

# PROJECT CONNECT STATUS REPORT

## ATP BOARD BRIEF | DECEMBER 2022

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 UPDATE

#### LIGHT RAIL

ATP continues its work with interdisciplinary and interagency technical focus teams to evaluate the feasibility of light rail optimization and cost-saving options.

The technical focus teams, created earlier this year, center on various aspects of the light rail program, including light rail phasing options, at-grade, and underground alternatives downtown, potential combined maintenance facility locations, and the optimization of stations, systems and vehicles, river crossing options, street cross sections, and construction technology and materials. Since last month, the teams have generated multiple options for feasible alternatives to be analyzed across the various evaluation criteria.

ATP will continue engaging community members through a series of focus group meetings to solicit feedback on the Evaluation Criteria used for the analysis of feasible alternatives and will use data collected to develop and recommend a phasing plan for light rail implementation.

In coming months, the project team will present options and recommendations for light rail operating segments and an updated Light Rail Implementation Plan is anticipated to be completed in Spring 2023.

Additionally, ATP continues its coordination with the FTA and the City of Austin to ensure both the project's compliance with NEPA policies and grant eligibility, as well as to facilitate any needed revisions to city code, criteria and permitting procedures.

#### FOUNDATIONAL ORDINANCE SUPPORTING PROJECT CONNECT PASSED BY CITY COUNCIL

On November 15, City Council unanimously approved an ordinance that lays an initial foundation to support the permitting and construction of Project Connect. This work was initiated through a resolution that directed staff to review City Code, Criteria Manuals and permitting procedures to identify impediments to Project Connect implementation.

The ordinance is not predicated on a specific design or scope, but rather creates a place for transit-specific regulations, expands permitting options, clarifies uses, and provides a programmatic approach to construction noise mitigation. As we learn more about design and construction in the coming months and years, additional amendments may be proposed.

## EQUITABLE TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (ETOD) POLICY UPDATE

As directed in [Resolution 20210610-093](#), City of Austin Housing and Planning Department staff are partnering with Capital Metro to deliver Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) to Austinites. Over the last year and a half, City staff, Capital Metro staff, and consultants have engaged community members, especially people of color, low-income earners, people with disabilities, non-English speakers, transit users, small business owners, and older adults, to understand current challenges and make recommendations regarding various tools to address those challenges and reach more equitable outcomes. The proposed ETOD Policy Plan includes the valuable input of these communities, ETOD goals, a policy toolkit, a typology of station areas in the Project Connect system to guide future decision-making, and an action plan with implementation steps over the short, medium, and long term.

On December 8, 2022, Council passed a resolution that directs staff to begin detailed station area planning at the North Lamar Transit Center and South Congress Transit Center station areas in partnership with CapMetro to begin applying the ETOD goals, typologies, and policy tools to key station areas. Staff is also directed to return to Council on February 23rd, 2022, with a resolution to accept the ETOD Policy Plan, initiate necessary amendments to City Code and the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan to incorporate ETOD policy and typologies and coordinate with CapMetro to incorporate ETOD into the Northeast Austin District Planning Process.

## METRO RAIL / METRORAPID

We'll start 2023 with some good news for the Project Connect program!

CapMetro has reached substantial completion of the Lakeline to Leander Red Line Improvement Project and looks forward to celebrating alongside the community and Project Connect partners. The ATP Board is invited to the ribbon cutting event Wednesday, January 25, at 10 am at Leander Station.

Work continues to progress on the MetroRail Red Line and the Pleasant Valley and Expo Center MetroRapid programs.

## PROJECT CONNECT COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

On December 12 and 15, the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) hosted four focus groups at the University Hills Branch and Cepeda Branch Public Libraries to gather community feedback on the light rail program. These focus groups allowed the Project Connect team to connect with priority populations, including Black, Hispanic and Spanish-speaking communities. The small group discussions of six to 14 individuals helped in building further trust and collecting meaningful input on the process of 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 were:

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

The feedback from these focus groups will help inform the technical team as they continue to look at light rail optimization and cost-saving options.

**ATP ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES**

As mentioned at the July ATP Board Meeting, ATP has modified its organizational structure to properly align us as an independent entity and fulfill our commitment to voters. In early fall, we launched national recruitment campaigns for a Chief Communications Officer—a new role responsible for standing up ATP’s communications capacities, including pivotal community engagement efforts to reach priority communities—as well as a Chief of Engineering & Construction to replace the former Chief Program Officer position—a crucial leadership position that will guide ATP’s program team on all aspects of Project Connect light rail.

ATP is pleased to announce that Julia Campbell has accepted the position of Chief Communications Officer, and Lindsay Wood has accepted the position of Chief of Engineering & Construction. Short bios are provided below:



**Julia Campbell, Chief Communications Officer** - Over the past 15 years, Julia has held several leadership positions at the University of Texas at Austin, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Austin. Julia brings significant knowledge of Austin’s diverse constituencies working on initiatives impacting housing, planning, transit, and economic development. She brings communications planning, community relations, marketing and media relations experience to our work, the ATP team, and our extended partnerships. Her background and expertise will help establish a strategic vision, partnerships, and activities to ensure a proactive external and internal communications program engaging the community, news media, key stakeholders, our partners at CapMetro and the City of Austin, the ATP Board, and ATP employees.



**Lindsay Wood, Chief of Engineering & Construction** - Lindsay was formerly the Associate Vice President of Transit & Rail for HNTB Corporation. Lindsay has been a member of the Project Connect light rail consultant team for years, building trusted relationships at Austin Transit Partnership, Capital Metro, and

the City of Austin, as well as with stakeholders locally and across the country. As her resume demonstrates, she has experience managing multi-disciplinary teams in her current and prior roles nationwide, and is no stranger to implementing large-scale transit projects on aggressive timeframes. Her vast knowledge of our project will allow us to seamlessly move the implementation of Project Connect forward in collaboration with the ATP team, our partners, and our community.

**CITY COUNCIL APPROVES ATP BOARD COMPOSITION AND APPOINTMENT PROCESS**

On December 8, 2022, Council approved a resolution which amends ATP’s articles of incorporation to add two additional community-at-large members to the five-member ATP Board, and to increase nomination process transparency for board members.

The CapMetro Board of Directors approved an item on its December 16, 2022, agenda recommending adoption of amendments to the Articles of Incorporation of the Austin Transit Partnership to allow the appointment of Alternate Capital Metro and Austin City Council Directors to serve in the absence of the appointed Director. The item noted above approved by Austin City Council will be considered as an item on the CapMetro Board agenda in January 2023.

Proposed changes to the Articles of Incorporation must be adopted by both the City Council and the CapMetro Board before taking effect.

**ANNUAL JOINT PARTNERSHIP MEETING**

On November 30, the ATP Board of Directors, Austin City Council, and CapMetro Board of Directors convened for the Annual Joint Partnership Meeting to present progress on the work across the multiple facets

of Project Connect, including MetroRapid, MetroRail (Red Line), the Light Rail Implementation Plan, and anti-displacement efforts. The joint meeting demonstrated how our focus on transparency and building trust with the community has been crucial in keeping our informative transit vision on track.



Presented at the joint meeting was the [2022 Project Connect Annual Management Report](#). The collaborative report by the Project Connect partners highlights the progress made and path forward.

The Austin Transit Partnership Board of Directors presents a special thanks to Mayor Steve Adler's dedication to the Board of Directors as the Board has navigated the initial startup activities and policy guidance since the organization's inception in December 2020. The Mayor currently serves as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors. The governing body took time at its last meeting of the year December 21, 2022, to provide special remarks for the Mayor's commitment to Project Connect and Austin Transit Partnership.



ATP Chair Veronica Castro de Barrera presented outgoing Austin City Council Members with a special presentation of appreciation at the Joint Partnership Meeting in November 2022. Council Member Ann Kitchen and Council Member Sabino Renteria also serve on the CapMetro Board of Directors.

### AECOM INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

December 8, was the [Greater Austin Chamber Business Awards](#) and AECOM was recognized with the 2022 Mobility Champion award for its Project Connect Summer Internship Program. The program was a collaboration among CapMetro, ATP, the City of Austin, Austin ISD, HNTB and AECOM. It introduced high school students to diverse professional STEM careers including planning, architecture, designing, engineering, science and program and construction management.

