

PROJECT CONNECT STATUS REPORT

ATP BOARD BRIEF | SEPTEMBER 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 to develop an Updated Light Rail Implementation Plan to ensure the light rail program's technical feasibility, community support and eligibility for federal funding. In late August, ATP held a series of Project Development workshops with the City of Austin, CapMetro and Project Connect consulting teams to review and discuss technical data related to program optimization and cost saving ideas, along with associated opportunities and challenges.

The groups came up with nearly 500 ideas for project components that could be changed, reduced, removed, or deferred. The next steps are to continue the technical evaluation of these ideas and validate the feasibility through interdisciplinary workgroups that will develop viable alternatives that meet financial, community and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) criteria. Other technical efforts to advance the light rail program continue, including collaboration with the City of Austin on items such as betterment criteria and permitting ordinance requirements, as well as establishing our project management and controls systems. We are also continuing coordination with the FTA as lead federal agency for the light rail projects. ATP has continued to provide program updates shared at the July 20 Board meeting to community stakeholders and aims to develop a community engagement and public involvement plan going forward that is informed by the community and broad program partnerships.

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT EFFORTS

The Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC), the entity charged with allocating the \$300 million anti-displacement funding, has continued to advance funding approvals. On September 1, the AHFC Board approved funds slated to go toward housing assistance as part of the Project Connect Anti-Displacement Community Acquisition Program (ADCAP) and the City's Ownership and Rental Housing Development Assistance programs (OHDA/RHDA). Additional funds will go to the AHFC Board for review at the end of this month.

The City of Austin Housing and Planning Department presented an update related to the progress made to date on expenditure of the initial allocation in anti-displacement funding for Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022. The funding was deployed through several programs and initiatives to include: land acquisition; ownership and rental housing development assistance; and a community-initiated solutions program.



The update from the City of Austin indicated that beginning in Fiscal Year 2023, budget priorities for the anti-displacement funding will be set every three years. Community engagement initiatives to prioritize budget allocations for investments over the next three years will begin on September 21, 2022, at 5:30 PM at the South Austin Recreation Center. This information is available in a [memorandum](#) from the Housing and Planning Department, which is available on the City of Austin’s website.



CAPMETRO: METRORAPID BUS PROJECTS

CapMetro is managing design and construction of the MetroRapid Expo Center and Pleasant Valley Bus Projects, which are funded with about \$35M from Austin Transit Partnership and the remaining \$65M from Small Starts grants that are under negotiation with FTA. Grants agreements for the federal funding are expected to be executed in November. Work on the [Expo](#) and [Pleasant Valley](#) lines continues to progress. On the ground, contractors have completed construction of nine stations – six on the Expo line and three on Pleasant Valley – and task orders for seven additional stations are in the works. Both lines are expected to be ready to ride in 2023.

PARK & RIDES

The Expo Center and Goodnight Ranch Park & Rides are each at the 90% design stage, and plats for both locations are under review with the City of Austin. The public use zoning case for the Expo Park & Ride was approved, and eminent domain and Parks & Wildlife public hearings for the Expo Center Park & Ride acquisition were held at the August 29 CapMetro Board Meeting with no comments received. In addition to providing parking spaces and other amenities for the community, the Park & Rides will provide charging locations for the buses along the routes.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ATP accepted a Core Values Award at the IAP2 Conference in Banff, Canada on September 15 for excellence in public participation. As part of the award, the team developed a 3-minute video about the community engagement efforts for Project Connect, including cameos from Board Chair Veronica Castro de Barrera and community members who have been instrumental to the success of the Project Connect community engagement efforts. The Community Advisory Committee and other actively engaged leaders in the Austin community acknowledged in the video for their forward thinking public involvement throughout the pandemic, which led to first ever practices that transformed community engagement.

[Click here to watch the video.](#)



CITY OF AUSTIN PROJECT CONNECT ORDINANCE

The City of Austin has initiated a review of its existing development regulations, which are primarily oriented toward vertical, site-specific development. Project Connect is a unique program that is the first of its kind for Austin and requires greater flexibility and modified regulations to implement the miles of linear rail investments. Understanding the challenge, City Council passed a resolution on October 29, 2021, directing staff to review existing code, criteria and permitting processes to identify impediments to implementation and operation of Project Connect and to bring forward recommendations. Staff has developed a proposed foundational ordinance that addresses needs that are apparent today and will benefit the program as it proceeds.

City Boards and Commissions presentations are planned starting September 21 through October 2022. City Council action is anticipated in December.

ATP BOARD VACANCY APPLICATION UPDATE

Fourteen applications were received for the ATP Community Director of Community Planning or Sustainability board member position, vacated at the end of June 2022. Information was reviewed and a summary of review results was distributed to the Nominating Committee on September 14, 2022, for Committee review and to commence the interview process. In accordance with ATP's Articles of Incorporation, applicants should have at least 10 years cumulative experience across one or more of the following fields: urban planning, community planning, equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD), sustainability and/or environmental planning, along with three to five years' experience with community engagement, and Austin residency. The Nominating Committee is expected to interview candidates this month with an appointment anticipated in October or November. The new Board Member will also serve as the ATP Board liaison to the [Planning, Sustainability, Equity and DBE Advisory Committee \(PSEC\)](#)