

PROJECT CONNECT STATUS REPORT

ATP BOARD BRIEF | SEPTEMBER 2024



In November 2020, 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 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

» Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Implementation

ATP continues to advance activities related to Austin Light Rail Phase 1 to meet federal requirements. As the project continues through Project Development, ATP is working with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), our partners, and Cooperating Agencies to prepare the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. ATP will publish the DEIS later this year for community review and feedback. The team continues to advance the early base design that will accompany the document.

In accordance with the federal Capital Investment Grant Program, ATP submitted a project evaluation and rating application to the Federal Transit Administration for Austin Light Rail Phase 1 — another key milestone in the federal process. FTA will review and assess the anticipated project rating and viability of projects to advance through the grant program and support annual funding recommendations to Congress. In advance of ATP's submittal, representatives from the FTA federal grants team conducted a weeklong tour in Texas, stopping in Austin where ATP had the opportunity to provide an update on the light rail program and provide a field tour of the project.



ATP staff and FTA representatives pose for a photo in the board room and tour the ALR alignment via bus.

In collaboration with the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, ATP submitted the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 project for inclusion in the CAMPO 2050 Regional Transportation Plan. Every 5 years, CAMPO updates this regional plan to anticipate transportation needs for the next 25 years and to forecast transportation funding. The project's Priority Extensions (38th Street Station to Crestview, and Yellow Jacket Station to the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport) are also requested to be included in the CAMPO 2050 Regional Transportation Plan.

» Budget Adoption Update

On September 18, ATP staff will request Board approval of the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget, which encompasses an appropriation of \$20 million for the Anti-Displacement Fund, an appropriation of \$10 million for the Light Rail Capital Fund, a spend plan for the Light Rail Capital Fund totaling \$116 million, and a staffing plan that includes 66 full-time equivalent positions.

The \$116 million spend plan will support ATP's continued progress through project development and includes \$78 million for existing professional services contracts encompassing program management support, environmental analysis and regulatory compliance, conceptual engineering, architectural design, and real estate services, as well as the delivery partner solicitation. The remaining \$38 million of the FY25 spend plan will fund administrative costs associated with light rail management and oversight, including ATP personnel, partner agency support, and business support contracts, such as outside legal counsel, facility lease, IT support, marketing and communications, and financial advisory services.

» Community Advisory Committee Update

On July 25, 2024, the Project Connect Community Advisory Committee (CAC) passed a resolution at their monthly meeting commending ATP staff for the superior community outreach work to determine the scope of the Environmental Impact Statement. The committee looks forward to community outreach associated with the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which will be released to the public for comment in the fall.

The FY2025 budget process, which started in July with the proposal of the FY2025 Proposed Budget, included a budget presentation to the CAC on August 8, 2024. The CAC had several budget recommendations for ATP, the City and CapMetro to consider as each budget proposal makes its way to the respective governing body for adoption. The recommendations are outlined below:

- CapMetro and ATP should explore opportunities to advance planning for the Green Line and Austin Light Rail Phase I Priority Extensions to move those programs forward swiftly and meaningfully, to address the mobility needs of communities in the Eastern Crescent.
- CapMetro should expand the Community Intervention Program and hire at least two additional Community Intervention Specialists, so that multiple teams can support public safety priorities within the transit system.
- CapMetro should continue to accelerate all the Metro Rapid projects included in Project Connect and provide regular updates to the CAC regarding program advancement.
- City of Austin should prioritize the preservation and development of affordable housing and land acquisition along the Austin Light Rail Phase I, including priority extensions to ensure that communities and residents in these priority areas are stabilized.
- City of Austin should increase the housing and employment capacities along the Project Connect routes, in alignment with the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan goals to expand transit ridership.
- All three parties should continue their community engagement efforts, with a focus on reaching out to priority communities, providing multilingual and accessible opportunities, and expanding communication efforts to share ongoing progress.

As the Austin Light Rail Phase I project advances, ATP will continue to work with local and federal partners to explore additional funding opportunities to help expediate other portions of Project Connect. In addition, ATP will continue to expand its reach to priority communities by attending and hosting events with local community partners including virtual interpretation services at ATP events for communities who speak languages other than English and Spanish.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

» Austin Light Rail: Sharing Expertise & Insights

Project Connect Annual Luncheon



City of Austin, ATP, and CapMetro leaders at the Project Connect annual luncheon.

Project Connect leadership participated in an annual luncheon to discuss the multi-pronged transit program administered across the three partnering entities: City of Austin, Austin Transit Partnership and CapMetro. The lead administrators Greg Canally, Executive Director of Austin Transit Partnership; Dottie Watkins, CEO and President of CapMetro; and Annick Beaudet, the City of Austin's Mobility Officer, joined Mayor Kirk Watson and Commissioner Jeffrey Travillion as well as ATP Board Chair Veronica Castro de Barrera for an afternoon community discussion on Aug. 28, 2024.

Highlights included a discussion about the overall program accomplishments as well as an opportunity for the community to ask questions about the short-term and long-term objectives of the program. The event is hosted annually by Transit Forward, an Austin-based nonprofit with a mission to inform the Austin metro community about the benefits of an accessible regional public transit system and to advance the implementation of transit-supportive programs and policies.

FTA Annual Construction Roundtable

Lindsay Wood, Executive Vice President of Engineering and Construction, represented ATP at the annual Construction Roundtable workshop hosted by FTA to provide training, peer-to-peer networking and open dialogue on delivering large, complex capital projects. As a part of the program, ATP presented an update on Austin Light Rail Phase 1 and the future project objectives, including discussion of delivery methods and strategy for contracting the next phases of final design and construction.

The roundtable provides valuable opportunities to connect in small groups to share lessons learned and best practices with other agency staff from around the country delivering similar projects. FTA also conducted training on requirements for federally funded projects such as compliance with Buy America and Buy America, Build America updates adopted under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Insights from Urban Design Innovators

Peter Mullan, Executive Vice President of Architecture & Urban Design, joined architect Ben van Berkel for a conversation on Sept 11, 2024, about the synthesis of architecture and infrastructure in urban design. This discussion followed van Berkel's lecture, "Transformational Cities & Places of Tomorrow" hosted by Design Austin at the Paramount's State Theater. Ben van Berkel is the founder of innovative global architecture and urban design practice UNStudio, part of the team contributing to Austin Light Rail.

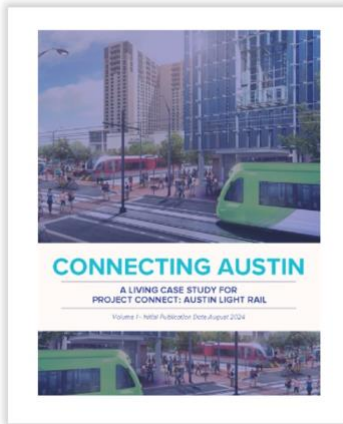


Peter Mullan with Ben van Berkel

Transit and design enthusiasts who attended the forum heard the design innovator share his perspectives about how transit is a key component of a regenerative and optimistic future for cities both in Austin and globally.

» Accelerator for America Presents Living Case Study of Austin Light Rail

The following information is made available by Transit Forward:



Accelerator for America, a nationally recognized transit non-profit, released a groundbreaking first volume of a Living Case Study review of Austin's new light rail system. Using the renowned Eno Center for Public Policy's research on best practices for building large rail projects and Federal guidelines for housing development near transit corridors, Accelerator's report shows how ATP, teaming with the City of Austin and CapMetro, measures up with strategies for keeping rail development responsible and efficient. Accelerator will use this process to continually monitor Austin's actions and assess how new light rail is developed as on time and budget as possible.

[The report](#) details six major areas of best practice, aligning them with how light rail system is developing. These areas include governance of ATP, community engagement, project delivery, procurement, permitting, and land use. Overall, the report finds that the "new and expanded transit system being implemented in Austin through Project

Connect, through the collaboration of the City of Austin, CapMetro, and ATP, compares very favorably with the best practices documented by the Eno Center report, "Saving Time and Making Sense: A Blueprint for Building Transit Better."

As this is Volume 1 in the Living Case Study, Accelerator plans to continue this process as Project Connect progresses to continue measurement of all Project Connect partners in following nationally understood best practice.

» Advancing Delivery & Contracting for Austin Light Rail

ATP has contracted with an engineering and design firms to kick-off preliminary engineering efforts, as required to complete the FTA Capital Investment Grants Project Development phase and to prepare for upcoming procurements next spring for final design & construction. ATP is moving forward the current Delivery Partner solicitation for program management and staff augmentation support with anticipation of awarding the contract in the upcoming months.



Partner Report — Regular updates contributed by partnering organizations

CAPMETRO PROJECT CONNECT UPDATE

» Spring 2025 Service Change

The proposed Spring 2025 Service Change is one of the most significant service changes CapMetro has completed in several years, featuring two new CapMetro Rapid lines and a new Pickup zone in the Decker and Colony Park area, all of which are Project Connect investments. In addition, some bus and rail schedules may have minor changes to improve reliability. Small schedule adjustments are a common part of every service change. This allows the CapMetro to adjust and make small improvements for service reliability.

A public hearing on the proposed service change was held on Wednesday, September 11th, at CapMetro’s Headquarters located at 2910 E. 5th Street. The CapMetro Board of Directors will vote on the proposed service change at their regularly scheduled meeting on September 23rd. If approved, the minor schedule adjustments would start on Sunday, January 12, the Pickup Decker zone would begin on Monday, January 13, and the two Rapid lines would launch later in spring 2025 after essential infrastructure and testing are completed.

» CapMetro Rapid



The highly anticipated CapMetro Rapid Lines—Pleasant Valley (800) and Expo Center (837)—continue to progress toward their 2025 launch. These new lines will provide important transit connections to areas east of I-35, with buses initially arriving every 20 to 30 minutes. Service for customers would begin after the essential infrastructure and testing are complete (estimated in spring 2025).

Staff have installed 46 Rapid Stations along the new routes and preliminary construction on the Expo Center Park & Ride is underway. While some infrastructure, including stops and Park & Rides, are still under construction, temporary stops may be used once the service launches. Customers can expect further enhancements to continue beyond the initial launch.

- Rapid 800 Pleasant Valley will provide service from Berkman/Mueller to the temporary end of line at Vertex/Slaughter Lane in southeast Austin. The line will end at the Goodnight Ranch Park & Ride once construction is completed. Rapid 800 will connect customers to destinations such as Mueller area, ACC Eastview, Dove Springs and more. It will also include connections to the future network, with transfers to the upcoming light rail and future Green Line commuter rail.

- Rapid 837 Expo Center will provide service from the temporary start of the line at Loyola Lane/Decker Lane in northeast Austin to Republic Square. The line will start at the Expo Center Park & Ride once construction is completed. Rapid 837 will connect customers to medical, university, residential, and commercial areas. It will connect to a variety of CapMetro routes downtown, including our high-frequency network, Red Line at Downtown Station, and Rapid 801 and 803.

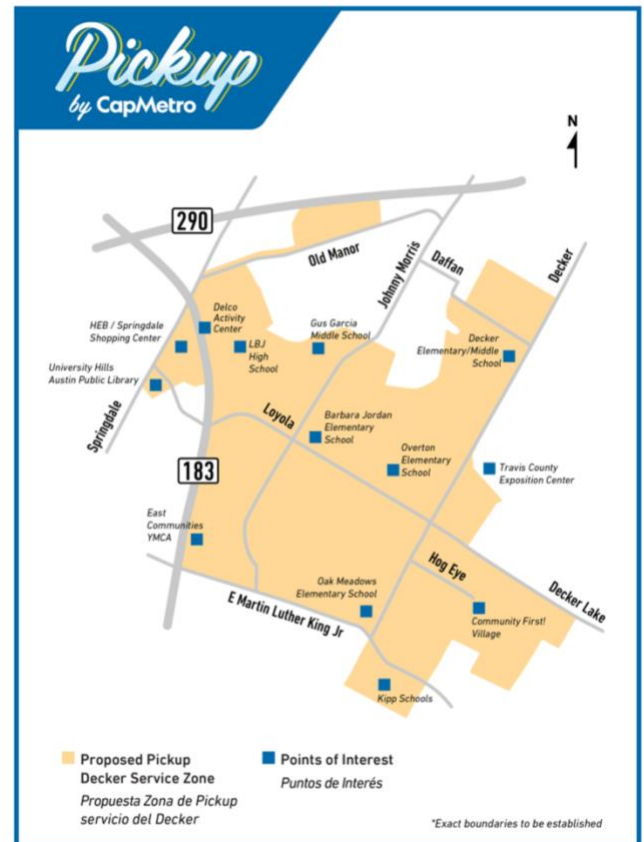
If approved, the two Rapid lines would launch later in spring 2025 after essential infrastructure and testing are completed.

» CapMetro Pickup

Following the successful launch of CapMetro’s Dove Springs Pickup zone in January 2024, CapMetro will introduce a new zone, Pickup Decker, to complement its transit system. The proposed new Pickup zone is a Project Connect-funded investment, with partial funding by Travis County.

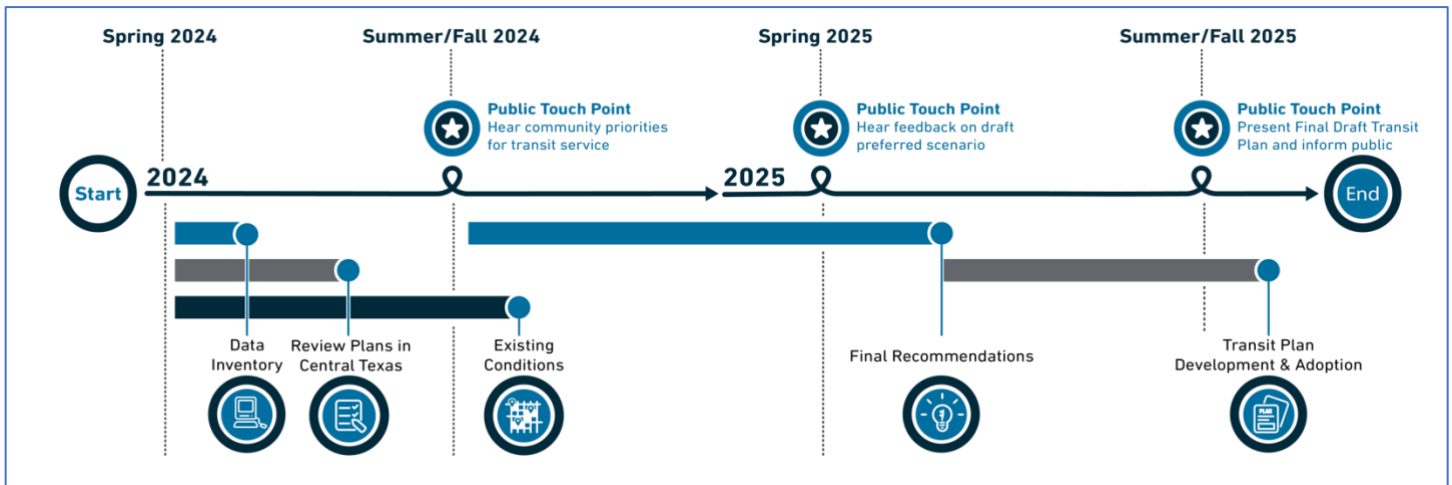
It will provide flexible service in the Northeast Austin, including connectivity to the proposed Rapid 837 Expo Center, and would also serve as a first-and-last-mile service to Bus Route 20 Manor Road/Riverside, Route 233 Decker/Daffan Lane, Route 237 Northeast Feeder, and Route 339 Tuscany. The proposed zone will be bordered by Springdale Road to the west, US 290 to the north, Decker Lane to the east, and E. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the south.

The seven-square-mile service area would be CapMetro’s 12th Pickup service zone that will provide access to key destinations such as Community First! Village, Travis County Exposition Center, University Hills Austin Public Library, the Colony Park neighborhood, and numerous schools (elementary through high school).



The CapMetro Board of Directors will vote on the proposed service change, which includes the new Pickup Decker Zone, at their regularly scheduled meeting on September 23rd. If approved, service for Pickup Decker would begin on Monday, January 13, 2025.

» Transit Plan 2035



Transit Plan 2035 is CapMetro’s blueprint for the future of public transportation in Central Texas. It includes a comprehensive evaluation of our transit system and changes to how people travel in the region. CapMetro’s Community Engagement Team is gearing up for Transit Plan 2035 engagement with the first of three public touch points. Each feedback period will contribute to shaping different aspects of the plan and offer various ways to hear the community’s ideas through community workshops, at-stop events, open houses (virtual and in-person), focus groups, surveys, and more.

The final plan will outline strategies to update transit services, upgrade infrastructure, and better meet riders’ needs over the next five to ten years. It also lays the groundwork to make the updated transit system a reality. Using community feedback, CapMetro will identify what changes need to be made step-by-step and what resources are needed to achieve the plan’s goals. This process allows riders to shape the future of what public transit looks like in Central Texas.

The community can stay updated on all the engagement opportunities and share feedback at: CapMetro.org/transit-plan-2035.

CapMetro Launches CapMetro Bikeshare

CapMetro announced this summer that MetroBike was being revamped to CapMetro Bikeshare. The popular bike-share service introduced an all-new fleet of 100% electric-assist (e-assist) bikes, upgraded docking stations, and a new app with convenient pass purchasing to enhance the biking experience in Austin.

MetroBike services were temporarily paused on July 1, 2024, as staff transitioned to CapMetro Bikeshare. The revamped service was introduced to customers on July 17, 2024, to great excitement. Staff continues to bring more stations and bikes online and expects full conversion will be completed later this fall. The upgrade includes a fleet of 100% e-assist bikes, more stable rides, and convenient pass purchasing through the new app. Existing memberships will transfer to the new system.

This service enhancement was made possible in part through a \$11.3 million-dollar federal grant award to expand and enhance Austin’s bike share program. In January 2024, CapMetro announced a partnership with PBSC Urban Solutions, Inc. to expand the program.



CITY OF AUSTIN PROJECT CONNECT UPDATE

» Community Needs Survey Informs Displacement Prevention & Other Housing Department Work

The City's Housing Department this year conducted a Community Needs Assessment Survey, which is updated every five years. The results of the survey inform how the department allocates grant funding awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Staff members used work done through the Project Connect Displacement Prevention program to help develop the Community Needs Assessment process, and the survey results will in turn inform future work done by the Displacement Prevention team.

The department received more than 500 responses in addition to almost 60 community consultations with small groups. By answering the question, "What are the greatest needs in your community?" feedback was shared from multiple perspectives:

- I need ...
- My neighborhood needs ...
- As a city, we should ...

The top three needs identified were:

- Availability of housing that is affordable
- Services to prevent homelessness
- Affordable childcare

The Housing Department issued a [report](#) of preliminary findings once the engagement period and the survey concluded in the spring. Staff is now preparing a second phase of the report that will be completed in October.

» City's ETOD Teams Prepare Fall Engagement in Aid of Project Connect

The Planning Department's Equitable Transit-Oriented Development teams are preparing a busy fall and winter of community engagement. The work is divided between two teams, one handling ETOD planning for the entire Project Connect system and the other planning specifically around transit stations.

The ETOD Overlay, which City Council adopted in May, created a zoning overlay and density bonus program along the entire Austin Light Rail Phase 1 alignment including the Priority Extensions. The next phase will build upon this with calibration of the bonus program and two phases of community engagement. It will also expand the regulations to apply to the entire Project Connect system, including north of Crestview and south of Oltorf, as well as CapMetro's Rapid, Red Line, and Green Line services. Plan development has begun, and engagement will kick off with two virtual open houses on Oct. 15 and 19.



The team is also working with CapMetro to prepare for outreach regarding the North Lamar and South Congress Transit Center Station Area Vision Plans. This fall, the public will have a chance to review the Vision Plans, speak with staff and provide feedback. Staff has also started updating the East Riverside Corridor Vision Plan and Regulating Plan to support ETOD policies and ensure alignment with citywide updates. Community engagement for this will kick off in the fall and include opportunities for public participation throughout the process.