



MEMORANDUM

TO: City of Austin Mayor and Council Members, Austin Transit Partnership Board Chair and Board Members, Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board Chair and Board Members

FROM: Awais Azhar, Chair, Project Connect Community Advisory Committee

CC: Greg Canally, Executive Director, Austin Transit Partnership
Dottie Watkins, President and CEO, Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority
T.C. Broadnax, City Manager, City of Austin
Jon Fortune, Deputy City Manager, City of Austin
Michael Rogers, Assistant City Manager, City of Austin

DATE: March 6, 2025

SUBJECT: Project Connect Community Advisory Committee Draft Environmental Impact Statement Recommendations

As the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) proceeds with Austin Light Rail Phase 1, the Project Connect Community Advisory Committee (CAC) commends staff from the agency for their outreach on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and provides the following recommendations to the ATP, City of Austin (the City), and the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro).

Build Alternative Strengths

The CAC is supportive of the following elements of Austin Light Rail Phase I that are highlighted in the DEIS due to their responsiveness to community feedback and alignment with planning principles that support transit riders, while furthering other community priorities.

- The Greenway concept for the East Riverside Corridor will enhance the transit rider experience, while also providing communities along the route with healthy green spaces and transit connectivity. The continuous bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure will enhance safety and multimodal mobility connections and expand existing infrastructure.
- The additional downtown station near Wooldridge Square will provide better connectivity to north Downtown and greater mobility opportunities for Travis County employees and visitors.

- An elevated Waterfront Station in the South Central Waterfront will minimize impacts on automotive traffic and other mobility options and provide a seamless connection to Downtown via the bridge.
- Maintaining the Montopolis Station while moving the other station in this part of the alignment closer to Grove Boulevard will provide better access to the Austin Community College campus, provide improved transit access for the Montopolis neighborhood, and align the station location with future anti-displacement investments and affordable housing.
- The concept for the “The Drag” portion of the light rail route on Guadalupe Street adjacent to The University of Texas at Austin is supportive of the high pedestrian usage in this section of the alignment and provides better multimodal access to transit riders by minimizing through automotive traffic in this section.
- The proposals by ATP are in alignment with previous recommendations from the CAC that stressed the need to minimize the impact on ownership and rental residential properties as far as possible to address any displacement impacts.

Build Alternative Feedback and Opportunities

To further strengthen the DEIS proposals and to ensure future overall success of Austin Light Rail, the CAC makes the following recommendations. While some of these suggestions are not within the full scope of the DEIS and others can only be achieved in partnership with the City and CapMetro, altogether these recommendations will improve the experience of transit users, minimize impact of construction on surrounding areas, and provide opportunities for multimodal travel.

- ATP should consider allowing only one automotive travel lane in each direction on South Congress and reducing the number of vehicular crossings to ensure that this section of the light rail alignment supports robust multimodal connections and as far as possible preserves the Parking and Transportation Management District. Considering the right-of-way constraints in this area, ATP and the City should reduce automotive vehicular lanes, minimize vehicular crossings and left turns, and create more space for robust pedestrian and bicycle connections, at the same time as providing limited parking in the SoCo district.
- To optimize future bus transit opportunities, all efforts should be made to ensure that the proposed Lady Bird Lake Bridge and all infrastructure providing access to it do not preclude opportunities for bus use, even if infrastructural improvements may be necessary in the future to allow buses to use the bridge.
- As the plans for Austin Light Rail Phase I proceed, ATP should continue outreach with affected property owners along the alignment, while also advancing engagement with tenants, including commercial tenants.
- While a limited number of park and rides may be necessary to serve a greater number of riders, both ATP and CapMetro should ensure that the following efforts be made to provide facilities that maintain an activated pedestrian space and minimize community and urban design impacts.
 - The required capacity for park-and-rides depends on where along the line they are located, with end-of-line locations requiring the highest capacity. For park-and-ride locations whose capacity requirements are likely to change because of line extensions,

as much as possible, the agencies should utilize shared parking agreements and other mechanisms to utilize existing public and private parking opportunities in an area, rather than acquiring new property for the sole purpose of establishing a park and ride. As new development happens along the alignment, developers who choose to build parking should be incentivized to provide parking for transit riders as a community benefit.

- For park-and-rides whose capacity requirements are likely to be enduring, ensure that new park and ride infrastructure is nestled within mixed use developments that provide additional benefits to the local community.
- All parking lots and structures should be wrapped in activated habitable spaces with robust pedestrian and bicycle connectivity in order to maintain street activation.
- ATP, CapMetro, and the City should work to ensure robust multimodal connectivity all along the alignment, including maintaining or altering bus service to provide well-timed connections, building sufficient bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and prioritizing light rail and transit crossings, where necessary.
- While there may be limitations on ATP's ability to address the needs of impacted undocumented residents or commercial tenants, the City and ATP should partner to ensure that their needs addressed, including the potential utilization of anti-displacement funding associated with Project Connect.
- As the Austin Light Rail Phase I route and station areas get finalized, wherever possible, the City should minimize any new driveway, parking garage entry, or other vehicular access to these zones, to minimize future conflicts and disruptions.
- As new station areas are identified, such as at Woolridge Square, the City should ensure that existing land use rules and other regulations that impact development in these areas are revised to maximize benefits to transit users, including working with other public entities with property there to expand transit ridership opportunities.

Ongoing Engagement and Managing Construction Impacts

While the community engagement opportunities during the Austin Light Rail Phase I DEIS process are aligned with federal legal requirements, ATP should continue engaging with the community and gathering feedback on an ongoing basis. This includes gathering feedback from property owners, tenants, business owners, and other stakeholders regarding the planning and design, construction process, and future operations.

The CAC supports the DEIS and the overall vision for Austin Light Rail, while exploring opportunities for improvements in response to community feedback. If you should have any questions, I can be reached at bc-awais.azhar@austintexas.gov.

Date of Approval: March 6, 2025

Record of the vote: Approved on a X-X-X vote (Committee Member X absent)

Attest:  , Project Connect Community Advisory Committee Chair