



AUSTIN LIGHT RAIL

Frequently Asked Questions: Federal Process: National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

January 2024

INTRODUCTION

In November 2020, Austin voters approved a referendum ("Prop A") to provide a dedicated revenue stream to fund investments in Project Connect, a program of transit improvements, including Austin Light Rail. The Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) is the independent Local Government Corporation responsible for the overall implementation of the Project Connect program and the day-to-day implementation, planning, financing, execution and oversight of Austin Light Rail.

AUSTIN AT A GLANCE

Austin's population grew by nearly 50% between 2000 and 2022. Today, it is the 10th largest city in the nation.



1,716,289

Austin regional population in 2010



2,421,115

Austin regional population in 2022



4,671,000

Estimated Austin regional population in 2045



68 hrs

Avg. annual delay for Austin commuters in 2019, **2nd worst in Texas**



25%

of Austinites spent more than **50% of their income on housing** in 2021

NEED FOR AUSTIN LIGHT RAIL



Support growth

of and connectivity to regional activity centers



Increase transportation

network capacity to meet increasing travel demand



Sustainably support

Austin's population and economic growth



Improve transit access

between affordable housing and jobs

Station At Pleasant Valley Road- Artist Conceptual Rendering

WHAT IS LIGHT RAIL?

Light rail is an electric train system that:

- Is used in metropolitan areas with stations spaced roughly one-half mile to a mile apart
- Generally operates within existing streets in a rail-only "lane." Traffic signals will be programmed to facilitate the travel of the train through intersections
- Serves as part of the overall transit network, connecting people to key destinations where they live, work, and play to improve mobility, connectivity, affordability, and sustainability



INTRODUCTION

ATP, City of Austin, and CapMetro adopted the [Light Rail Implementation Plan](#) in June 2023. The Implementation Plan recommends the first phase of light rail to be implemented as on-street light rail from 38th St. on Guadalupe St. to Oltorf St. on S. Congress Ave., and to Yellow Jacket on E. Riverside Dr., crossing Lady Bird Lake at Trinity Street. This phase will connect the community to key destinations, jobs, and each other. It will also support future transit network expansion, so light rail will continue to serve Austinites as our city grows. With our Implementation Plan in place, ATP is now working to advance the project for federal grant funding and environmental clearance.

PHASE 1



9.8 MILES OF NEW
LIGHT RAIL



Access to
136K+
CURRENT JOBS

200K+
FUTURE JOBS

**PROP A FUNDING STREAM
PROVIDES FOR:**



Capital
Construction

+



Allowance for
Inflation



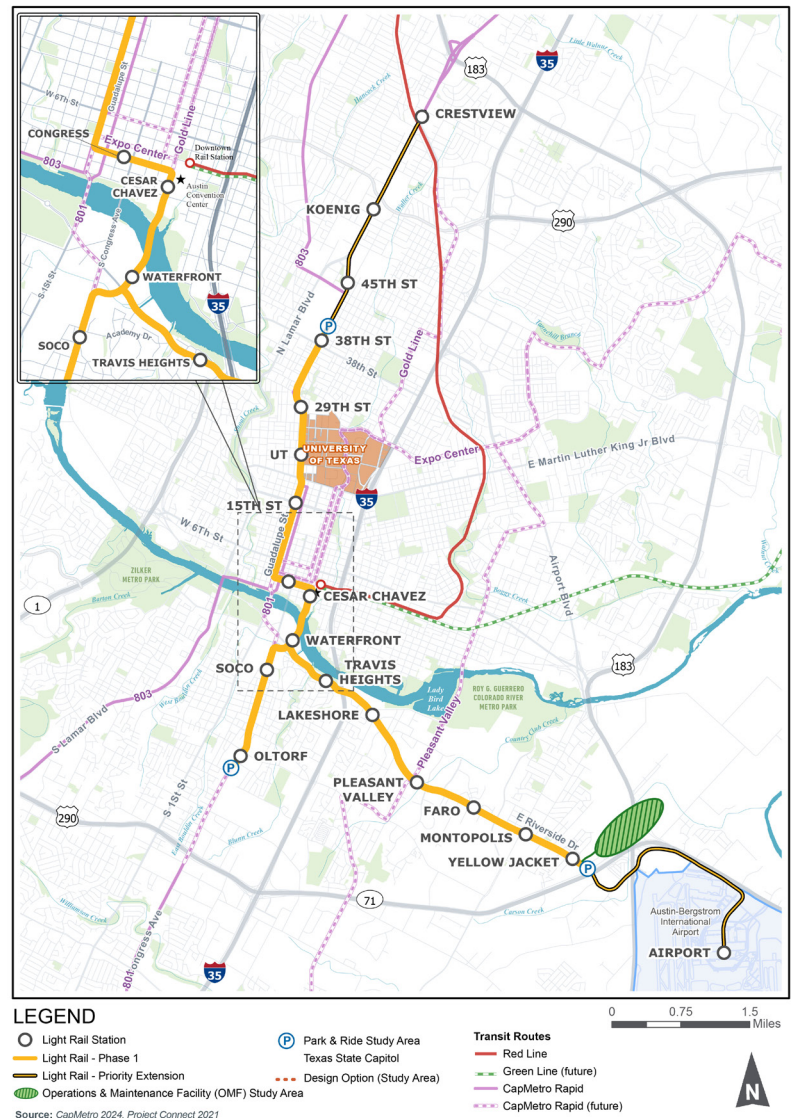
Operations and
Maintenance

PRIORITY EXTENSIONS



Could be accelerated if additional
funding becomes available

Austin Light Rail Implementation Plan (Adopted June 2023)



INTRODUCTION

DESIGN PROGRESSION SINCE JUNE 2023



Definition of right-of-way needs

Understanding of at-grade requirements in Downtown

Requirements for end of line locations

Analysis of utility relocation needs

Continuously looking to reduce impacts on adjacent properties



Systems and power needs to operate light rail

Analysis of system elements needed and coordination with Austin Energy on sources of power



Consideration of station access and locations based on technical constraints and community input

Analysis of location and user experience around station areas

As we advance design and environmental analysis, along with receiving continuous community feedback, a set of design options are being considered for evaluation in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS).

EVALUATING DESIGN OPTIONS



STATION LOCATIONS

- Evaluating and optimizing station locations
- Minimum of 13 stations or maximum of 16 stations

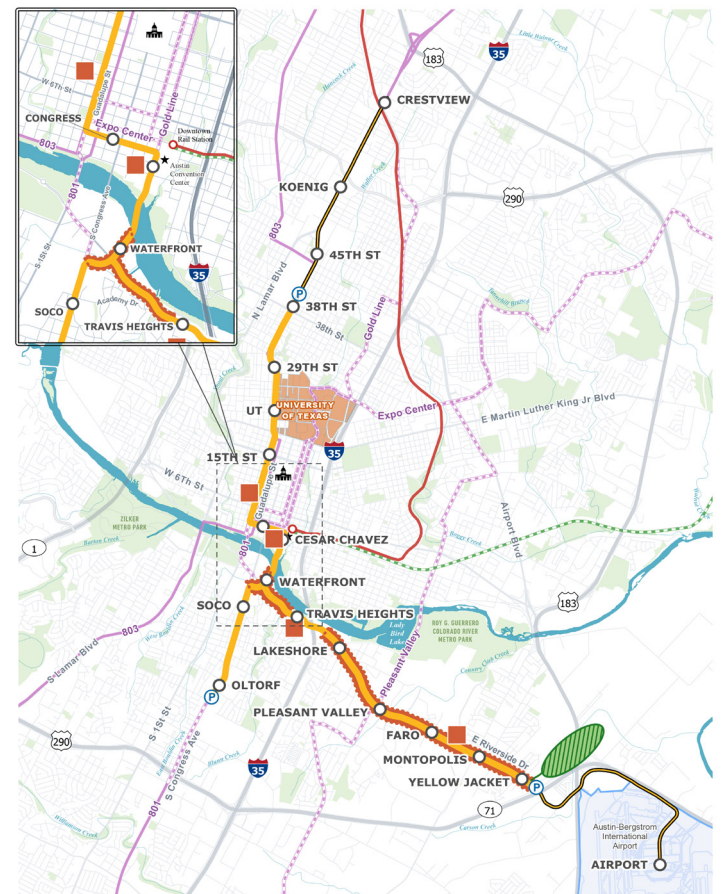


MULTIMODAL INTEGRATION

- Study area to extend light rail bridge south of Lady Bird Lake
- Study area to locate bike and pedestrian facilities next to light rail, east of I-35 (center-running) along Riverside Drive

As of January 2024, the environmental analysis and Draft EIS for Austin Light Rail will only consider the funded Phase 1 project, and not the priority extensions. Should additional funding become available for the extensions, ATP will work with the FTA to address their inclusion in the project and NEPA process.

Austin Light Rail Advancing Design



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Design Option (Study Area) | Light Rail Station | Park & Ride Study Area | Red Line |
| Design Option (Future Extension) | Light Rail - Phase 1 | Texas State Capitol | Green Line (future) |
| Light Rail - Priority Extension | Operations & Maintenance Facility (OMF) | CapMetro Rapid (future) | |

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA)

ABOUT

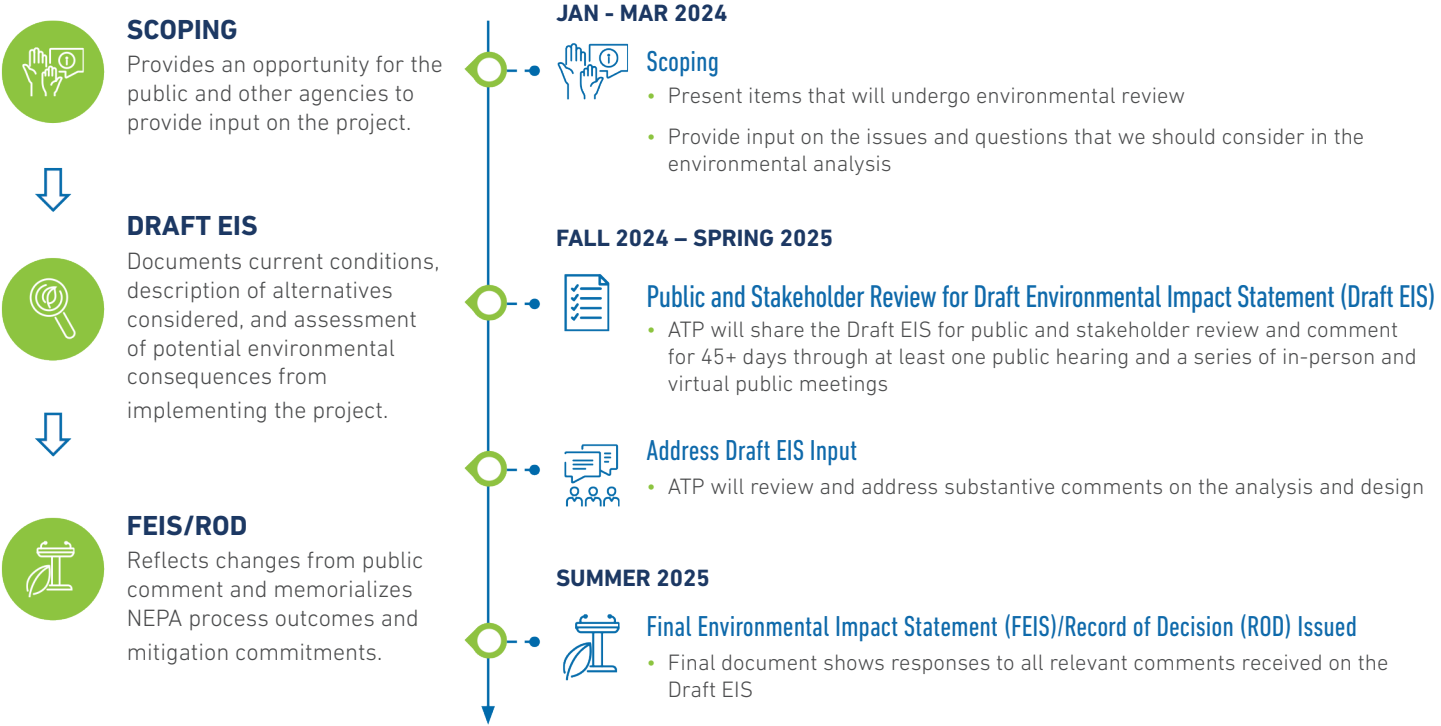
Enacted into law in 1970, NEPA is a federally mandated public planning process for projects involving federal funds or federal involvement.

REQUIREMENT

NEPA requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental considerations into their planning and decision making through a systematic and interdisciplinary approach.

Compliance with NEPA is required for Austin Light Rail because we are pursuing federal grant funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

KEY STEPS IN THE NEPA PROCESS



NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA)

WHAT DOES AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) ANALYZE?

► The EIS will evaluate both a Build Alternative and a No-Action Alternative.

Compare proposed project to a baseline that allows public and decision makers to assess effects of approving the project versus the effects of not approving project.

No-Action Alternative includes existing and committed improvements to the regional transportation network that are expected to be operational by 2045.



Physical and Natural Environment

- Air Quality
- Soils and Geology
- Water Quality
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Energy
- Hazardous Materials
- Noise and Vibration
- Temporary Construction Impacts



Human Environment

- Environmental Justice (EJ)
- Safety and Security
- Land Use and Zoning
- Socioeconomics and Economic Development
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Land Acquisitions and Displacements



Cultural Environment

- Cultural, Historic, and Archeological
- Parks and Recreational
- Visual Quality
- Neighborhood and Community Resources

FAQ – NEPA PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

QUESTION 1

What federal processes are required for Austin Light Rail and why are they needed?

The Austin Light Rail project will pursue federal funding partnership through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Capital Investment Grant (CIG) New Starts program. One of the requirements to receive federal grant funding is to comply with NEPA. There are several steps and documentation requirements for both CIG and NEPA. In early 2024, ATP will advance the NEPA process as described in further detail in this FAQ. The work to advance CIG will proceed simultaneously in 2024.

QUESTION 2

What is NEPA?

NEPA stands for National Environmental Policy Act, which requires any agency seeking federal funds to incorporate environmental analysis and considerations into their planning and decision making. Compliance with NEPA is required for Austin Light Rail because ATP is pursuing federal grant funding from the FTA. The FTA has determined that an EIS—which is a comprehensive document that will analyze the environmental considerations associated with the construction and operation of the light rail project—will be prepared to assess Austin Light Rail. ATP will support the FTA in the preparation of the EIS. Completion of the NEPA process is required before final design and construction activities can begin for Austin Light Rail.

To comply with NEPA, the FTA and ATP must follow three primary steps: (1) Scoping, which includes gathering public input on the issues and topics the FTA and ATP will analyze in the EIS; (2) Preparing, distributing, and gathering public comment on a Draft EIS (which will provide all the analysis prepared to support the decision-making process); and (3) Preparing a FEIS, this will include revisions made after the public comment period and responses to all substantive comments.

The issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) from the FTA concludes the NEPA process and documents all mitigation commitments that were identified for the project.

QUESTION 3

What is Scoping and how will input be used?

Scoping occurs early in the NEPA process. During this phase, with environmental analysis underway, members of the public can comment on the range of issues and topics the Draft EIS will evaluate. ATP will host a series of events to understand the key questions and concerns that people have that the Draft EIS should investigate.

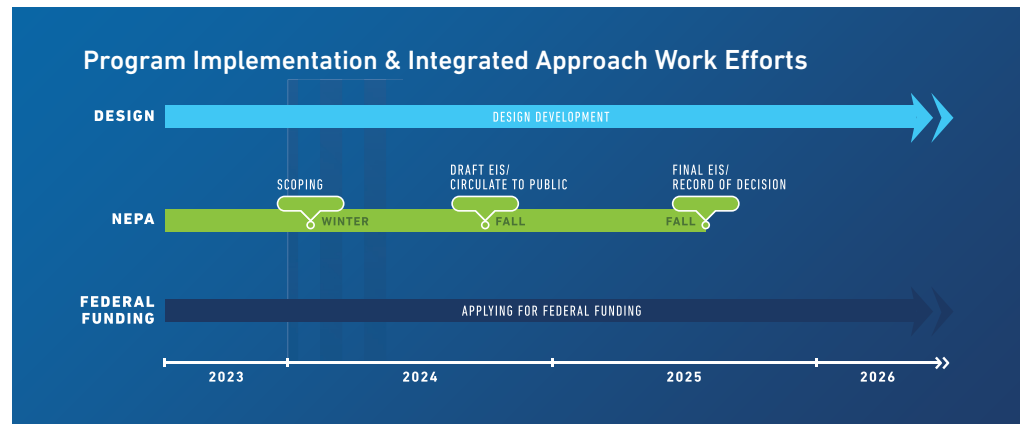
FAQ – NEPA PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

QUESTION 4

What is the timeline for the NEPA Process and next steps?

The Austin Light Rail Implementation Plan that was approved in June 2023 defined the project that will be advanced for further study as part of the NEPA process. The team is working with the FTA and our project partners to conduct those studies. We expect to share a Draft EIS with the public later in 2024.

For NEPA, only preliminary engineering level of design is needed to assess project impacts. Final design and construction schedules will be informed by ATP's contracting strategy.



QUESTION 5

Will the impact of overlapping construction with other regional projects be evaluated?

Yes, light rail construction will take place at the same time as other major mobility and infrastructure projects throughout Central Texas over the next 10 years. ATP, CapMetro, the City of Austin, Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA), Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and other agencies will be closely coordinating construction schedules and outreach plans to keep our city moving. All these entities are jointly partnering in a Construction Partnership Program to create a centralized source of coordination and informing the public regarding planned construction for major public projects throughout the city.

QUESTION 6

Will traffic analysis be conducted and when will the results be shared?

Traffic analysis will be conducted as part of the environmental review. Traffic modeling and analysis will be presented as part of the Draft EIS.

FAQ – DEFINING THE PROJECT

QUESTION 7

What level of design has been completed and when will it be shared for community input?

ATP is still in early, or preliminary, engineering design. The “base design” currently under development is conceptual and intended to identify the project requirements and footprint. In addition, the conceptual engineering plans will be shared for community input as part of the public review period of the Draft EIS. Following the Draft EIS, ATP will continue to advance the engineering design work and will contract with a designer to prepare the final plans used for construction. Final design and construction schedules will be informed by ATP’s contracting approach.

QUESTION 8

What is a design option and how were they identified? How will they be evaluated?

The NEPA process looks at two alternatives: the proposed project (or Build Alternative) and a scenario where the project isn’t built (the No-Action Alternative). The Draft EIS will compare the impacts of the two alternatives to help distinguish what changes would result from the proposed project. For Austin Light Rail, the Draft EIS will evaluate a Build Alternative that includes a set of design options. These design options include various station locations and multimodal integration concepts that consider how light rail, buses, bicycles, and pedestrians interact. These options were identified based on public input received during prior planning efforts and the analysis of technical constraints and opportunities during preliminary engineering. ATP will evaluate all alternatives and design options equally taking technical feasibility, environmental impacts, and community feedback into consideration.

QUESTION 9

Will park and rides be planned at the Phase 1 end points? If so, where will they be located?

Parking and transit connections are planned at all three end of line locations. End of line facilities and specific sites will be evaluated as part of the NEPA process.

FAQ – REAL ESTATE

QUESTION 10

Will additional real estate be needed for Austin Light Rail?

Major public transportation projects like Austin Light Rail sometimes require the acquisition of private property. ATP's goal is to minimize property impacts as much as possible while meeting requirements of the light rail system.

When acquisitions are necessary, ATP will follow all local, state, and federal laws and regulations while working with property owners to address their unique needs, minimize hardships, and answer questions.

An initial assessment of ROW impacts and real estate needs is being conducted as part of the preliminary engineering and environmental review and will be presented as part of the Draft EIS later in 2024.

Additional information regarding Real Estate guidance can be found on our website here:

<https://www.atptx.org/real-estate-information/>

For more information about your rights as a property owner in the case of proposed acquisition, please see the related links below. All real estate acquisition will comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition for Federal and Federally Assisted Programs (Uniform Act).

[Uniform Act \(PDF\)](#)

[Texas Landowners Bill of Rights \(English\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Texas Landowners Bill of Rights \(Spanish\) \(PDF\)](#)

Additionally, a mitigation and monitoring program will be developed during the NEPA process to address potential impacts of the project on properties along the project alignment, particularly during construction. An assessment of the potential impacts and proposed mitigation measures will be included in the Draft EIS and available for public review and comment. Further information about the timing of construction in locations along the corridor will be available during final design, which occurs after the NEPA process.

If you have questions about potential impacts along the Austin Light Rail corridor, we encourage you to reach out to us by email at input@atptx.org or by phone at 512-389-7590.

FAQ – OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE FACILITY

QUESTION 11

What is a light rail Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF), where will it be located, and how was the location identified?

An OMF is required to provide necessary functions for the operation and maintenance of the light rail system. These can include storage of light rail vehicles (trains) when not in use; facilities for inspection and maintenance of the vehicles; maintenance of way (MOW) facilities for storage and maintenance of light rail materials and equipment; administrative spaces and facilities for light rail operations and maintenance staff; and light rail operations control center facilities.

The area proposed to be studied for the OMF is located along Airport Commerce Dr. near US 183 and SH 71. A study area will be evaluated in NEPA, which is larger than the space required for the facilities. The study area for the OMF currently contains commercial uses (such as manufacturing) and is zoned to prevent residential use because of its proximity to the airport.

An evaluation to identify possible locations for the OMF was performed based on a first tier of selection criteria that considered the sites close to the light rail, a minimum of 40 acres in size, and a mostly flat site.

The potential locations were also considered utilizing a second tier of additional criteria that included compatibility with surrounding land uses; avoids residential displacements; minimizes impacts to properties and businesses; is not under development by others; would accommodate future expansion opportunities (if feasible); avoids or minimizes environmental impacts; and cost (property + cost to build).

This resulted in 21 potential areas to locate the OMF that could meet minimum criteria requirements. The options were evaluated and narrowed down to nine locations that best met the criteria, such as compatible use with adjacent properties, proximity to the light rail alignment, site development challenges, etc. Location options were then further narrowed down to those within the limits of the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 alignment options presented for community feedback in spring 2023. The North Lamar Transit Center and Airport Commerce areas were the two final locations considered. The adoption of the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 alignment led to the location in the vicinity of Airport Commerce Dr. to be recommended for continuing study in the Draft EIS.

The OMF is part of the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 project and as such will be included in the NEPA process. Like the light rail route itself, the OMF is subject to the same level of environmental analysis, considerations, and determination.