



TFLEX | MAXIMIZING GRANT SUCCESS

Securing 2nd Bus & Bus Facility Grant

What DART changed between applications -
and what your agency can use.

PERSISTENCE / READINESS / SHARED SUPPORT

FTA Buses and Bus Facilities (BBF) grants

Transit Finance Learning Exchange
Des Moines, Iowa | September 21-22, 2026



The need for total replacement was real - and visible.



Deteriorating infrastructure

Mechanical systems in vulnerable tunnels.



Recurring flooding

A facility that must work when the region needs it.



Operational constraints

Narrow doors, tight circulation and limited room.

Make the risk concrete: Connect physical conditions to safety, service and taxpayer cost.

Two federal awards. Persistence required through detour.

2019**\$17.275M**

First BBF award.
A first investment,
not full-facility
funding.

2021**A forced
pause**

Site-review issues
prevented
submission. An
alternate site was
needed.

FY2025 APPLICATION**\$20M request**

A revised Phase II
case was not
selected in the
initial round.

FEBRUARY 2026**\$20M award**

Remaining FY2025
application
selected with
FY2026 funds.

\$37.275M combined BBF awards - with continued pursuit between awards

Persistence did not mean an uninterrupted path.

Five moves that worked for DART that others can use.

01

Stay flexible through detours

Keep the mission; be willing to change the site and schedule.

02

Make the project deliverable

Show readiness, usable phases and BABA compliance evidence.

03

Earn confidence in the funding plan

Show real sources, cash timing and local trade-offs.

04

Bring partners and the public along

Build understanding with communities, elected offices and media.

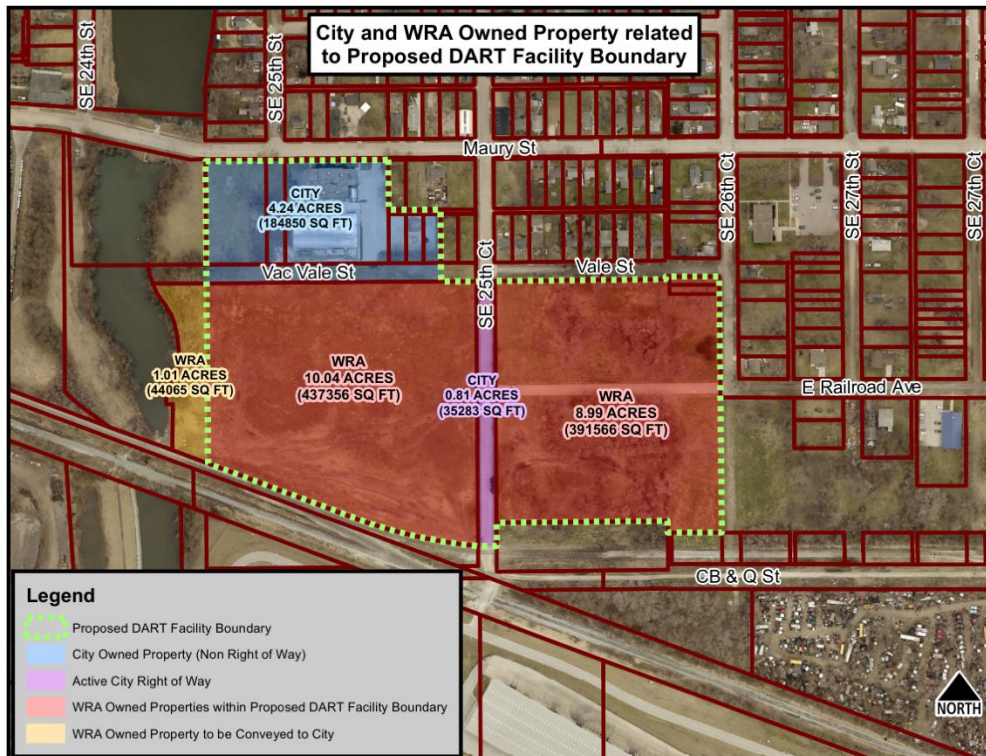
05

Keep improving as a team

Use fresh eyes and the expertise across your organization.

Listen for one change to your project, one stronger piece of evidence and one relationship to build.

Don't give up during the detours.



Original SE 25th / Maury study area - not the Vandalia site.
Ownership map only; it does not show the Palace Site boundary.

JUNE 2021 | A DIFFERENT KIND OF SITE RISK

Historical school building preservation and a possible “Palace Site” extension required specialist review.

SUMMER 2021 | PUT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL HATS

Up to 600 hand-auger holes were planned, with City/WRA access and consultant coordination.

LATE 2021 | CHANGE THE SITE, NOT THE MISSION

FTA recommended not proceeding. The Commission supported an alternate-site search.

Stay committed to the operating need - while being willing to change the site, plan and schedule.

Advance the existing projects - prove you can deliver.

DART EVIDENCE

SITE + APPROVALS

Land and
clearance

Land acquired.
Environmental and
local site approvals
identified.

VISIBLE PROGRESS

Phase I
underway

A funded first phase
made delivery
visible before the
next award.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Named
delivery owners

Internal project
manager, design
team and
construction
manager working
together for results.

BABA COMPLIANCE

Compliance
achieved

Phase I made Build
America, Buy
America tangible -
aligned with an
administration
priority.

Show completed work and compliance evidence, not only a promise to meet requirements later.

Define a useful phase - and a workable fallback.

THE OPERATING OUTCOME

Finish the move from DART Way

Phase I: establish the
maintenance base.

Phase II: add storage,
fueling, wash and operating
functions.

SCALABILITY IN THE FY2025 APPLICATION

\$20M

Full federal request

\$12.5M

Minimum federal amount

A smaller award meant real trade-offs:

Stage administrative build-out.
Use temporary outdoor bus parking.
Preserve the expansion path.

Protect the useful operating outcome - do not promise the same project for less money.



Make the local commitment tangible.

FY2025 "GO ALL-IN" PLAN | APPLICATION SNAPSHOT

\$43.8M total



\$23.8M local commitment | 54.3%

WHAT CHANGED

Bonding planned in 2019.
No debt planned in the FY2025 case.

COMMITMENT IS NOT CASH TIMING

Reserves: secured.
Sale proceeds: committed, but still planned.

Commitment answers "where"; cash flow answers "when." Show both before asking for approval.

Bring the board and communities along.

DART'S LOCAL CHALLENGES	THE RESPONSE TO BUILD
Reluctance to borrow	Show the no-debt plan, timing of cash and fallback options.
Mixed support for the facility	Make the need and alternatives understandable, not just the design.
Approval across communities	Use the same scope, costs and local-benefit story with each community.
Service cuts alongside construction	Explain and educate on the facility award and the local-resource trade-offs together.
A federal opportunity still needs local understanding, approval and confidence in the financial choices.	

Translate the facility into public value.

APPLICATION ESTIMATE \$65M Capital rehabilitation needs at the old site over the next 20 years.	APPLICATION ESTIMATE \$1.26M / year Projected O&M savings compared with operating three facilities.	REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL 11 acres The existing site could support housing and reinvestment after relocation.
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Application estimates, not realized savings. Cost avoidance is not cash for the local match.

The facility is the means. Reliable service and responsible use of public dollars are the benefits.

Put the project on the region's agenda.

LOCAL FOUNDATION

Commission +
communities

Local authority,
resources, safe service
and taxpayer value.

REGIONAL PLATFORM

MPO +
Partnership

Facility project included
on the region's "2025
Washington priority-
project list".

SHARED BENEFICIARIES

Education +
community

Partners connected the
project to work, school,
housing and regional
growth.

Build familiarity / Explain the need / Ask clearly / Report results

Make the facility a solution to shared priorities - not only an agency request.

Let elected officials hear from the people doing the work.

DOCUMENTED DART ACTION

A tour with leadership,
drivers and maintenance staff.

*"My first-hand experience reinforced how
critical this upgrade is"*

Rep. Zach Nunn, letter to FTA, July 9, 2025

ZACHARY NUNN
3RD DISTRICT, IOWA

1232 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-1503
(202) 225-5476

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1503

9 July 2025

Tariq Bokhari, Acting Administrator
Federal Transit Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Support of DART's Operations and Maintenance Facility 2025 Buses and Bus Facilities
Grant Application

Dear Acting Administrator Bokhari,

I am writing to request full and fair consideration of the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority's (DART) Buses and Bus Facilities grant application. DART provides more than 3.5 million rides each year to constituents throughout my district, ensuring central Iowans have reliable access to work, medical appointments, educational opportunities, and other daily essentials.

Since being elected to Congress, I've had the opportunity to tour DART's facility and speak

Show the constraint. Let staff explain it. Connect the experience to a specific funding request.

Turn support into a specific federal action.

REP. ZACH NUNN

Project-specific letter to FTA

Cited the site visit and requested full and fair consideration.

SEN. JONI ERNST

Direct contact with DOT

Requested consideration and identified a staff follow-up channel.

SEN. CHUCK GRASSLEY

Direct contact with FTA

Requested consideration and offered to relay the agency's response.

Ask for appropriate, merits-based consideration - not a guarantee, scoring exception or funding promise.

Partner with the media when possible to assist with public education

ONE MEDIA NEWSLETTER | TWO RELATED PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS

SERVICE REDESIGN

“Fewer but speedier bus routes”

FACILITY INVESTMENT

“A new campus under construction”

THE QUESTION TO BE READY FOR

“Why build a facility while changing service?”

Give reporters the full context.

The purpose

How the facility keeps buses and service reliable.

The funding

What this facility award can fund - and cannot.

The trade-offs

How local match, reserves and operating needs are balanced.

Work with media on clear context and accurate facts - not an expectation of favorable coverage.

Keep the project ready after "not selected."

INITIAL ROUND

Not selected

DART sought input from FTA and Congressman Nunn's office. It was incorporated into future applications

CONTINUED WORK

Phase I advanced

The underlying project continued while the next funding opportunity was pursued.

FEBRUARY 2026

\$20M selected

FTA made additional awards from the remaining FY2025 applications.

Seek available feedback. Keep the plan current. Do not assume reconsideration or a future award.

Keep the mission. Rethink the application.

FRESH LEADERSHIP

Different perspectives

Successive CEOs contributed as well as many key staff continue to evolve the application.

OUTSIDE EYES

Third-party input

Drago was hired as a third-party perspective to the application effort. Lobbyists included in the project team.

STRATEGIC RETHINK

A final "go all-in" approach

Link smaller ask, reserves, a planned property sale and a full exit from DART Way - with no debt planned.

Use fresh eyes to challenge the approach - not only to polish the wording.

One application. The whole organization.

ROLES YOUR AGENCY CAN ADAPT

Leadership + board

Direction, choices and local commitment.

Grants + compliance

Criteria, eligibility and supporting evidence.

Finance

Sources, cash timing and credible assumptions.

Operations + maintenance

Need, workflow, safety and service value.

Project + procurement

Scope, readiness and BABA delivery.

Communications + partners

A consistent public story and informed support.

One accountable editor. Many evidence owners. A strong submission is not the grants team working alone.

Phase I's opening put Phase II in the spotlight.



JUNE 18, 2026 | AFTER THE AWARD

\$20M

PHASE II GRANT

Secretary Sean Duffy and Rep. Zach Nunn joined the Phase I opening, highlighting the Phase II investment.

**Show delivery. Recognize support.
Connect the milestone to the next phase.**

Invite partners back to see results - and keep the relationship connected to public value after selection.

Questions - and the lessons to take home.

Stay with the mission.

Be willing to change the plan.

Bring the people with you.

A deliverable project

Clear phases + compliance
proof

Credible funding

Real sources + cash-flow
discipline

Shared ownership

Whole organization +
informed partners

Discussion: Which move will make the biggest difference to your next application?