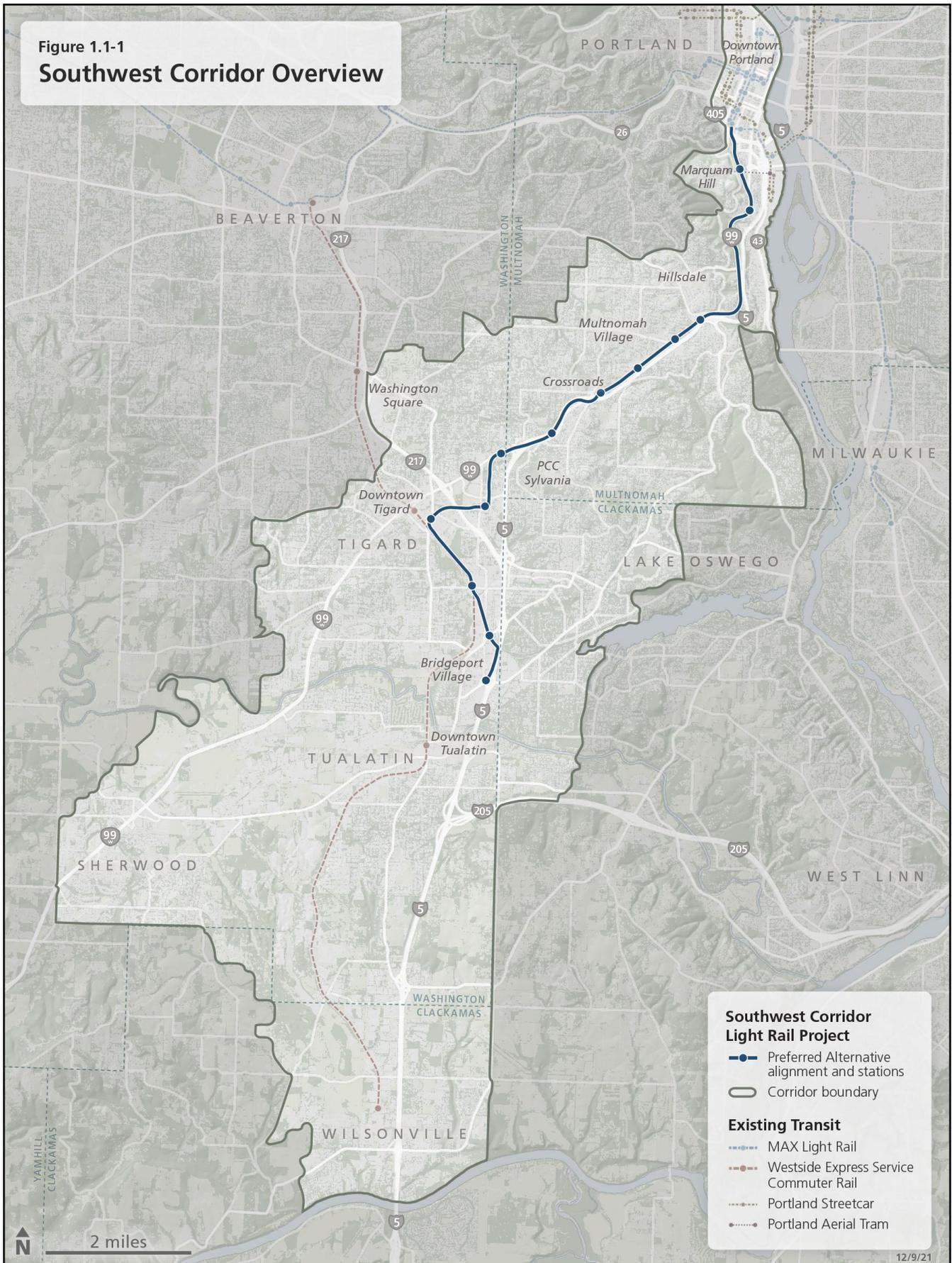
The analysis in this Final EIS is based on information and projections that were completed before the COVID-19 pandemic. FTA acknowledges the current impacts of the recent social response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting decline in travel demand. Chapter 3, Transportation Impacts and Mitigation, summarizes the impacts of the pandemic on TriMet’s transit service and ridership as of 2021. At this time, it is not possible to predict future changes to the Purpose and Need, schedule and impacts that may result from a COVID-19 response of an unpredictable nature and length. Should a prolonged COVID-19 response result in significant changes to the planning assumptions, project schedule, project scope or surrounding project environment, FTA will consider additional evaluation and public input consistent with applicable and current implementing environmental regulations.

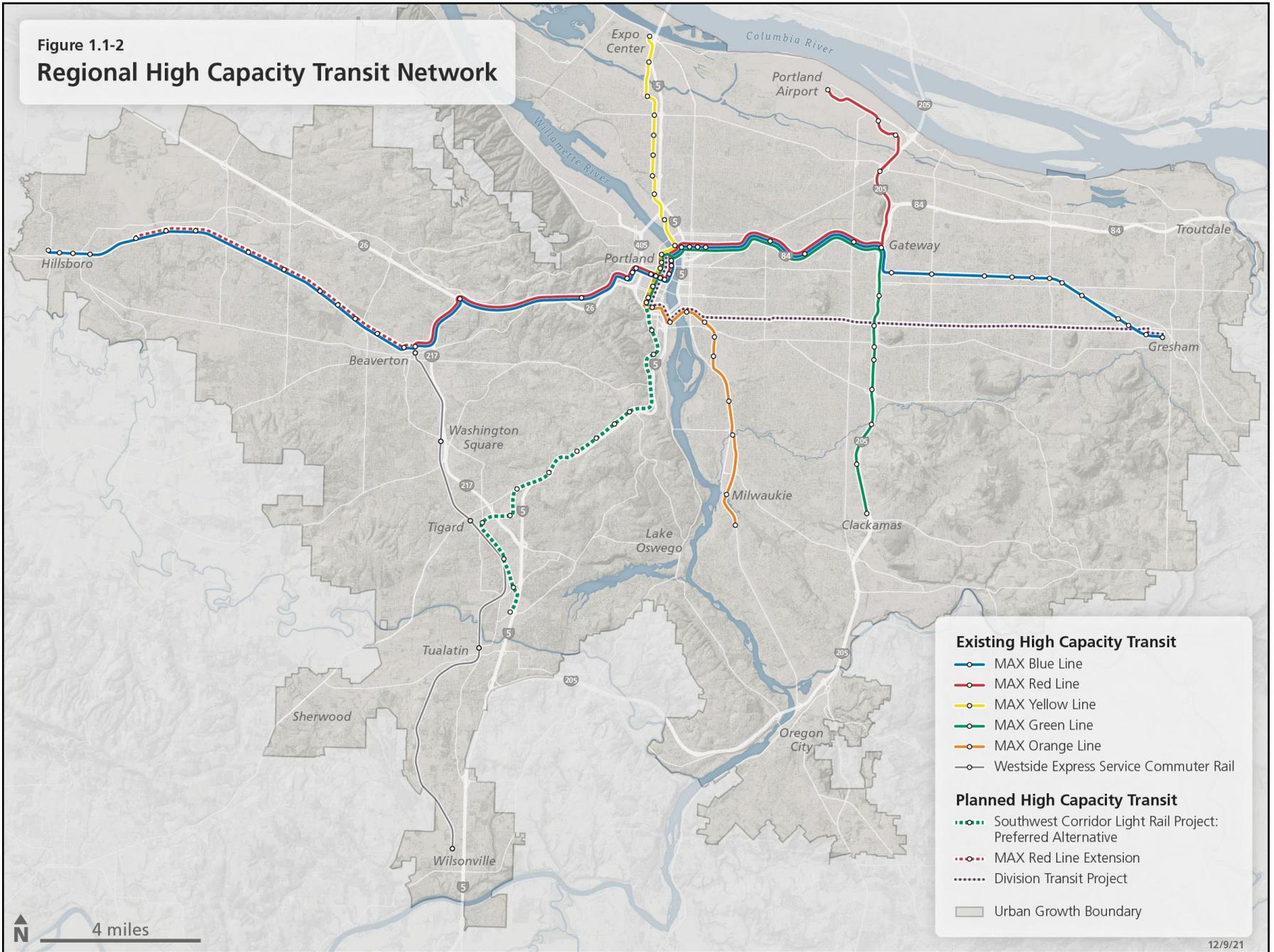
1.1. Project Overview

The Project consists of a light rail investment and related transportation improvements that would serve the Southwest Corridor, a broad north/south travel corridor from downtown Portland to Sherwood and Wilsonville (see Figure 1.1-1). These investments would provide needed mobility options in the Southwest Corridor, which faces increasingly congested roadways and unreliable bus service. The Project would also improve regional access to major employment areas and medical and educational facilities located in the Southwest Corridor. The mobility improvements provided by the Project would support state, regional and local goals for land use and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Preferred Alternative for the light rail investment proposes a new 11-mile Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail line from downtown Portland through southwest Portland and Tigard, terminating near Bridgeport Village in Tualatin. The Preferred Alternative is the lead agencies’ favored course of action to meet the Project’s Purpose and Need. The new line would be a major new spoke in the regional high capacity transit network (see Figure 1.1-2). The light rail investment would include a new connection to medical and educational facilities on Marquam Hill, a shuttle to the Portland Community College Sylvania campus, park and rides, a new operations and maintenance facility, and streetscape elements such as sidewalks and bikeways. The Project also would include related transportation improvements, which are additional access improvements, such as sidewalks and bikeways, that would extend the mobility benefits of developing light rail. These improvements are optional and could be phased to be built before, with or after the light rail investment, depending on funding availability, including other federal grants or local funding initiatives. See Chapter 2, Alternatives Considered, for more information about the elements of the Project.

**Figure 1.1-1
Southwest Corridor Overview**





1.2. Purpose and Need

Federal environmental regulations for an EIS require a statement of the purpose a proposed project is intended to address, along with reasons why the project is needed. The Purpose and Need is used to define the EIS alternatives to be considered, and it guides FTA, Metro, TriMet and their local agency partners in other decisions about the Project. The Project's Purpose and Need, provided below, remains as stated in the Draft EIS. Chapter 1 of the Draft EIS has more background on the need for the Project. See Appendix H, References, for full reference information for the plans mentioned in the Purpose and Need statement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented shifts in social, economic and transportation conditions and behaviors at regional, national and international levels. Although it is not possible to predict future changes to the Purpose and Need, the basis for the Purpose and Need is long range urban growth in the Portland region, including growth in population, employment and travel demand. While the pandemic immediately reduced economic and transportation demand, a resumption in growth is still expected to occur in the coming decades. Regional plans to manage growth sustainably through high capacity transit also remain in place. Therefore, the basis for the Purpose and Need remains intact.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project is to directly connect Tualatin, downtown Tigard, southwest Portland and the region's central city with light rail, high quality transit and appropriate community investments in a congested corridor to improve mobility and create the conditions that will allow communities in the corridor to achieve their land use visions. Specifically, the Project aims to, within the Southwest Corridor:

- provide light rail transit service that is cost-effective to build and operate with limited local resources
- serve existing transit demand and significant projected growth in ridership resulting from increases in population and employment in the corridor
- improve transit service reliability, frequency and travel times, and provide connections to existing and future transit networks including Westside Express Service (WES) Commuter Rail
- support adopted regional and local plans, including the *2040 Growth Concept*, the *Barbur Concept Plan*, the *Tigard Triangle Strategic Plan* and the *Tigard Downtown Vision* to accommodate projected significant growth in population and employment
- complete and enhance multimodal transportation networks to provide safe, convenient and secure access to transit and adjacent land uses
- advance transportation projects that increase active transportation and encourage physical activity
- provide travel options that reduce overall transportation costs
- improve multimodal access to existing jobs, housing and educational opportunities, and foster opportunities for commercial development and a range of housing types adjacent to transit
- ensure benefits and impacts that promote community equity
- advance transportation projects that are sensitive to the environment, improve water and air quality, and help achieve the sustainability goals and measures in applicable state, regional and local plans

Need for the Project

A light rail transit project in the Southwest Corridor is needed to address the following issues:

- Transit service to important destinations in the corridor is limited, and demand for transit is increasing due to growth.
- Limited street connectivity and gaps in pedestrian and bicycle facilities create barriers and unsafe conditions for transit access and active transportation.
- Travel is slow and unreliable on congested roadways.
- There are both a limited supply and a limited range of housing options in the Southwest Corridor that have good access to multimodal transportation networks. In addition, jobs and services are not located near residences.
- Regional and local plans call for high capacity transit in the corridor to meet local and regional land use goals.
- State, regional and local environmental and sustainability goals require transportation investments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

1.3. Role and Focus of This Final EIS

The Draft EIS, published in June 2018, analyzed the impacts of a range of options for the light rail investment and related transportation improvements, and identified potential mitigation strategies to address the impacts of those options. It also introduced design refinements that could avoid or minimize certain impacts and presented a draft Preferred Alternative, known as the initial route proposal. After the Draft EIS public comment period, a Preferred Alternative for the light rail investment was selected and adopted (see Appendix I, Preferred Alternative Selection and Project Refinements).

This Final EIS updates the Draft EIS analysis for the adopted Preferred Alternative for the light rail investment as well as the related transportation improvements. To allow for a comparison of impacts between the Draft and Final EIS, the impacts of the Preferred Alternative are reported in a similar structure to those of the Draft EIS light rail alternatives (see Section 2.2.1, Project Terminology, of Chapter 2 for more information). Where necessary, the Final EIS provides more detailed analysis to inform the development of mitigation measures and to comply with other applicable federal laws. This Final EIS has also been updated based on public comments and includes responses to substantive comments received during the Draft EIS comment period. The analysis in this final EIS was based on data collected and models completed before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The remaining chapters of this Final EIS include:

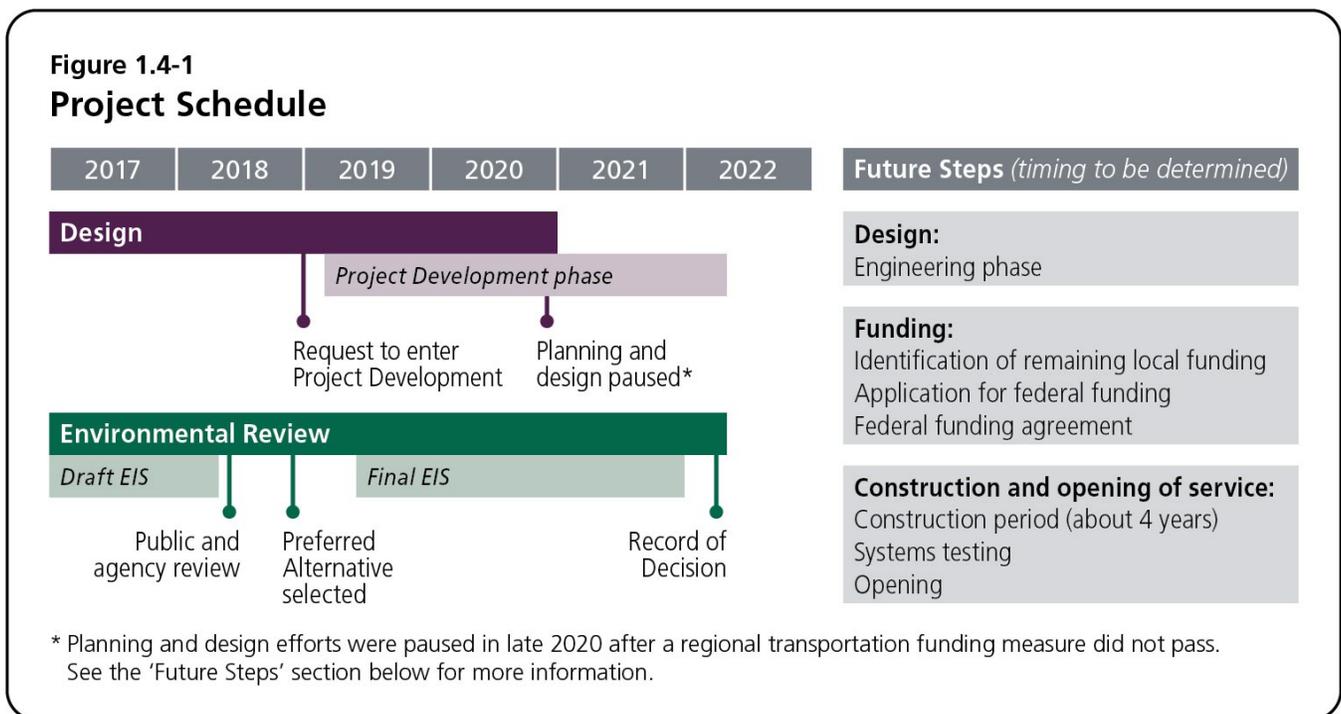
- **Chapter 2, Alternatives Considered**, describes the Preferred Alternative for the light rail investment and the related transportation improvements. It also provides a summary of the options studied in the Draft EIS and refinements that have been made to the Project since the Draft EIS.
- **Chapter 3, Transportation Impacts and Mitigation**, identifies the long-term (permanent and operational), short-term (construction), indirect and cumulative impacts of the Project on transportation and mitigation measures to address these impacts.

- **Chapter 4, Environmental Impacts and Mitigation**, identifies the long-term, short-term, indirect and cumulative impacts of the Project on environmental resources and mitigation measures to address these impacts.
- **Chapter 5, Evaluation of Alternatives**, summarizes how the Preferred Alternative meets the Purpose and Need, summarizes key impacts and performance of the Preferred Alternative compared to the Draft EIS light rail alternatives, and describes the financial plan for the Preferred Alternative.
- **Chapter 6, Community Participation, Agency Coordination and Required Permits**, discusses public participation during the Draft EIS phase and leading up to publication of this Final EIS, agency and tribal coordination, and the types of permits and approvals needed for the Project at the federal, state and local levels.
- **Chapter 7, Draft EIS Comment Summary**, includes a discussion of the Draft EIS public comment period and a summary of the comments received.

This Final EIS also includes several appendices and attachments that provide additional detail and documentation. See the Table of Contents for a complete list.

1.4. Project Milestones and Schedule

The publication of this Final EIS is a major milestone in the Project’s development. There are several immediate steps occurring concurrent with or shortly after the publication of this Final EIS to complete the environmental review process and the Project Development phase of the FTA Capital Investment Grants Program. Longer-term planning and design efforts are on hold at the time of this publication. The next steps of the Project are illustrated in Figure 1.4-1 and described in the sections below.



Environmental Review

Upon completion of this Final EIS, all entities and individuals that provided comments during the Draft EIS comment period, requested a copy of the Final EIS, or are otherwise participating in the environmental review process will be notified of its availability and how to access it through Metro's project website, swcorridorplan.org. Notification will require that a valid email address or mailing address has been provided. In addition to the digital files available on the project website, physical copies of the Final EIS will be available at TriMet and Metro offices.

After the Final EIS has been distributed, a Notice of Availability for the Final EIS will be posted in the Federal Register. There will be a waiting period of at least 30 days following publication of the Notice of Availability, after which FTA will issue a Record of Decision (ROD) stating its determination and the basis of the Project's compliance with NEPA requirements. There is no formal public comment period for the Final EIS, but FTA will consider any public comments received during the waiting period. The ROD will identify the mitigation measures that will be incorporated in the Project, which are listed in Appendix M, Mitigation Measures, of this Final EIS.

Future Steps

Planning and design efforts for the Project were paused in late 2020 after Measure 26-218 (also known as Get Moving 2020) did not pass. This measure would have provided a large portion of the local funding for further design and construction of both the Preferred Alternative and the Ross Island Bridgehead Reconfiguration.

The timing of remaining planning and design, project construction and opening of light rail service will depend on when the remaining local funding is identified and committed. After securing additional local funding, TriMet would request federal funds from FTA's Capital Investment Grants Program. After a federal funding agreement is executed, the major construction phase would take approximately four years, which would be followed by systems testing before the opening of service.

As noted in Section 1.1, the related transportation improvements could be phased to be built before, after or with this light rail investment, depending on funding, including other federal grants or local initiatives.

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