

PROJECT CONNECT STATUS REPORT

ATP BOARD BRIEF | JANUARY 2023

In November 2020, the Austin voters approved Proposition A to dedicate new revenue to the implementation of Project Connect—a program of transit projects designed to provide transportation alternatives for our community. Voters simultaneously created the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) and tasked its Board of Directors with overseeing the program. This Project Connect ATP Board Brief serves as an update to the ATP Board about the progress of the projects that make up the Project Connect Program.

» PROGRAM UPDATES

LIGHT RAIL

Technical analysis of light rail optimization and cost-saving options continues. ATP, CapMetro, and the City of Austin are examining factors such as cost, right-of-way, ridership, socioeconomic status, demographic data, and alignment with the initial implementation plan while continuing to prioritize safety, accessibility, and integration with the existing transportation network.

This month, ATP continued to center engagement efforts on priority populations through additional focus group meetings to capture input on community evaluation criteria related to mobility and customer experience, access to opportunities, environmental benefits, and land use and housing. Feedback will be used to refine and better inform how emerging options fit community values.

ATP will share emerging options within the coming months for board and public consideration. An updated Light Rail Implementation Plan is on track to be completed in late Spring 2023.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) coordination continues with monthly meetings to update the Administration on the Light Rail program and ensure the project meets NEPA guidelines and requirements.

Coordination with the City of Austin to modify permitting procedures and city code is ongoing.

METRORAPID

CapMetro continues close collaboration of Expo and Pleasant Valley construction with the City of Austin and impacted stakeholders. Additionally, CapMetro is coordinating with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on the signing of the Small Starts Grant Agreements (SSGA) to fully secure Federal funding for both projects. CapMetro anticipates the SSGA will be ready within the next 30-45 days, at which point a revenue service date will be set and communicated widely with the entire community. Prior to the launch of service, CapMetro will work with the community on the service change in support of the MetroRapid service.

METRORAIL

On January 25, Project Connect partners celebrated the on-time and on-budget completion of the Leander-Lakeline Double Tracking project with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held at the Leander Station. This project will provide resiliency for the CapMetro RedLine, improving service for the community.

The project placed additional tracks on segments of the existing Red Line for trains to run more consistently and

frequently which provides a tremendous benefit to surrounding communities. The 32-mile regional rail service operates from Leander to Downtown Austin with stops at key destinations such as the Domain and Q2 Stadium. This milestone marks the first rail project completed under the Project Connect program.



CapMetro also advanced steadily on the McKalla Station project.

CapMetro and the City recently began public notice of upcoming road closures and a commuter rail service suspension planned for February 2023; the road closures and rail service suspension are necessary to support the McKalla Station Project and associated quiet zone installations.

- Commuter rail on the Red Line is anticipated to be suspended from February 26 through March 3. There are no events or games at Q2 Stadium during this time.
- Rutland Drive is anticipated to be closed between Metropolitan Drive and McKalla Place from February 26-28.
- Rundberg Lane is scheduled to be closed in each direction from Metric Boulevard to McNeil Road from February 26 through March 3.
- Signed detours will be in place for both Rundberg Lane and Rutland Drive throughout the duration of the closures.

While necessary and unavoidable, CapMetro and the City recognize the impact these closures can have on the community and worked diligently to begin public

notification more than 30 days in advance with additional notification through social and traditional media, direct mail, etc., planned for the coming weeks.

PROJECT CONNECT COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

In January, the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) hosted seven more focus groups as part of the effort to continue gathering community feedback on the light rail program. The Project Connect team also continued to center this focus group effort on priority populations, including Black, ADA, Hispanic and Spanish-speaking communities. These small group discussions of up to 15 individuals have helped collect meaningful input on community values, which is a crucial component for updating the Light Rail Implementation Plan.

During the focus groups, participants were provided with an overview presentation of Project Connect and an update on the current status of the light rail program. Participants were then asked to select their top five community values for the light rail system. Follow-up questions further explored some of the most and least selected community values. The three most selected community values in the January focus groups were:

- Access to Key Destinations – “How many jobs, special events, education centers, and other destinations are served by the light rail train?”
- Affordability Benefits – “Are we serving existing and planned affordable housing units?”
- Traffic – “How will the light rail train impact traffic?”

Participants emphasized the need for access to public transportation in low-income communities and access to affordable housing as important considerations for an inclusive and affordable future transit system in Austin.

Additionally, the Project Team heard from bus and rail connections that decreasing walking distance between connections were priorities for members of the accessibility community. The feedback from the focus

groups in December and January will provide valuable information to the technical team as they continue to look at the light rail optimization process.

ATP RECOGNIZED FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT TRB23—THE TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD ANNUAL MEETING IN WASHINGTON D.C.

ATP presented “Engaging the Community in Design and Development: Project Connect”, which was selected for inclusion in the Transportation Research Board’s 16th Annual Competition and Call, Communicating Concepts with the Public. Staff from the Community engagement team discussed public outreach achievements, challenges, and lessons learned with transportation professionals from across the county and international visitors as well.



There has been incredible energy and commitment around ATP’s readiness to deliver Light Rail by leveraging the strengths of ATP with the leadership of the ATP Board of Directors. Several organizational updates are included below:

Business and Legal Affairs: Responsive to ATP’s board direction in April 2022 to pursue an independent governance model that positions ATP for successful project delivery, business services have been aligned under the “Business and Legal Affairs Department” bringing several business services to include ATP’s procurement and contracting activities under one executive lead under, Casey Burack. Brandon Carr will take on the role of General Counsel, partnering closely with Casey as both continue to offer legal support and expertise across all departments. Brandon will have a presence on the dais during ATP Board Meetings and will be the primary point of contact for staff on legal issues.

Communications and Community Partnership: Foundational to ATP as a community corporation is the mission to embed equity, accessibility, and transparency across all aspects of our work. The “Communications and Community Partnership Department” will be led by Julia Campbell and serves to leverage critical talent in these disciplines to strengthen ATP’s equity framework and create opportunities for positive community impact. The functions in this workgroup encompass community engagement, public involvement, communications strategy, media relations, public information, marketing, and creative services. Courtney Chavez will continue to oversee the Federal Civil Rights programs, development of Project Connect equity metrics, and Workforce and Equity Policies, and will now also oversee Community Engagement and Public Involvement.

Engineering & Construction: Lindsay Wood will have three senior management leads overseeing specific, specialized workflows. In a newly created role, Alvin Livingstone will lead LRT engineering efforts through all phases of the project in close coordination and integration with the architecture and urban design team.

» ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE

ATP ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS UPDATE

As we begin 2023, ATP leadership extends sincere appreciation to the ATP team overall, Project Connect partners, the community, and the ATP Board of Directors for working thoughtfully and rigorously to advance Project Connect. Austin Transit Partnership continues to advance two primary objectives at the direction of the ATP Board of Directors: (1) Assess and update Austin’s Light Rail Implementation Plan;

and (2) Create an independent Austin Transit Partnership organization ready to deliver Project Connect with – and on behalf of – the Community.

Manan Garg will oversee and manage the construction phases of the light rail program. Manan will lead the development of a comprehensive delivery and contracting strategy. John Rhone will oversee critical light rail program integration elements including operations and maintenance facilities, third-party and utilities agreements as well as PMOR contract management.

ATP's website, www.atptx.org, will be updated to reflect these changes to its senior management team.