

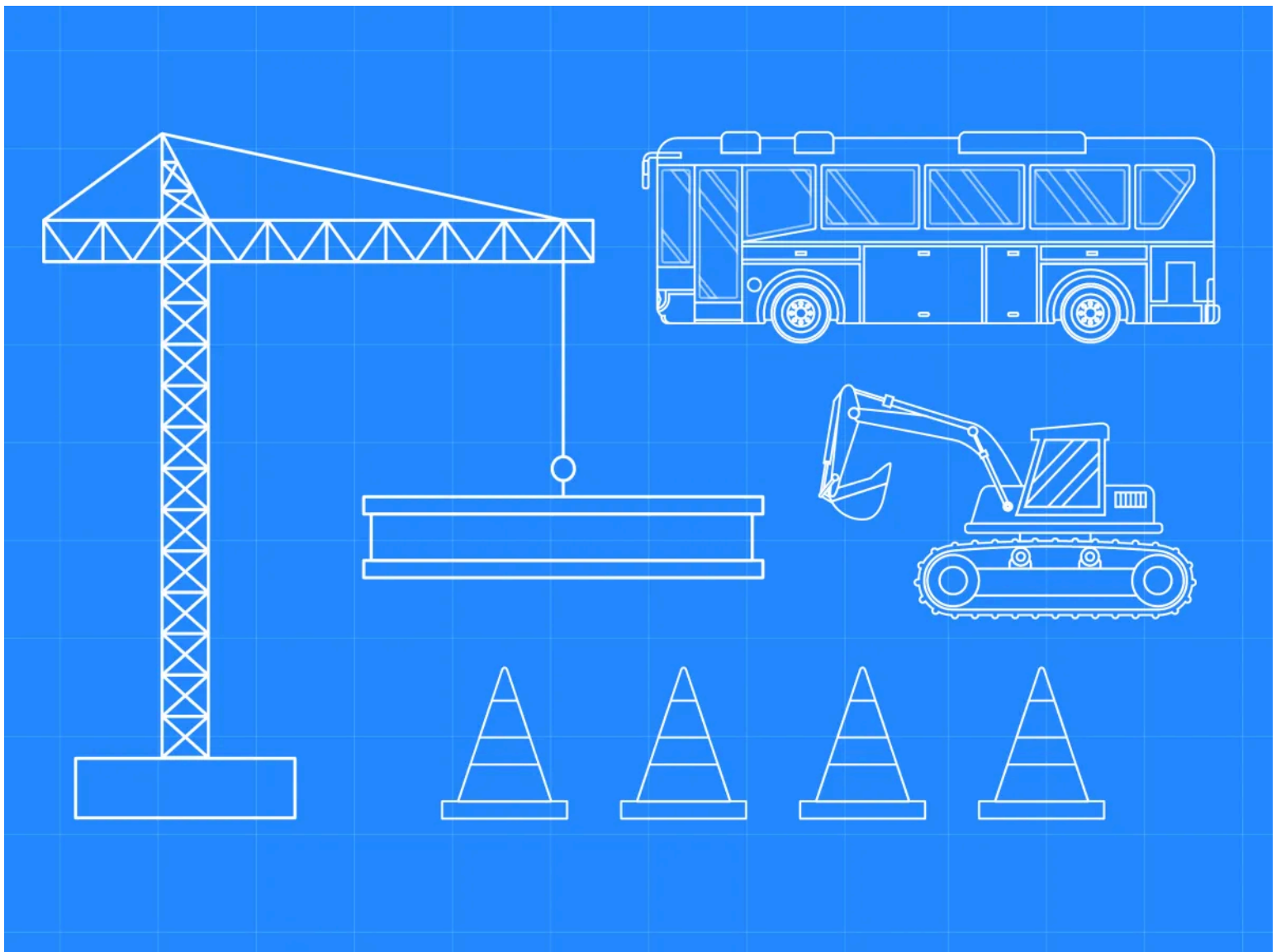
WAKE COUNTY

Will 2025 Be the Year Construction on Raleigh's First Bus Rapid Transit Line Finally Gets Off the Ground?

The city is re-advertising construction plans for the New Bern Avenue BRT line. We asked some city staffers to answer our questions about the process.

by **Jane Porter**

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Credit: Illustration by Ann Salman

It feels like a precarious time for public transit in Raleigh.

The regional commuter rail plan **is on the back burner**. The city held a groundbreaking for Raleigh's **first Bus Rapid Transit line** along New Bern Avenue, at the time expected to be in operation this year, in November of 2023. Construction is starting, **the INDY headline read**—only for residents to find out seven months later that there was no contractor to build out the 10 stations and 3.3 miles of dedicated bus lanes along the 5.4-mile corridor. The city **hadn't received any construction bids** on the project.

So, the city broke the \$90 million project into two parts and re-advertised the new construction plans. Earlier this month, we learned, **the city received one proposal**, from Fred Smith Company, that was over-budget at \$113 million. The city council rejected the bid.

Now, we're back to square one and hoping the third time's the charm.

To stay within the city's new \$96.75 million budget for the project, the city intends to split the project footprint into three areas and break up construction into four phases (depicted in the chart below). It will also give contractors more time to complete the project.

ADVERTISING

The *INDY* asked Byron Sanders, Raleigh's assistant director of engineering services, and Het Patel, the city's BRT program manager, about the bidding and construction process and when we might expect the state's first BRT line to finally be up and running.

INDY: What are the three project footprint areas for the New Bern Avenue BRT line and what are the four construction phases?

Three Areas:

Area 1: Downtown to Tarboro Road

Area 2: Tarboro Road to I-440

Area 3: I-440 to New Hope Road

Four Construction Phases:

PHASE	ANTICIPATED ADVERTISEMENT FOR CONSTRUCTION	ANTICIPATED ADVERTISEMENT DURATION
Clearing and Grubbing of Area 2	Early 2025	2 months
Construction of all horizontal elements* of Areas 1 and 3	Spring 2025	24 months
Construction of all horizontal elements* of Area 2	Summer 2025	34 months
Construction of all vertical elements*	TBD*	TBD*

*Horizontal elements = roadway work, utilities, drainage, paths and sidewalks

*Vertical elements = BRT stations

Vertical construction advertisement and construction duration is to be determined as it depends on the completion schedule of horizontal elements

How much do you estimate each construction phase to cost?

To maintain the integrity of our bidding process, we do not share our estimates until bids are publicly opened.

Raleigh’s BRT system has been in the works since 2016. How has the increased cost of materials following the pandemic changed the budget projection for the project overall?

Project estimates account for inflation for all components, including materials. These estimates were updated throughout the design process and were reviewed following each previous advertisement of the project. The city’s goal is to deliver the project within the identified budget.

What’s the ideal timeline now for (i) advertising and receiving bids and (ii) roadwork and station buildout from beginning to end? When is the soonest that BRT could be operational?

The ideal timeline is to advertise and award the four packages through 2025 with work commencing as soon as this summer. On this timeline, the BRT would be operational in the latter part of 2028.

Is the city limiting construction of the project to contractors based in North Carolina?

No, the city is not limiting to NC-based contractors. The city is interested in creating opportunities for NC based contractors, but we are encouraging of any contractors familiar with heavy construction to pursue each of the packages.

Do you anticipate recovery efforts in Western North Carolina continuing to impact contractors' availability?

This has been an impact on much of the regional construction industry. It is difficult to know to what extent this may continue to be the case. We will continue to monitor these impacts through communication among agency and industry partners to adjust our strategy to maximize the pool of qualified contractor interest.

The city will host an Industry Day on January 27 at the Chavis Community Center where construction contractors can meet with city staff and ask questions about the project.

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