AUSTIN TRANSIT PARTNERSHIP

Austin Light Rail
Frequently Asked Questions:
Expandability of Light Rail Options

Date:
May 16, 2023

Transforming Transit Together

Expandability

Since Austin's voters approved Proposition A (Prop A), the dedicated property tax to support Project Connect, the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) has worked diligently to develop its Light Rail Implementation Plan. While ATP's revenue source was dedicated to ensure stability and predictability, the planning process has faced challenges with respect to cost increases driven by strong inflationary pressure, rising real estate prices and scope refinement.

ATP's aim for the Light Rail Implementation Plan is to maximize light rail coverage to the Austin community with available funding, while ensuring that stations and infrastructure are sized appropriately and there is a plan to expand the system with minimal disruption. ATP developed five options for the core light rail system to seek feedback from the Austin community.

In each of the five options, the segments not included in the initial phase would be part of a future phase. Additionally, while all five of the light rail options are expandable, they have different implications to future extensions as noted in this FAQ report.

As we near completion of the first phase, we will expend planning funds to analyze alternatives for the next phase of extension(s). Our planning efforts will engage community in evaluation of extension phases and associated timelines, which could vary from more near-term extensions one additional station at a time to more extensive extensions grouping multiple segments.

Frequently Asked Questions

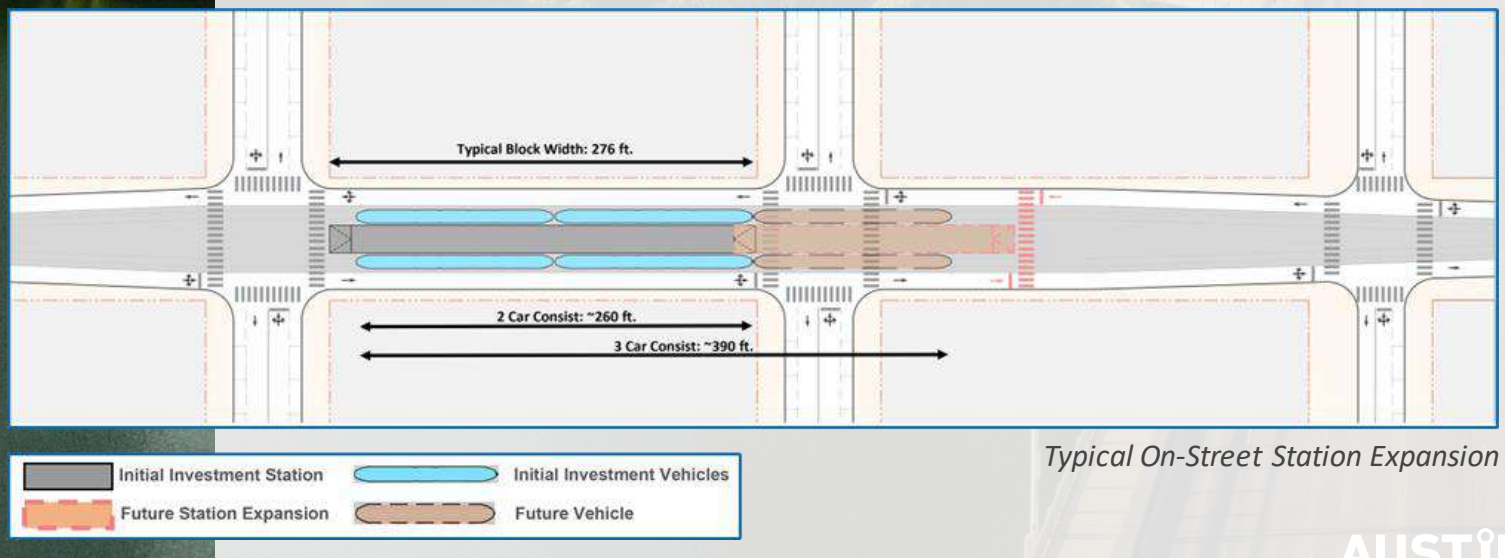
Question 1: Are there any constraints to accommodating future expansions?

A key consideration of expandability is to plan for future systemwide demand – to ensure that station locations and the street network can support light rail expansion with minimal impacts. Examples of this include the construction of shorter station platforms with the initial project, but planning and design to not preclude platform extensions in the future. It is also important to consider the configuration of track and real estate impacts to connect the south (along S Congress Ave) and east (along E Riverside Dr) lines of the light rail system south of Lady Bird Lake to minimize disruption to operations and property impacts during future construction.

Station locations and the street network will be designed to support both the initial and future light rail expansions. Considerations such as how large the stations platforms will be in the future and how the track from two lines intersect are key to ensuring that the system is sized correctly. While the stations may be extended as light rail extensions are constructed, the area and space needed for future stations and the area needed for future track will be preserved.

S 1st St. Crossing Option

Trinity St. Crossing Option



Typical On-Street Station Expansion

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Frequently Asked Questions

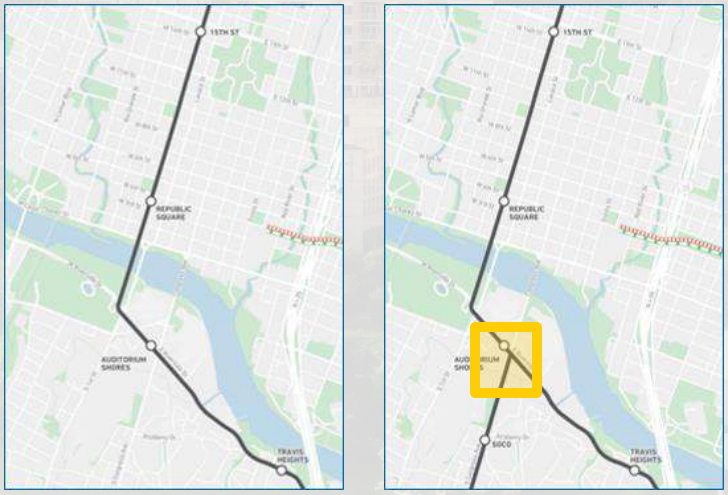
Question 1 (continued): Are there any constraints to accommodating future expansions?

It is also important to consider the configuration of track and real estate impacts to connect the south (along S Congress Ave) and east (along E Riverside Dr) lines of the light rail system south of Lady Bird Lake to minimize disruption to operations and property impacts during future construction.

Preserving the track and system infrastructure to connect and operate two lines today will minimize disruption to operations during the construction of future lines.

Building the initial light rail project that preserves this space, will be more cost effective and less disruptive as future extensions are constructed. It is ATP's goal that the existing operations will be maintained without disruption to service. This configuration will allow construction to occur away from the existing tracks.

S 1st St. Crossing Options



Trinity St. Crossing Options

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Frequently Asked Questions

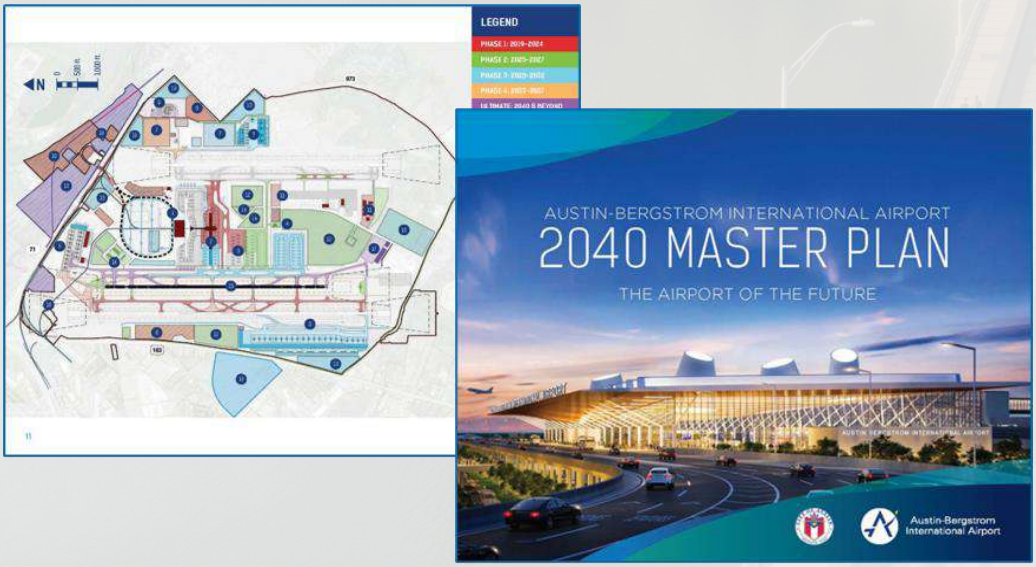
Question 2: What are the opportunities and challenges with integrating with future planned projects?

Some segments of the light rail options may require integration with other planned projects in the region, such as the expansion of the airport, TxDOT's I-35 Capital Express Central project, TxDOT's SH 71 frontage road extension toward the airport and the grade separation of the Red Line at Crestview.

Airport Connection

ATP and the City of Austin are working with the airport to coordinate a light rail connection and station at the airport. Convenient connections between the airport and destinations throughout Austin would improve the experience for airport employees, local travelers, and visitors by providing reliable service despite crowded conditions at terminals or traffic conditions. As the airport plans for expansion to meet current and future demands, close coordination on a light rail connection could provide opportunities for both projects to take advantage of efficiencies or achieve mutual goals, especially given the complexities and additional regulatory considerations associated with building transportation on or near airports. It is also possible that the light rail-airport connection segment could leverage additional funding opportunities that are intended to improve airport connections or intermodal connectivity.

ATP is also working with the City and TxDOT on integrated project solutions to optimize design, costs and funding for the segment of light rail near the airport. The segment of light rail east of US 183 must be closely integrated with TxDOT SH 71 frontage road extension plans to avoid conflicts between the planned projects.



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Frequently Asked Questions

Question 2 (continued): What are the opportunities and challenges with integrating with future planned projects?

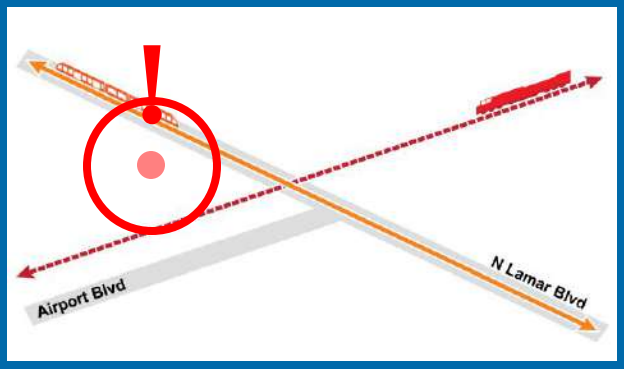
Crestview Connection

A potential Crestview light rail station at North Lamar and Airport Boulevard would provide an opportunity for transfers with the Red Line and the MetroRapid 801. However, there are technical challenges associated with the Red Line crossing North Lamar at street level, because light rail vehicles and systems may not interact with heavy rail vehicles used for Red Line commuter service or freight trains, which operate on the tracks at night.

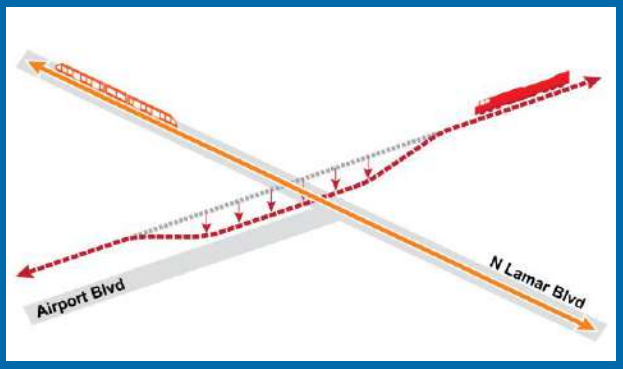
CapMetro is currently developing engineering plans for a future Red Line grade separation that would lower the existing commuter and freight rail line to an underpass beneath North Lamar and the future planned light rail crossing. This grade separation would improve conditions at the nearby traffic intersection for all users and enable on-street light rail service. The grade separation (underpass) is not currently funded, though CapMetro is actively seeking grant opportunities and funding partnerships for the project.

Without the Red Line grade separation, the light rail would have to be elevated at the Crestview Station to extend to the North Lamar Transit Center. Elevated light rail would introduce an overpass that would create a visual barrier and inhibit the development of a more pedestrian-oriented streetscape in this area. An elevated light rail station would require elevators, escalators and stairs for passengers to access the light rail.

LIGHT RAIL/RED LINE INTERSECTION



Constraint: Freight cannot cross Light Rail at the same level



Opportunity: Light Rail – At Grade; Red Line & Freight: Below-Grade (construction not yet funded)

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