



MEMORANDUM

TO: 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

DATE: September 10, 2026

SUBJECT: Project Connect Community Advisory Committee FY 2026 Budget Recommendations

As the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) and Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro) move towards adoption of their FY 2026 - 2027 budgets, the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) recommends the following items to better our community.

Proposed CapMetro Fare Increase

Along with budget adoption this month, the CapMetro Board of Directors will also take action on a potential fare increase and changes to the reduced fare program. Although an increase in base fares may impact transit users and usage, the agency has to meaningfully address issues with rising costs due to inflation and other factors in order to continue expanding and improving transit service. Currently, fare collections make up a relatively small share of Capital Metro's overall budget, and while this is likely to continue with the proposed changes, in the absence of other forms of funding, fare collection is necessary to maintain service quality.

In recent years CapMetro has made great strides in introducing fare policies that support lower-income and frequent riders. The Reduced Fare Program, Equifare, and Reloadable Fare Cards for unhoused users continue to provide reduced-cost or free services to riders who may not otherwise be able to afford transit use. On the other hand, fare capping limits daily and monthly spending for a rider, ensuring lower overall cost for riders who are using the system frequently. Together, these policies and programs will buffer low-income and frequent users from some of impacts of the fare change policy and thereby ensure that such riders are not forced to make alternate mobility decisions. While the Community Advisory Committee understands the need for the proposed fare changes at this time, we ask that CapMetro continue to track any potential impact on overall transit usage as these changes are implemented and to mitigate any adverse impacts in the long run.

CapMetro Public Safety Program

Similar to past years, the Community Advisory Committee recommends increasing funding for Public Safety Ambassadors and Community Intervention Specialists. To ensure CapMetro's three-team approach to public safety is successful, it is critical to provide sufficient resources for these two teams along with the Transit Police. These alternate public safety models are more likely to support riders with greater needs, while enhancing the experiences of all riders and CapMetro operators. While we defer to the CapMetro Public Safety Committee in guiding the day-to-day functioning of CapMetro's public safety program, including the three-team approach, we recommend that the agency work to provide alternative pathways to public safety that are focused on creating a safe rider experience aboard CapMetro vehicles and at CapMetro stops and transit stations.

CapMetro should continue to share the development of its public safety program with riders and the community in order to build trust and share positive impacts. In the long term, we recommend CapMetro continue partnering with the City of Austin, Travis County, the State of Texas, and other entities to address broader public safety issues.

CapMetro Infrastructure Updates

The Community Advisory Committee recommends that CapMetro continue to update and maintain transit infrastructure at bus and rail stops, transit stations, and digital platforms to support riders and operators. CapMetro has made great strides already to address some of these issues and we recommend that the agency should continue its efforts to:

- Provide adequate bus stop and shelter infrastructure throughout the system, including where current stop infrastructure is lacking or where infrastructure needs upgrading for comfort at high ridership stops, for example improving the Metro Rapid 801 shelter design to align with those for the new rapid systems. The CapMetro Transit Stop Amenities Dashboard provides a good opportunity for riders and residents to review the amenities available at stops throughout the system.
- Maintain cleanliness at stops and on transit vehicles, including ensuring that there are adequate waste receptacles at stops and that these are cleared regularly to avoid overflowing.
- Integrate digital platforms for payment and bus information to allow for easier and simplified usage.

Austin Light Rail Airport Access

The Community Advisory wants to highlight the strong support from the Austin community for the Austin Transit Partnership to continue its efforts to plan the Austin Light Rail extension to the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. These efforts must include collaboration with the City of Austin to identify how existing resources and planning efforts can be leveraged to make the airport extension possible. At the same time, it is critical that the planning for the airport expansion project, Journey With AUS, is focused on integrating light rail and other transit options into the new Arrivals & Departures Hall in a manner that makes it easier for customers to access these alternative options to driving and rideshare.

At the same time, it is important that ATP continues to leverage resources to expand the system to North Lamar and North Austin, to better support increasing ridership in that part of town.

Austin Transit Partnership Business Support Program

The Community Advisory Committee supports ongoing work by ATP in developing a business support program with the aim of mitigating construction on local businesses affected by upcoming light rail and transit expansion construction projects. While the construction relocation and Project Connect anti-displacement funding will continue to ensure that direct construction impacts to properties are managed and that any potential indirect residential displacement pressure is addressed, the business support program is necessary to ensure that small and local businesses along the light rail alignment that may see the greatest construction impacts receive adequate support.

Austin Transit Partnership Betterments

The CAC recommends that ATP align the schedules and timelines for betterments related to pedestrian, bicycle, and alternative mobility infrastructure in such a manner as to provide those community amenities at the earliest opportunity. We also encourage ATP to continue working with the City of Austin to align and leverage City infrastructural updates and investments throughout the light rail construction timeline.

As Austin and Central Texas continue to expand transit and mobility options for all under Project Connect and other investments, it is critical that we continue to create sustainable revenue options, maintain public safety through a community-focused approach, enhance user experience, and expand connections to commonly accessed locations such as the airport. In future years, we would also request that all three parties continue to engage with the Community Advisory Committee on budget issues earlier in the process and the committee will work to get recommendations to the parties in a timely manner. These recommendations will build on existing efforts by CapMetro and Austin Transit Partnership efforts to boost transit ridership and expand options for riders.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at bc-awais.azhar@austintexas.gov.

Date of Approval: September 10, 2026

Record of the vote: Approved on an 8-0-1 vote (Committee Member Brooks abstained, Gonzalez absent, and one vacancy)

Attest:  , Project Connect Community Advisory Committee Chair