

Project Connect Status Report

ATP BOARD BRIEF | MARCH 2025

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Austin Transit Partnership is the local government corporation responsible for the implementation of Project Connect. Project Connect will transform how people move around Austin by expanding transit options to connect people to major job centers, education hubs and iconic destinations. Investments include adding a new light rail system, improving existing commuter rail service, and expanding bus routes across the city.

Learn more at atptx.org.

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Program Updates

Austin Light Rail Implementation

ATP is making progress in the federal funding process after publishing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) on January 10, 2025. Release of the Draft EIS kicked off a 60-day public comment period that exceeds the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA guides the public planning process for projects involving federal funds. The Draft EIS presents an extensive study of the project and provides ATP with an opportunity to seek community feedback on the design work, which continues to evolve.

From January 16–28, ATP conducted four public meetings providing the community a progress update on Austin Light Rail. This process included opportunities for the public to review the Draft EIS and environmental impacts, see preliminary design plans, and give feedback on Austin Light Rail Phase 1. ATP hosted 617 attendees at four public meetings located along the alignment area. Information presented at the public meetings is available on the [online public meeting portal](#).

In February, Austin Transit Partnership also conducted community presentations, tabling, and at-stop outreach in addition to presentations at City of Austin Boards and Commissions, the City Council Mobility Committee, and the CapMetro Board meeting. ATP engaged with more than 2,800 people interested in Austin Light Rail (including public meeting attendees).

ATP will review public comments received during the Draft EIS comment period to inform

the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) analysis. ATP is also developing updated preliminary engineering plans that will be published with the Final EIS, serve as a reference for final design and construction procurements, and meet the requirements to complete Project Developments as part of the FTA's Capital Investment Grants program. The designs are continuously updated to optimize the project while meeting guidelines and criteria as well as minimizing impacts.



Top: District 9 Council Member Zohaib "Zo" Qadri explores the virtual reality environment for Austin Light Rail at the UT public meeting. Bottom left: Senior Architect Alex Medina chats with UT attendees. Bottom right: the CE team represents ATP at the CapMetro Decker Pickup Launch on January 24.

Onboarding a New Delivery Partner

ATP initiated a Delivery Partner solicitation in January 2024, engaging with industry experts for months before issuing a Request for Qualifications in June 2024. This early engagement helped ATP strengthen its solicitations to encourage more top industry performers to submit proposals. It also allowed firms responding to the solicitation time to assign their most experienced team members to the project.

In December 2024, the ATP Board unanimously approved the resolution authorizing the agency to move forward with a multi-year contract with AECOM as the Delivery Partner for the implementation of Austin Light Rail. The Delivery Partner serves as a Project Management/Construction Management team, dedicated to delivering the Austin Light Rail project through full integration with ATP and collaborative engagement with ATP's other contractors.

The Delivery Partner team has onboarded and is actively partnering with ATP to continue advancing the project.

Connecting and Building with Local Industry

ATP initiated the procurement of the final design and construction contract for the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 project in February 2025. This multibillion-dollar contract will cover various aspects of the project, including the project's transitway, tracks, systems, stations, bridges, traffic signals, utilities, drainage structures, and streetscape. The contract is expected to extend through the duration of design, construction and opening of service.

As a first step, ATP released a request for information (RFI) to gather industry feedback on the draft solicitation and contract documents. This early engagement is designed to strengthen competition and provide potential partners with more information to assemble the best teams for the project.

To inform industry leaders on the contract and the RFI, ATP hosted a "Connect and Build: Partnerships for Austin Light Rail" event on February 26. This networking opportunity offered a place for connections between small



Top left: event attendees at the Connect & Build event on February 26. Top right: Frank Fuentes, Mark Borenstein, and Tina Cannon lead a morning training. Bottom: event signage in our new brand.

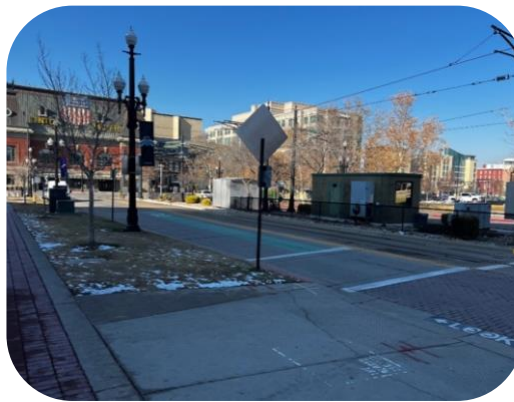
firms and prime contractors interested in pursuing the final design and construction contract. Overall, 189 attendees, 115 businesses (including prime contractors) and 49 DBE firms attended the event. Businesses have until March 19 to provide feedback on the RFI, ahead of the anticipated request for qualifications (RFQ) in June.

ATP will build Austin Light Rail Phase 1 using a progressive design-build delivery model. This enables ATP to closely collaborate with industry partners, ensuring innovation, constructability, and alignment with the project budget.

Upcoming additional contracting opportunities include the Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) Progressive Design-Build, and the Light Rail Vehicles, with a Request for Information (RFI) scheduled to be released for both April 2025 and May 2025, respectively.

Learning from Peer Agencies

ATP visited Phoenix, Arizona and Salt Lake City, Utah as key collaborative opportunities to learn from industry expertise as Austin Light Rail continues to advance. A key objective is to meet with the agencies advancing rail capital projects and extract important information about procurements and contracting, construction, and overall delivery methods from successful projects. As a part of these visits, the ATP team also toured the Salt Lake City and Phoenix light rail systems as part of the overall knowledge sharing opportunities.



Left: Phoenix Valley Metro agency staff hosted ATP on a tour of their new elevated light rail station and shared their experiences with its design and construction. Right: ATP staff explored the light rail system in Salt Lake City to get to and from meetings with the agency to learn about their upcoming expansion, including their progressive design-build contract underway.

Sharing ATP Expertise

ATP Executive Director Greg Canally served as a panelist at Austin Business Journal's ATX Ahead: 2025 Economic Outlook event on Jan. 23. The panel included Tom Noonan, CEO of Visit Austin. ABJ Editor Colin Pope led a discussion about the economic opportunity brought about by infrastructure projects like Austin Light Rail and the upcoming redevelopment of the Convention Center. Canally provided project progress updates and shared information about recent milestones achieved.

ATP's Alvin Livingstone, Senior Vice President of Design & Construction, moderated a panel featuring Lisa Storer, ATP's Vice President of Architecture, Urban Design and Sustainability, along with City of Austin Director of Transportation and Public Works Richard Mendoza and Diana Wang, City of Austin Consulting Engineer, Watershed Protection Department at the annual banquet for the Texas Society of Professional Engineers (TSPE). The panel focused on the integration of sustainability into public infrastructure projects.

Administrative Updates

ATP Board New Community

Expert Directors

In December 2024, the Austin City Council and CapMetro Board of Directors finalized the appointment process for the community expert director positions on the ATP Board of Directors. The terms commenced in January and term lengths were established at the January 29 board meeting.

Both Veronica Castro de Barrera and Juan Garza were reappointed to the ATP Board, with Kammy Horne being newly appointed. These community experts bring valuable knowledge in architecture, engineering and construction; finance; and community planning or sustainability. Their decades of expertise will play a crucial role in advancing Austin Light Rail.

Veronica Castro de Barrera brings professional experience working on public transportation and multi-modal projects. She will continue to serve as the community expert director in engineering and construction as well as chair of the ATP Board of Directors, a role she has held for the last four years.

Juan Garza previously served on the board as the community expert director in planning or sustainability and transitioned to the appointed position of community expert director in finance. Garza also served as general manager

of Austin Energy from 2000-2008, chief financial officer and then city manager for the City of Corpus Christi, as well as interim chief executive officer at Driscoll Children's Hospital.

Kammy Horne, appointed as the community expert director in planning or sustainability, is the chief executive officer of Mpact, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to building vibrant communities around transit. Horne brings extensive experience in the transit industry, having worked in both the private and public sectors.

ATP Receives Distinguished Budget Award

ATP received the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget on February 5, 2025. There is a prescriptive set of requirements to ensure that budget documents produced are high quality and reflect national guidelines and best practices established by the National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting and the GFOA's best practices on budgeting. This distinction is awarded to state and local governments that produce budget documents that meet program criteria and excel as a policy document, financial plan, operations guide, and communication tool.

CapMetro Updates

CapMetro Rapid Launches Two New Rapid Lines

CapMetro introduced initial service for [two new Rapid transit lines](#) on February 23, 2025: Route 800 Pleasant Valley and Route 837 Expo Center. The two routes are key components of [Project Connect](#) and improve connectivity to major employment hubs, educational institutions, and community activity centers, creating more seamless transit options across East and Southeast Austin.

As the initial service is introduced, CapMetro is still constructing some stations and the Park & Rides. Customers may need to use temporary end points or nearby stops to access the service while construction is being completed. Customers can check the status of their stations on the [CapMetro website](#). These new routes are the first CapMetro Rapid lines serving East Austin, providing service in high-traffic corridors with well-established bus routes and areas that are new to transit offerings.

Route 800 Pleasant Valley

- Length: 15 miles | Stations: 40+
- Initial Frequency: Every 20-30 minutes (moving to 10-15 minutes in 2026)
- Route Highlights: Line will initially run from the Mueller area down to a temporary station at Vertex/Slaughter Lane in southeast Austin, with a future expansion to the upcoming Goodnight Ranch Park & Ride on E. Slaughter Lane.
- Key Destinations: Dell Children's Medical Center, Austin Community College (ACC) Eastview, Mendez Middle School, Dove Springs Recreation Center.

Route 837 Expo Center

- Length: 12 miles | Stations: 40+
- Initial Frequency: Every 20-30 minutes (moving to 10-15 minutes in 2026)
- Route Highlights: Line will run from Republic Square in downtown Austin to the Colony Park neighborhood, eventually terminating at the Expo Center. During initial service, the Expo Center Line's temporary last stop will be at Decker Lane until construction on the Expo Center Park & Ride is complete.
- Key Destinations: Austin Convention Center, The University of Texas, Dell Seton Medical Center, Mueller Development, LBJ High School, Travis County Exposition (Expo) Center.

Expanded Access and Benefits

- Improved mobility connections with fewer transfers.
- Real-time information at stations and via the CapMetro transit app.
- Bike-share docking at many locations along the routes.
- Enhanced stations with distinct Rapid branding and seating.
- Dynamic message boards at some stations during initial service, soon expanding to all stations.
- Improved travel times through limited stops and transit priority lanes.

The full-service vision is anticipated in 2026, with increased frequency, new Park & Rides and zero-emissions vehicles on the lines.

Payment System Upgrades

CapMetro is enhancing the way customers pay for fares, bringing modern and convenient improvements without changing prices. These changes are designed to enhance the overall transit experience while ensuring accessibility and ease of use for riders.

- **New App** – The agency is replacing the CapMetro App. Customers will be able to use the new Umo app to pay for fares along with the Transit app to plan trips. The long-term goal is a single app that houses all transit service information and payments for a seamless customer experience.
- **New Scanners** – Riders will see new fare validators on buses, offering improved scanning and real-time feedback for riders and operators.
- **Reloadable Cards** – New reloadable fare cards are available, reducing waste and maintaining fare capping. Customers can visit CapMetro’s retail network of more than 300 locations for reloadable fare cards.
- **Tap to Pay** – In the future, the new scanners will support Tap to Pay, allowing customers to use contactless payments with credit or debit cards, Apple Pay, and Google Pay—making boarding faster and eliminating the need for paper tickets or exact change.

For more information and instructions on the payment system upgrades, visit www.capmetro.org/fares-passes/fare-updates-2025.

Advocating for CapMetro

After local sales tax, CapMetro's second-largest source of revenue comes from federal funds, so the agency regularly engages with federal policy makers and regulators in Washington, D.C. CapMetro President and CEO Dottie Watkins is a proud board member of The Bus Coalition and joined a group of fellow transit executives from across the country for a February 2025 Washington, D.C. fly-in to engage with transit funding officials and policy leaders in our nation's capital.

The trip included visits with many of Central Texas' congressional delegation leaders to champion increased bus funding levels, revenue sources, and to share updates on CapMetro's progress with existing federal grant awards and the introduction of new service.

Additionally, Watkins and other agency leaders had opportunities to meet with partners at the Build America Bureau as well as connect with new staff at the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Secretary and the Federal Transit Administration's Governmental and Legislative Affairs Office.



CEO Dottie Watkins and Director of Government Affairs Celso Baez in D.C.

City of Austin Updates

ETOD Teams Advance Work on Transit Center Vision Plans

The City's Equitable Transit-Oriented Development teams continue their work to amend regulations around land use and transportation policy. The goal is to better align the two and position Austin to maximize the benefits of the Project Connect program.

The Station Area ETOD team is bringing the vision plans for the North Lamar and South Congress Transit Centers through the adoption process this spring.



Rendering of North Lamar Transit Center from the vision plan.

They held two community meetings on March 4 and 5 covering amendments to neighborhood plans for areas within a half mile of the two CapMetro-owned transit centers. The amendments are intended to prevent any conflicts between the vision plans and the neighborhood plans.

Development of the publicly owned facilities at the heart of these two station areas has the potential to catalyze revitalization of their neighborhoods. This process is designed to ensure that is done in a way that benefits current residents, supports new and existing transit services, and creates affordable housing opportunities. The vision plans are scheduled to go before City Council at the April 24 meeting.