

# BUILD

Connecting Howard Street's Commercial Corridor

## Project Description

January 2025



# Project Summary

The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) requests \$25 million in Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant funds for Connecting Howard Street's Commercial Corridor (the Project). This effort aims to improve safety for all road users, increase transit operational efficiency, and set the stage for the continued economic development of a critical corridor running through downtown Baltimore.

The Project will reshape how residents and visitors move through the city by creating a safer built environment that both supports existing community members and invites new residents and private development on one of the city's most dynamic corridors.

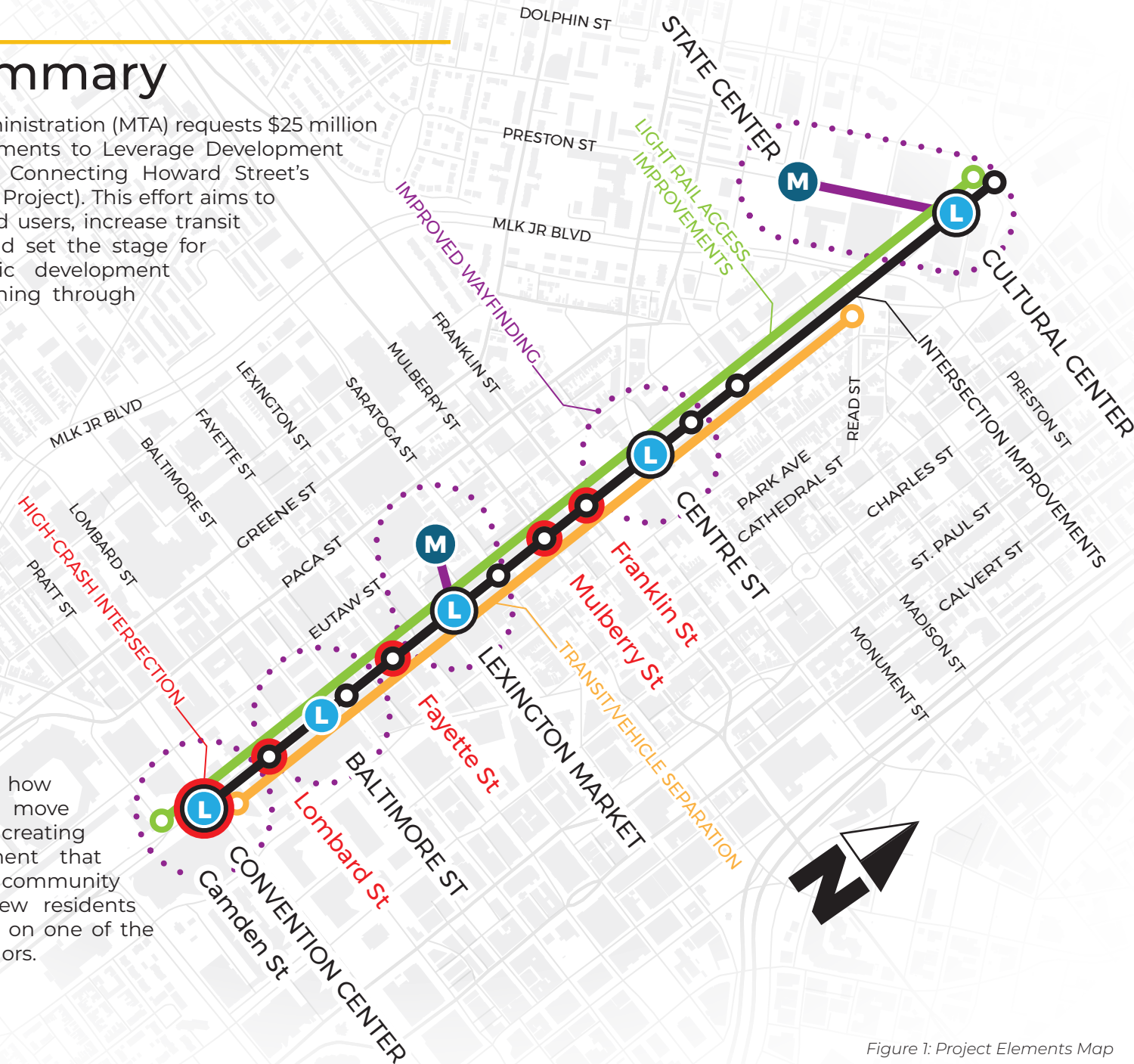


Figure 1: Project Elements Map

The Project will:

- **Increase the visibility of pedestrians and vulnerable road users** through investments in public space, including improvements to sidewalks, curb ramps, signage, lighting, and crosswalks. Addressing high-crash areas in the corridor, the Project will include improved intersection crossings and vehicle/transit operations, as well as renovated public spaces coordinated with ongoing community development efforts such as Baltimore City's Downtown RISE action plan.
- **Increase light rail efficiencies and access** by reducing conflicts between automobiles and trains, new wayfinding signage, and introducing improved station access through upgrades to light rail and streetscape infrastructure that has met the end of its useful life. This will lead to faster and more reliable travel times and a better transfer experience that can increase ridership and inspire private development around stations.

# Project History

Howard Street is a historically significant corridor located near Baltimore's downtown, connecting key parts of the city and acting as a transition corridor between tourism sites like the Inner Harbor and stadiums, and the cultural hub of Mount Vernon that includes multiple venues for music and dance. For over 200 years, the Howard Street Corridor has served as a destination shopping district for downtown Baltimore. As a complementing Charles Street, the city's primary north-south axis.

The Project corridor's commercial significance is anchored by Lexington Market, which was established in 1782 and is one of the longest-running public markets in the world. In the late 19th century, department stores flourished along Howard Street, including Hutzler's, Hecht's, and Stewarts. These stores clustered to take advantage of Lexington Market's hustle and bustle. Post-World War II suburbanization brought a gradual decline in foot traffic and retail sales, as most of the economic energy along Howard Street relocated to larger sites further from the central business district. Continued population decline in the City during the 1960s and recurring disruptions to business due to significant construction projects during the 1980s and 1990s combined to cause many commercial outlets to close for good. Today, growing market demand for urban living have been

evidenced by renewed investment in private property within the project area. For example, Lexington Market has recently undergone major redevelopment fueled by a \$45 million investment, including more than \$12 million coming from the Maryland Department of General Services and the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

The central light rail system in Baltimore first opened in 1992, running north-south from Camden Yards in downtown Baltimore City to Timonium in Baltimore County. The system was incrementally expanded over the years to the North, South, and through in-fill stations to key destinations like Penn Station, BWI Airport, and the M&T Bank Raven's Stadium. From its original construction, Howard Street has continued to be the central light rail's downtown trunk that carries each of the system's service patterns and provides access to the central business district and key regional attractions like the professional sports stadiums, University of Maryland's Baltimore Campus, the City's marquee venue of CFG Bank Arena, and multiple regional hospitals. Moving forward, the Howard Street segment of the Light Rail's importance will grow with connection points to the planned east-west Red Line light rail and continued focus on Complete Street's investments that promote active transportation options.



The transformation of Downtown Baltimore into a transit-oriented community is a goal for the region that is supported by multiple transportation infrastructure investments and plans, including the Downtown RISE strategic action plan published by Baltimore City in 2024. A safer, better connected, and accessible Howard Street corridor will build upon the revitalization of properties within the Project area and combine with upcoming transportation investments like the Red Line to position Howard Street as a key asset in the City's economic revitalization and urban renaissance.

## Project Location

The Project is located entirely in the Baltimore, MD Urbanized Area, which is considered urban for the purpose of the BUILD grant. As shown in Figure 2, the Project is located within Census Tracts 2201, 401, 1701, 1702, and 1102. The majority of the Project investments are located in census tracts designated as an Area of Persistent Poverty (AoPP), including census tracts 401, 1701, and 1702.

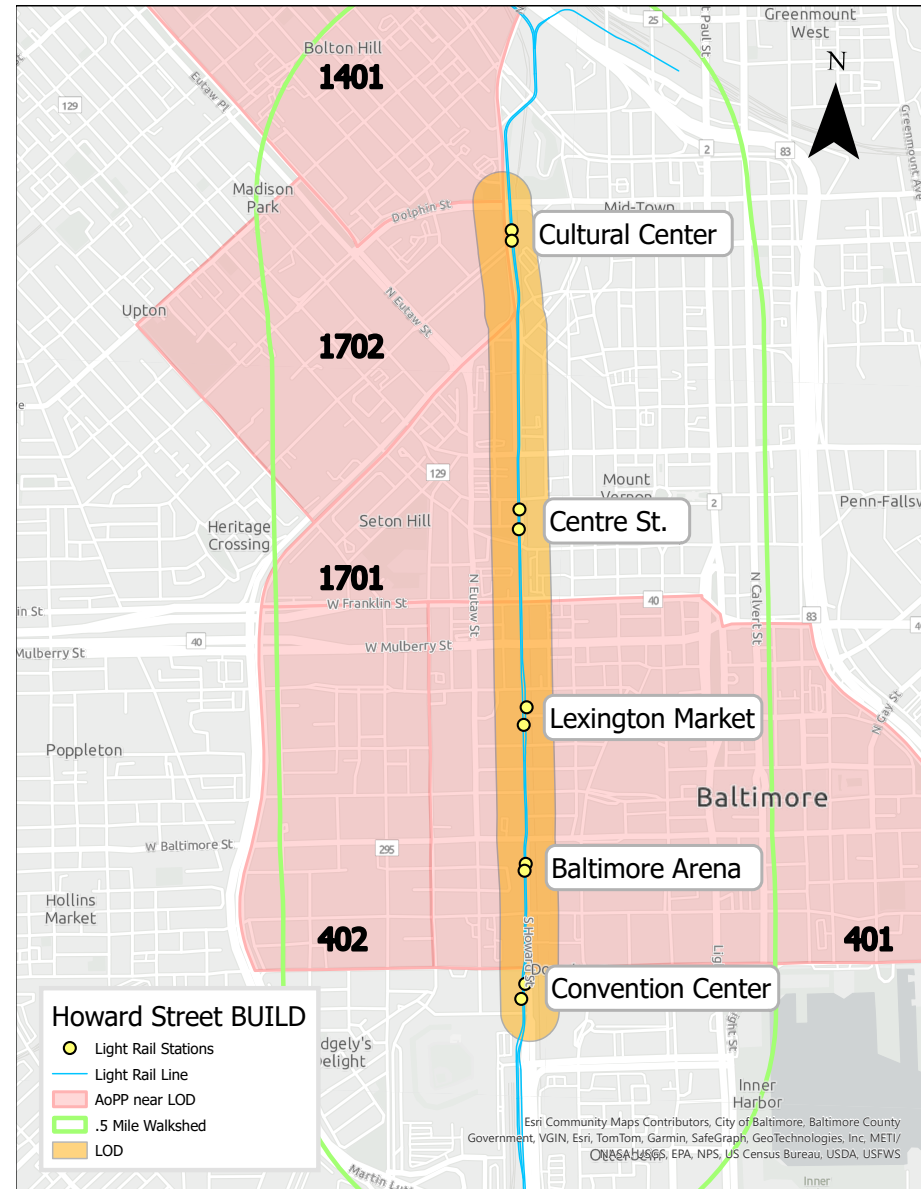


Figure 2: Areas of Persistent Poverty and Historically Disadvantaged Communities in Project Area

## Statement of Work

The Project elements can be organized into two categories, Enhancing Pedestrian Infrastructure and Improving Light Rail Operations and Access. Conceptual design has been completed for all Project elements, and both the wayfinding signage has completed final design milestones. The design of the pedestrian infrastructure Project elements will be supported by thorough existing design guidelines, including the Baltimore City's Complete Streets Manual and the MTA's Transit Priority Toolkit, Transit Hub Toolkit, and Transit

Oriented Development Guidelines. Engineering activities will be informed by experience from recently completed projects led by the MTA and Baltimore City DOT, including the North Avenue Rising project. Table 1 below provides an overview of the Project's technical and engineering aspects. Each category of activities will be supported by robust public engagement that includes on-site activities, community meetings, stakeholder discussions, and the availability of online resources.

## Description of Technical and Engineering Aspects

### Enhancing Pedestrian Infrastructure

The Project will improve the safety of pedestrians and vulnerable road users by:

- Adding pavement markings and ADA-compliant crosswalk striping to intersections.
- Revamping existing sidewalks, curb ramps, and pedestrian lighting.
- Adding pedestrian count-down signals at street crossings to facilitate safer movement of non-motorists.
- Incorporating public art into streetscape elements.

### Improving Light Rail Operations and Access

The Project will increase light rail efficiencies and access by:

- Implementing vertical barriers between passenger vehicle lanes and the Light Rail railway tracks to reduce the potential for crashes and maintain vehicle flow.
- Improving station access and intermodal connectivity through the upgrade of transit and streetscape infrastructure in poor condition.
- Introducing wayfinding to improve multi-modal connectivity between Light Rail, Metro, and bus transit, including signage to provide improved accessibility for individuals with visual disabilities.

Table 1: Technical and Engineering Details

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# Transportation Challenges and Solutions

## Safety

### Challenge

From 2019 to 2023, the corridor saw over 340 crashes, with 12 percent involving railway train cars, bicyclists, or pedestrians. Two of the crashes were fatal events. Given the significant concentration of destinations and transit transfers within the area, particularly near Lexington Market, there is a crucial need for safety improvements for pedestrians and other vulnerable non-motorized road users.

### Solution

The Project would enhance crosswalks and curb ramps to ensure that all pedestrians and non-motorized road users have safe access to the Light Rail stations located in the Project area as well as all essential destinations, including grocery stores, educational institutions, healthcare centers, parks, and community centers located in the Project area.

## State of Good Repair

### Challenge

Significant transit and streetscape infrastructure in the Project corridor is currently in poor condition, resulting in unsafe pedestrian crossings, access to stations, and light rail operations. Frequent disruptions to transit service negatively impacts local businesses who rely on the Light Rail for both customers and workers.

### Solution

The Project would replace the outdated light rail and streetscape infrastructure to increase the safety accessing the light rail service. Reductions in transit service disruptions will also improve operations for all Light Rail passengers.

## Economic Development

### Challenge

Despite recent success stories, the Project corridor still suffers from property vacancies and blight. As a light rail corridor with high pedestrian activity, visual signs of neglect and streetscape disinvestment hamper the economic vitality and private-investment potential of the properties in the Project area.

### Solution

The Project will leverage investments in infrastructure to complement broader development goals. It will improve access to existing regional economic drivers, such as a lively entertainment district that includes the Hippodrome Theatre, educational institutions, and historic icons like Lexington Market, a historic landmark market that is home to more than 40 merchants and kiosks. In addition, the Project will result in travel time savings and improved first- and last-mile connectivity that will increase the efficiency and safety of door-to-door travel for transit riders arriving to shop and work along the corridor.