

PROJECT CONNECT STATUS REPORT

ATP BOARD BRIEF | FEBRUARY 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 – AUSTIN TRANSIT PARTNERSHIP

In the past month, findings from the technical and planning data analysis of light rail optimization and cost-saving options were shared among ATP, CapMetro, and the City of Austin staff for feedback and additional consideration. This project team feedback continued to support the evaluation of factors such as cost, right-of-way, ridership, travel time, bus network, socioeconomic status, demographic data, and alignment with the initial implementation plan while continuing to prioritize safety, accessibility, and integration with the existing transportation network.

Additionally, input collected during focus groups in December and January was incorporated into the planning team data, which helped weigh data related to mobility and customer experience, access to opportunities, environmental benefits, and land use and housing.

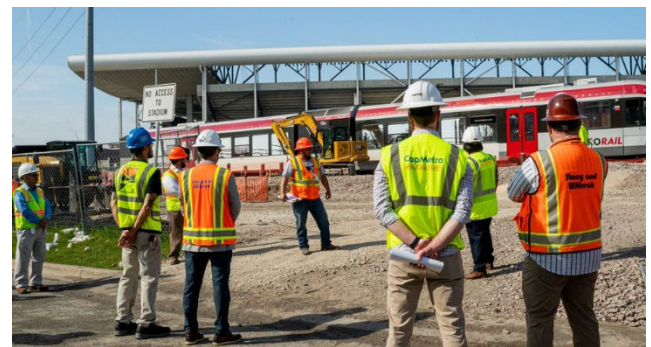
ATP will begin to share light rail options later this month with the public and provide opportunities for the community to submit feedback. Following this public comment period, an updated Light Rail Implementation Plan is anticipated to be completed late Spring 2023. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 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 with regard to permitting procedures and city code amendments is also still ongoing.

The following information related to CapMetro projects has been submitted by CapMetro leadership.

METRORAIL – CAPMETRO

CapMetro celebrated the on-time and on-budget completion of the CapMetro Rail Red Line Improvements: Lakeline to Leander Double Tracking Project in January 2023. The project provides resiliency for the Red Line commuter rail, providing benefits to CapMetro and Red Line customers. CapMetro will continue to collaborate with the community and the City of Leander on future improvements and the train



schedule.

(Pictured: Feb. 22, 2023, CapMetro tour of the McKalla Station construction site today for both board members and media)

In February, CapMetro hosted members of the CapMetro Board and Austin FC on a tour of ongoing construction at McKalla Station. The project includes many improvements – the station itself, double tracking, four quiet zones, significant investment in drainage improvements, and enhanced connectivity for people who walk and bike. The construction is ongoing as planned, and is anticipated to be completed in time for the 2024 Austin FC season!

METRORAPID – CAPMETRO

In February, CapMetro provided an update to the community and stakeholders regarding the Rapid project schedules. The Expo Center and Pleasant Valley routes are anticipated to open in 2025. This is significantly later than we originally estimated due to supply chain delays and the need for end-of-line charging stations for electric vehicles – we are also using the time to also expand and improve the station design to increase access for other mobility choices, such as shared use paths for bikes and pedestrians. While the schedule delay is significant and disappointing to CapMetro and the community, the enhanced project design will better connect the community and was the most cost-efficient path forward.

CapMetro is planning a celebration of the significant federal investment in the Expo Center and Pleasant Valley lines for March 11 and is looking forward to celebrating with the community, our partners, and the FTA.

The following information related to City of Austin has been submitted by City of Austin leadership.

PUBLIC PROJECTS TEAM & PERMITTING PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS – CITY OF AUSTIN

The City’s Development Services Department recently launched its Public Projects team which features a dedicated review staff for publicly funded projects. In addition to review, this staff will provide collaborative guidance during the design phase of projects to reduce design rework and ensure permissibility. This new team will provide efficiency in the permitting process for public projects, to reduce the timeline between design completion and permit issuance.

This process is currently being piloted with permanent supportive housing projects.

The City has been coordinating with CapMetro on the review process and timeline for the MetroRapid Park and Ride site plan applications. The site plan applications will be reviewed by this Public Projects Team with the Project Connect Office providing pre-submittal reviews and applicant support.

UTILITY RULES OF PRACTICE – CITY OF AUSTIN

The Utility Rules of Practice (UROP), a significant first step in utility coordination, has been signed off by ATP, City utilities, and affected departments. The UROP contains methodology for reviewing and approving potential utility conflicts along the light rail alignments. It documents how to handle common utility conflict situations, defines commonly used terms, and cites City and other agency standards to guide related infrastructure. This document will aid both the designers of the light rail and City reviewers.

EQUITABLE TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (ETOD) UPDATE – CITY OF AUSTIN/CAPMETRO

Station area vision planning, led by CapMetro, for the North Lamar Transit Center (NLTC) and South Congress Transit Center (SCTC), has begun including a series of four virtual, bilingual workshops, six virtual and one in-person focus group, and an online survey for capturing similar content to what is being collected in the workshops. The last virtual workshop is for SCTC on March 1, 2023, at 6:30 pm. Interested individuals can sign up for a workshop and take the survey, which is open through March 21, 2023, at:

projectconnect.com/etod. City Council is holding a special joint called meeting of the Mobility and Housing and Planning Committees on Thursday, March 2. Committee members will be briefed on ETOD planning and policies, including the draft ETOD Policy Plan and anti-displacement funding. City Council is scheduled to take action on the draft ETOD Policy Plan at their next meeting on March 9.

PROJECT CONNECT COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS – AUSTIN TRANSIT PARTNERSHIP

In December and January, the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) Community Engagement team hosted 11 focus groups, with a total of 121 participants, as part of the effort to gather community feedback on the light

rail program. The team received impactful and valuable comments from underrepresented communities, including Black, persons with disabilities (ADA), and Hispanic and Spanish-speaking communities.



(Pictured: Lonny Stern, Public Involvement Manager, leads a focus group discussion with Lakeside Apartments community)

Over the last several months, focus group participants helped provide meaningful feedback on what the essential community values are for building light rail in Austin. Insights on Project Connect and the light rail train system were collected from these community-focused conversations. When participants were asked what is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about the words “light rail” the top theme that was mentioned were the words “fast” or “speed.”

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?” – Desire to increase public transit access points in Austin to serve more communities.

- Affordability Benefits – “Are we serving existing and planned affordable housing units?” – Access to affordable housing is an important consideration for a future transit system in Austin.
- Demographic Data – “How many groups, including transit-dependent, Black/Indigenous/People of Color, and low-income populations have access to the light rail train, to ensure the system is equitable for all?” – Access to public transportation in low-income communities is an important consideration for inclusive future transit.

Another exercise in the focus groups helped identify what key destinations were important to the Austin community. Access to Hospitals/Medical, Shopping, and Schools were participants’ top choices. The Hospitals/Medical category includes things such as doctor’s offices, urgent care, emergency room, etc. Shopping encompassed not only access to shopping centers such as malls, but also the grocery store and pharmacies.

Critical to the focus group effort was capturing how this outreach helps shape the design and advancement of Project Connect’s light rail program. Following the conclusion of the focus groups, the community engagement team provided data collected during the community values exercise to the planning team to incorporate into their analysis of feasible alternatives for the first light rail investment in Austin. The feedback from focus group participants helped amplify the most selected community values during this analysis and contributed to the weighing of the planning team data. This planning data is a crucial tool for the Project Connect team as they continue to look at light rail optimization and cost-saving options.

You can view a full report of the findings from the ATP Light Rail Focus Groups at publicinput.com/library.

ATP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMMUNITY FORUM RECAP

At the January 27, 2023, ATP Board Meeting, the Board of Directors indicated its interest in presenting Greg Canally as their candidate for Executive Director. The Board also indicated that ATP staff should conduct community engagement related to the candidacy of Mr. Canally and bring an item back to the Board to consider at a future ATP Board meeting.



(Pictured: Feb. 15 Community Forum at ATP Headquarters)

Chair Veronica Castro de Barrera and Board Member Juan Garza served as the Board of Director co-leads throughout the engagement process, maintaining a presence throughout the community engagement activities and serving as the contacts on behalf of the ATP Board of Directors. Two community forums on February 16 (hosted at ATP Headquarter, 203 Colorado St) and February 22 (hosted at Mendez Recreation Center) offered a Question & Answer Session with Interim Executive Director Greg Canally who was asked to share his thoughts about Austin Transit Partnership’s mission, the partnerships crucial to advance Project Connect and most importantly the community’s role that informs ATP’s work and guides the overall investment of Project Connect. These question-and-answer sessions also provided an opportunity for attendees to ask questions and were recorded so that interested stakeholders not present at the forums may also access the information online. Audio recordings and transcripts for both Forums are available online at atptx.org/leadership. Click on the Executive Director recruitment button for this information as well as more information overall on the executive director recruitment process.



(Pictured: Community member raises a question during Feb. 22 Community Forum held at Mendez Recreation Center)

Additional stakeholder meetings included:

- Meeting with the Community Advisory Committee Governance Workgroup.
- Meeting with business community leaders.
- Meeting with ATP Employees, a roundtable discussion with Greg where employees were also invited to participate in offering feedback related to the position.

The summary of the engagement efforts is published online as an additional backup to Item No. 8.1 on the March 1 ATP Board Meeting Agenda.

‘HUG’ PARTNERSHIP IN-PERSON KICK-OFF – AUSTIN TRANSIT PARTNERSHIP

Members of world-renowned architectural and urban design firms HKS, UNStudio, and Gehl—referred to as ‘HUG’— met with ATP teams the week of February 13 for a series of in-person events and activities to kick off the partnership. The ATP Board approved a contract with HUG for systemwide architecture, urban design, and engineering services at the November 16, 2022, ATP Board meeting. A highlight of the visit was a bus tour around Austin to envision how they might accurately capture the people and spirit of Austin in their future designs.



(Pictured: ATP's Senior Vice President of Architecture & Urban Design, Paulo Faria, and members of the 'HUG team')

The 'HUG' group will design a human-centric transit experience true to Austin's culture and landscape. The team comprises architects and planners with collaborative mindsets and local knowledge. Their global infrastructure expertise includes similar award-winning projects in Doha, Los Angeles, Melbourne, The Netherlands, and Beijing.

ATP AWARDED GFOA'S DISTINGUISHED BUDGET PRESENTATION AWARD

On February 17, the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) announced that ATP was the recipient of the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. The accolade reflects the commitment of the organization and staff to meeting the highest principles of sound governmental budgeting.

Additionally, ATP's Finance Department was awarded an individual performance commendation—the Certificate of Recognition for Budget Presentation—for their role in achieving the GFOA award. Congratulations to the Finance Team on this tremendous accomplishment!