

# Bethlehem Connect: two-page summary

Version 1.2 · 21 October 2026 · by David Fischbarg · contact via the project website

*Planning phase. An independent plan; nothing is funded or built yet.*

## What it is

Bethlehem Connect is an independent plan for frequent electric transit linking the Saucon Valley, Lehigh University's three campuses, the Southside, Downtown Bethlehem, Moravian University and North Bethlehem. It builds on LANTA's Enhanced Bus Service instead of duplicating it. It is not an official project of, or endorsed by, LANTA, LVPC, the City of Bethlehem, PennDOT, Lehigh University or any other institution named; none of them has reviewed, adopted or funded it.

## Why this shape

- **Terrain decides the mode.** Mountaintop / Iacocca Hall sits about 180 m above Goodman and 153 m above the University Center, on roads with 11–13% grades. Buses can climb it today, a gondola fits the slope best, and surface rail does not fit.
- **Build on what runs today.** 7 of the 10 station areas had LANTA trips within 400 m (2022 timetable data); Goodman and Mountaintop have Lehigh shuttles.

## Phase 1: Bethlehem, Hellertown and nearby (conditional target 2029)

Two electric bus lines on existing streets, every 10 minutes for 18 hours a day, with 10 station areas in all (the I-78 Park & Ride site is unverified):

| Line                                                 | Route                                                                                                                                                                                    | km    | Minutes (model) |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| <b>Connect Spine</b><br>(electric bus rapid transit) | I-78 Park & Ride – Hellertown – Goodman – Mountaintop / Iacocca Hall – Lehigh University Center – Farrington Square – Downtown – Moravian University – North Bethlehem (9 station areas) | 16.50 | 35              |
| <b>River Line</b> (upgraded EBS core)                | Downtown – Farrington Square – Third Street / SteelStacks                                                                                                                                | 2.51  | 5               |

Every station: level boarding, shelter, real-time information and a recycling, compost and trash point.

**Options, each only after its own studies:** a gondola up South Mountain (3.42 km), about 12 minutes (model) from Goodman to the University Center, against 14 by bus (model; Lehigh's shuttle timetable allows more), only with a sponsor and land, otherwise after 2030, if at all; a Valley Express bus from the I-78 Park & Ride via Wind Creek to Farrington Square (5.15 km), quicker because of its route; two St. Luke's branch options in Fountain Hill (1.67 and 2.30 km); and an Airport Link bus from Downtown to LANTA's existing stop at the ABE terminal (7.99 km, about 13.5 minutes, model); a stop at the terminal would need the Airport Authority's agreement (not asked).

**Extensions, only if demand supports them:** Wind Creek (+1.46 km); Bethlehem Square / US 22 (+5.62 km), then Bethlehem Township's Municipal Park (+5.24 km); LVH–Muhlenberg to the Hanover Township (Northampton County) Municipal Park (+3.00 km). **Stop options:** 4th & Wyandotte on St. Luke's option A; South Bethlehem (City parkland) on the Valley Express, only if a separately proposed park is built. No owner has agreed to any stop.

**Screening numbers, the two lines only (options and extensions not costed):** 15 buses with spares; about 71,000 revenue hours a year (18% of LANTA's 2024 total, about 26% of its directly operated bus hours); operations about \$11.2 million a year at LANTA's 2024 bus cost per hour (more in later years; no payer); capital for "BRT-lite" (stations, signal priority, some lanes) roughly \$45–215 million plus buses and chargers (AACE Class 5). If funded: at least about 34 full-time drivers and roughly 55–80 people in all (gross estimates, before netting out existing LANTA service the River Line would upgrade; no job is offered).

## The dates are conditional

Phase 1 by 2029 and Phase 2 by 2030 are the author's conditional targets, not commitments. They need a public sponsor, operating money, approvals and partners, and are faster than comparable US projects in this plan's research (3.75–8 years from a grant or route choice to opening), so they assume early commitments and quick-build steps. Slips of 1–2 years are normal.

## Phase 2: past Bethlehem (conditional target 2030)

Five corridor options on existing streets to a transit hub or town center. LANTA's 2022 routes ran along most of them (to confirm), and LANTA would decide.

| Corridor                                     | From                | To                                               | km    | Minutes (model) | Along LANTA routes (2022) |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Allentown                                    | Downtown            | Allentown Transportation Center                  | 8.98  | 18              | 95%                       |
| Easton                                       | North Bethlehem     | Easton Centre Square                             | 16.00 | 31              | 100%                      |
| Nazareth                                     | Bethlehem Square    | Nazareth borough center                          | 8.37  | 16              | 76%                       |
| Bath                                         | Moravian University | Bath borough center                              | 11.69 | 23              | 40%                       |
| Saucon Valley south and Coopersburg (PA 309) | Hellertown          | Saucon Valley south → Coopersburg borough center | 14.49 | 29              | 17%                       |

Times include no intermediate stops; each stop would add about 39 seconds. Where a corridor runs mostly along LANTA routes, Connect would at most share stops, timetables and a fare. Bath and Coopersburg had no LANTA stop within 400 m of the town end: the real gaps (2022 data, to confirm).

### Long term: ideas only, no route

- Rail, a subway or a tunnel only behind ridership, funding and engineering gates. No passenger trains run in Bethlehem today and no regional rail route has been chosen; Connect would meet any future rail at a shared station.
- Express and ultra-express service only when measured triggers are met; every line starts all-stop.
- Staffed restrooms at a few busy stations, bottle fillers and climate-controlled rooms at major stations; a wellness and sports hub is a long-term idea.
- Free fares only as a goal, if a named, reliable funding source replaces them; LANTA's board decides. No paid ads; student-made environmental posters instead (no school asked yet).

### Not done yet

No surveys, engineering, borings, traffic studies, ridership forecasts or flood checks. Numbers are screening values from open data and a stated model.

### What is being asked

Conversations only; no money or partnership is requested:

- **LVPC:** how a plan like this could fit the FutureLV long-range plan.
- **LANTA:** fit with EBS; boardings, timetable and park-and-ride data.
- **Lehigh University:** the mountain link (bus or gondola), its campus station areas and shuttle data.
- **City of Bethlehem:** fit with its draft Complete Streets Plan and street projects.

### More

Short summary: <https://website-five-tau-72.vercel.app/files/summary-short.txt> · Longer summary:

<https://website-five-tau-72.vercel.app/files/brief.txt> · One-page map:

<https://website-five-tau-72.vercel.app/files/one-page-map.pdf> · Executive Summary:

<https://website-five-tau-72.vercel.app/files/executive-summary.pdf> · Website: <https://website-five-tau-72.vercel.app>

Sources: Overture Maps 2026-09-23.1 (© OpenStreetMap contributors, ODbL); USGS 3DEP; LANTA (EBS schedule 2025-12-04; 2022 timetables; NTD 2024); GAO-14-472. All sources:

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