



**Position Statement on Lincoln's Transit Development Plan Preferred
Alternative**
Citizens for Improved Transit
February 2016

Introduction

Established in August 2015, Citizens for Improved Transit (CFIT) is a community action group whose mission is “to enhance the quality of all forms of public transportation and make it more responsive to the needs of the citizens of Nebraska through education, training, and advocacy.” Its members include regular StarTran users, StarTran drivers and staff, and concerned citizens. In addition to regularly working with Lincoln’s StarTran Advisory Board and the city’s Transit Manager, CFIT has also gained the endorsement and financial backing of the Amalgamated Transit Union International and ProRail Nebraska.

In January of 2015 StarTran, in consultation with Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, launched a Transit Development Plan (TPD) to both assess the current status of Lincoln’s public transportation and make recommendations for its improvement. Throughout this process CFIT members have been highly involved in providing feedback to the consultants; gathering and recording feedback from citizens; and attending and encouraging community attendance of StarTran Advisory Board meetings, City Council meetings, and TPD Public Engagement events. In addition, CFIT members have met regularly throughout the year to consider on-going concerns with Lincoln’s public transportation, brainstorm and develop possible solutions, and discuss means for encouraging greater community engagement (with both StarTran and the TPD).

Context

In his 2015 “Goals For the Year,” Lincoln Mayor, Chris Beutler cited “build[ing] our transportation infrastructure” and working towards a “comprehensive transportation solution” as one of his primary goals for the City. Since 2000 Lincoln’s population has continued to grow by 3,000 residents per year (2015, *TPD Final Report*) and this steady increase in residents has led to the continued expansion of commercial and residential development near the edges of the city (areas which are not currently served by the existing transit system). Moreover, the findings of a 2013 study comparing Lincoln to nine similar peer cities, revealed that Lincoln provides “significantly less service than transit systems in peer cities” (2015, *TPD Final Report*). In addition, as Lincoln moves forward toward the goals outlined in the Lincoln Downtown Master Plan (2012) and 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan, it is clear that simply maintaining the current level of public transit services will not be adequate in achieving these goals nor in helping the City keep pace with its peer cities. Perhaps most concerning, however, is the impassioned cries of the public which were consistently heard at StarTran Advisory Meetings, TPD Public Engagement events, and City Council meetings, calling for increased and improved public transportation services. Specifically, participants in these meetings expressed significant concerns with safely and efficiently being able to access their places of employment, medical facilities, public services, retailers for basic necessities, and recreation and entertainment.

However, in spite of Mayor Beutler's commitment to improving transportation and the clear necessity for improved services, StarTran and Nelson/Nygaard were tasked with providing these improvements without any substantial increase in budget. According to the *TPD Final Report*, "Even though funding has increased every year, it is still not enough to allow service expansion to meet the growing needs of the Lincoln population." CFIT members, however, are aware that City funds are not infinite.

Action Items and Recommendations:

Thus, after careful consideration of the above circumstances and close analysis of the Transit Development Plan CFIT recommends the City Council and Mayor Beutler take the following actions in regard to the Transit Development Plan and Preferred Alternative:

1. Phases 1-5 of the Preferred Alternative should be implemented immediately (rather than over a lengthy span of several years).
2. As proposed by the Preferred Alternative, bus routes should be moved from neighborhood streets to major arterial streets.
3. However, if this is to happen, significant provisions should be made to support individuals with disabilities who depend on the current bus system and are unable to access the new bus routes (e.g. the current Handi-Van eligibility requirements will need to be widened and services significantly improved and increased).
4. StarTran move to a fixed-stop system in order to provide more efficient and safer service which will also provide greater accessibility by connecting with new technologies (e.g. GoogleTransit).
 - a. This recommendation, however, comes with the caveat that these fixed stops be clearly marked, accessible, well lit, and very frequently spaced.
5. In the event that immediate adoption of all 5 phases of the Preferred Alternative is absolutely not possible, then, at the very minimum, Phases 1 and 2 (as outlined in the TPD) should be immediately and simultaneously implemented.
6. The relatively minor route alterations to the Preferred Alternative, as suggested by riders and drivers during the TPD Engagement events and StarTran Advisory Board Meetings, should be adopted.