

Chapter 2

Alternatives Considered

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Chapter 2 Alternatives Considered

NEPA requires all reasonable alternatives to be objectively evaluated in an Environmental Impact Statement as well as consideration of a No Build Alternative. Reasonable alternatives are those that meet a Project's purpose and need and are economically and technically feasible. Prior planning studies and results can be used to narrow the range of reasonable alternatives. The No Build Alternative is used as a benchmark to compare the effects of the reasonable alternatives in a horizon year where travel demand, and population and employment growth, can be reasonably forecasted. The No Build Alternative includes transportation improvements that are planned and programmed in the region, with the exception of the Project.

2.1 Introduction

ATP has evaluated and compared a Build Alternative, including six Design Options, and the No Build Alternative. Additional information about the No Build Alternative and Build Alternative is set forth in Sections 2.2. and 2.3, respectively.

The Project consists of constructing and operating a 9.8-mile light rail system in Austin including an OMF, MOW shops, and associated light rail equipment storage functions. The ATP Board of Directors, Austin City Council, and CapMetro Board of Directors unanimously approved the *Austin Light Rail Implementation Plan* (ATP 2023a), which recommended the Build Alternative after evaluation of different scenarios within the context of the purpose and need and the goals and objectives identified in **Chapter 1**. ATP's alternatives development and analysis process included detailed technical and financial analyses, planning, and community outreach. Alternatives that ATP considered but eliminated from further consideration are described in **Appendix A**, along with ATP's rationale for the advancement of the Build Alternative.

The No Build Alternative and the Build Alternative, including the Design Options, are described below.

2.2 No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative includes the existing transportation system and committed projects within the six-county metropolitan area that are documented in the *CAMPO 2045 Regional Transportation Plan*, excluding implementation of the light rail system components of Project Connect in Austin (CAMPO 2024a). The transportation components of the No Build Alternative are summarized below; a detailed description is provided in **Chapter 3, Transportation** and **Appendix D**.

2.2.1 Public Transit Operations and Projects

CapMetro currently operates High Frequency, Local, Flyer, Limited, and Express bus services with different frequencies, stops, and hours of service to serve multiple users. CapMetro also operates the Red Line commuter rail service.

CapMetro expects to implement the following new and expanded public transit service by 2045:

- CapMetro Express bus service between park-and-rides and major employment hubs serving suburban Austin and neighboring communities;
- CapMetro Rapid bus service featuring frequent service, limited stops, priority lanes, transit signal priority, queue jumps, and enhanced and improved bus stations. The 801 Rapid route extends from North Lamar/South Congress and connects Tech Ridge to Southpark Meadows via UT and downtown. It travels down North Lamar Boulevard and South Congress Avenue. The 803 Rapid route extends from Burnet/South Lamar and connects the Domain to Westgate via UT and downtown. It travels down Burnet Road and South Lamar Boulevard.
- CapMetro Rail Green Line commuter rail operating on CapMetro’s existing freight line between Downtown Austin and Elgin; and
- CapMetro Rail Red Line commuter rail improvements.

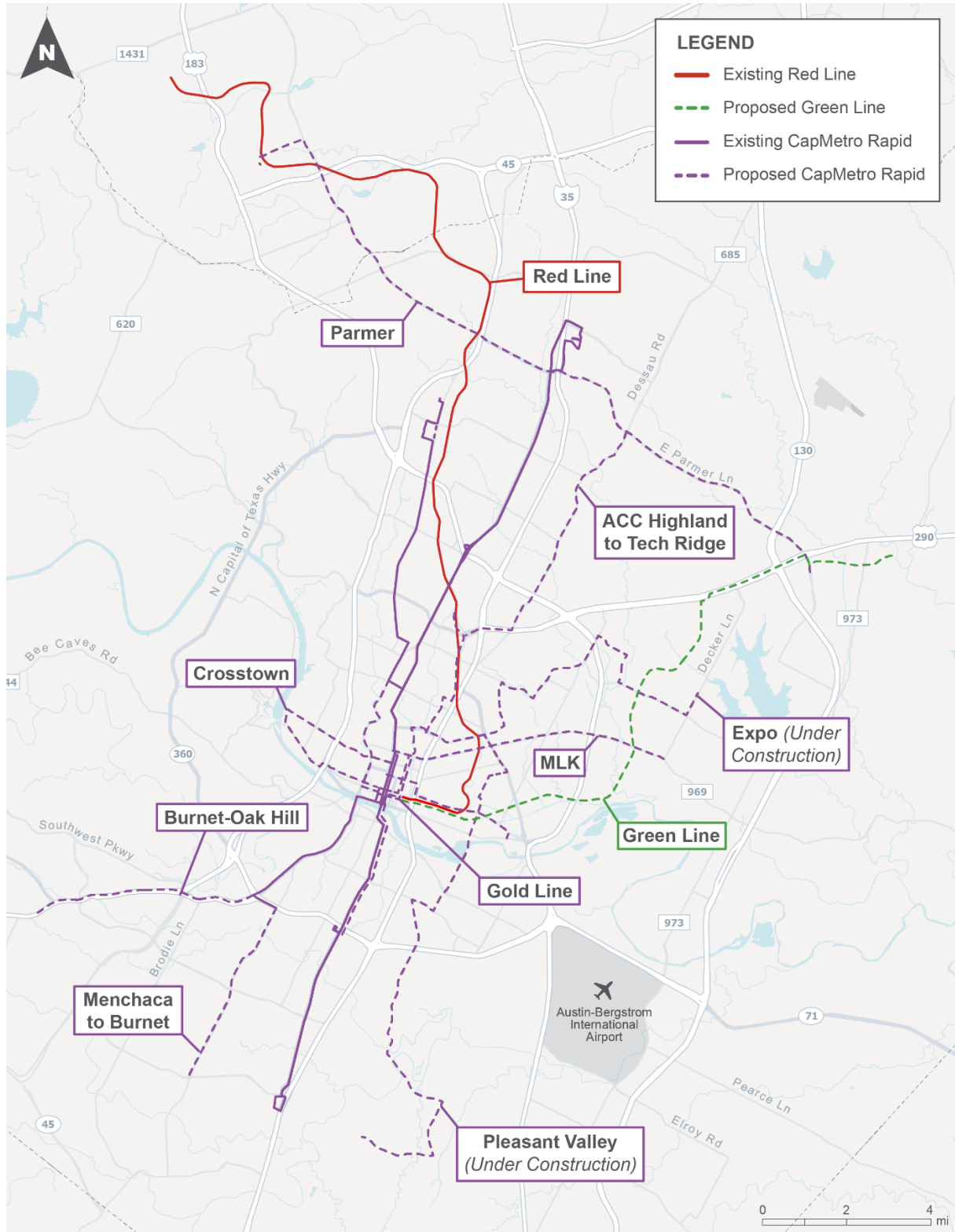
Table 2-1 provides additional details about the CapMetro Rapid routes that are planned or currently under construction, the proposed CapMetro Rail Green Line, and the existing CapMetro Rail Red Line; and these projects are shown in **Figure 2-1**.

Table 2-1: No Build Alternative Transit Projects in CAMPO’s 2045 Regional Transportation Plan, Adopted 2020

Service	Planned Routes
CapMetro Express Bus	Downtown Austin to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • San Marcos • Buda • Southpark Meadows • Georgetown • Round Rock • Howard Station • Elgin • Manor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hutto • Pflugerville • Lockhart • Easton Park • South Mopac • Bastrop • Del Valle • Four Points
CapMetro Rapid Bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasant Valley – Mueller to the Goodnight Ranch Park-and-Ride • Expo Center – East Austin to Republic Square • Austin Community College – Highland to Republic Square • Burnet – Menchaca and Oak Hill Road Rapid Extension • Parmer Lane – Wildhorse to Lakeline • Martin Luther King (MLK) – Decker to Redbud • Crosstown – CARTS East Bus Plaza to Redbud • ACC – Highland to Tech Ridge
CapMetro Rail (commuter rail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed Green Line commuter rail service to Elgin on a 25-mile alignment with 10 stations and connections to light rail routes, CapMetro Rail, and CapMetro Rapid • Red Line commuter rail improvements, including a double-track segment to support expanded operations, platform extensions, and new stations

Source: CAMPO 2024a.

Figure 2-1: Proposed CapMetro Rapid Routes, Proposed CapMetro Rail Green Line, and Existing CapMetro Rail Red Line



Source: CapMetro 2022.

2.2.2 Roadway Projects

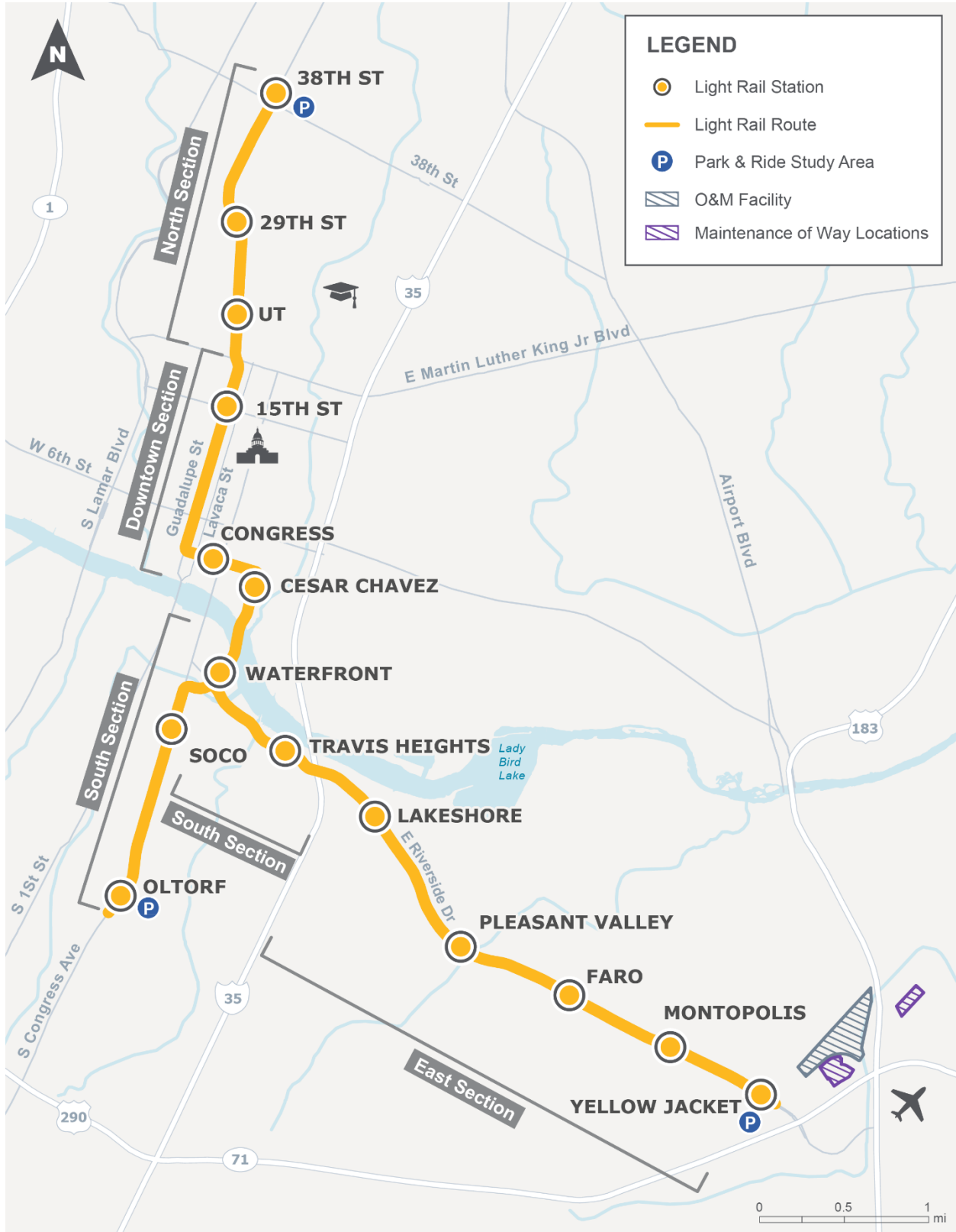
The No Build Alternative assumes completion of infrastructure improvements to roadways in the region, including drainage and safety enhancements, rehabilitation improvements, and roadway widening to accommodate increases in traffic. The following roadway projects would substantially increase capacity and mobility in Austin:

- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project would add two non-tolled high-occupancy vehicle managed lanes in each direction along I-35 from U.S. Highway 290 (US 290) East to State Highway 71 (SH 71) / Ben White Boulevard. This project would lower I-35 through downtown (between Martin Luther King Jr. [MLK] Boulevard and Holly Street) and would improve east-west connections, reconstruct the I-35 bridge over Lady Bird Lake, and improve bicycle and pedestrian paths (Texas Department of Transportation [TxDOT] 2023a); and
- Corridor Mobility Program projects on Airport Boulevard, Burnet Road, East Riverside Drive, East MLK Boulevard, Guadalupe Street, North Lamar Boulevard, Slaughter Lane, South Lamar Boulevard, and William Cannon Drive would improve Austin's transportation infrastructure (City of Austin 2022a).

2.3 Build Alternative and Design Options

The Build Alternative includes a 9.8-mile dedicated light rail guideway, 15 stations, 3 park-and-rides, an OMF, and MOW shops, as shown in **Figure 2-2**. The components of a light rail system are described in Section 2.3.1 to assist the public in understanding the Build Alternative, which includes Design Options. Section 2.3.2 describes the key components of the Build Alternative and Design Options for each of the four geographic sections (North, Downtown, South, and East) shown in **Figure 2-2**. Information on the operating characteristics of the light rail system is provided in Section 2.3.3.

Figure 2-2: Build Alternative



2.3.1 Light Rail System Components

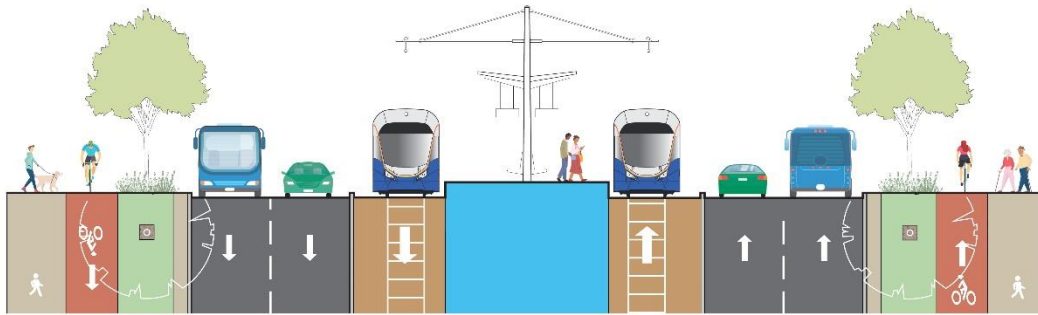
Light rail is a conventional term for urban electric rail systems that have the flexibility to operate along an exclusive right-of-way (ROW) at ground level, on elevated structures, or in subways. ATP is planning for low-floor, low-platform vehicles ranging from 100 to 130 feet long, with a maximum seating capacity of roughly 200 to 270 passengers and the potential to couple two or more vehicles together to meet demand as needed. The light rail vehicles would be powered using electrical wires (catenary) suspended from catenary poles along the guideway (see **Figure 2-3**). These light rail vehicles would operate on tracks that are either at-grade (i.e., embedded within a street) or elevated to cross over geographic or physical barriers or where at-grade trackway would not be appropriate.

Figure 2-3: Light Rail Vehicle Rendering

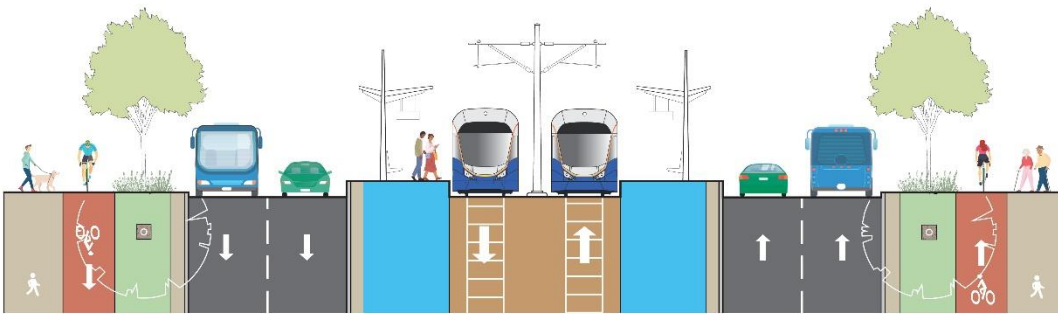


Depending on the location, ATP could design stations with center or side platforms. Center platform stations would allow passengers to access trains going in the opposite direction from the same platform in between the tracks. Side platform stations would be located outside of the tracks and would require riders to cross over tracks to access trains in the opposite direction (see **Figure 2-4**). The width of the platforms would range from 12 to 20 feet, and their length would be a minimum of 245 feet, with platforms at some stations extending up to 400 feet to meet passenger demand. Canopies would be installed to protect passengers from inclement weather-. All stations would be fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (i.e., ADA accessible).

Figure 2-4: Center and Side Platform Station Configurations



Artist Rendering of Center Platform Station



Artist Rendering of Side Platform Station

The Project would include changes to the street network, including the number and configuration of lanes, turning movements, modified signalized intersections, and improvements to adjacent roadways to accommodate traffic. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be provided throughout the corridor and would include variations of bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and/or shared use paths with connections to existing and planned facilities.

The Project would include traction power substations that provide electrical power to the trains via the overhead wire or catenary; a signal system including train control and communications bungalows and cabinets; and crossing gates similar to traditional railroad crossing gates at select locations. Traction power substations would be adjacent to the alignment spaced approximately 1 mile apart. Examples of the power and communications equipment needed to operate light rail are shown in **Figure 2-5**. Train control and communication cabinets would be approximately 0.5 mile apart along the alignment. ATP would refine the precise location of this equipment as the design advances to minimize effects on surrounding properties and resources and to balance safety, reliability, cost, and operational efficiencies. The Project would include an OMF to maintain and store the light rail vehicles, and MOW shops for materials and equipment needed to maintain the guideway and associated amenities. Additional details of these facilities are provided below.

Figure 2-5: Examples of Light Rail Power and Communications Equipment



Example Traction Power Substation (Valley Metro, Phoenix, Arizona)



Example Train Control Bungalow (LA Metro, Los Angeles, California)

2.3.2 Description of Build Alternative, including the Design Options

The horizontal and vertical alignment profile and proposed station locations for the Build Alternative are described below for each of the four sections of the alignment: North, Downtown, South, and East (see **Figure 2-2**). The Project elements and the Design Options proposed for each section are also described.

2.3.2.1 North Section

The North Section of the alignment extends from 38th Street to MLK Boulevard and hosts the UT campus, medical facilities, and the Museum District among other key destinations. Beginning at the intersection of Guadalupe Street and 38th Street, the center-running at-grade alignment would extend in the middle of the street south to UT. Guadalupe Street between 29th and 27th Streets would function as a light rail and pedestrian corridor, with vehicular access restricted by signage, traffic control devices, and/or curbs. Emergency vehicle access would be accommodated. On Guadalupe Street between 27th and 21st Streets, a transit/pedestrian-focused corridor would be established due to a high level of pedestrian activity on Guadalupe Street and the constrained ROW. This segment of Guadalupe Street would include the light rail guideway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and one travel lane in each direction outside the guideway that is intended for bus access. Cars traveling through the area would disperse to surrounding roadways and thoroughfares, which could include San Antonio Street, Whittis Avenue, or Nueces Street. A park-and-ride would be located in this section, as shown in **Figure 2-6**.

Figure 2-6: Project Components in the North Section



Three stations would be located in the North Section:

- **38th Street Station.** A center platform station on Guadalupe Street between West 39th Street and West 38th Street accessed via crosswalks at adjacent intersections.
- **29th Street Station.** A side platform station in a transit plaza on Guadalupe Street between West 27th Street and Fruth Street accessed via adjacent sidewalks.
- **UT Station.** A center platform station on Guadalupe Street between West 23rd Street and West 22nd Street at the West Mall entrance to the UT campus accessed via signalized pedestrian crosswalks.

A park-and-ride garage near the 38th Street Station would be located on three adjacent parcels on Guadalupe Street and 38th Street. ATP would design the facility to accommodate 300 parking spaces to meet the estimated Project demand.

2.3.2.2 *Downtown Section*

The Downtown Section extends from MLK Boulevard to Lady Bird Lake and hosts key employment centers, government facilities, the Convention Center, Town Lake Metro Parks, and the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail. The center-running at-grade alignment would extend south on Guadalupe Street from MLK Boulevard to 3rd Street. Along this segment, Guadalupe Street would include the light rail guideway, sidewalks, and one traffic lane in each direction on either side of the guideway between MLK Boulevard and 3rd Street. The existing southbound bicycle lane on Guadalupe Street and the existing northbound bicycle lane on Lavaca Street north of 4th Street would be removed to accommodate the new street configurations. New bicycle lanes on Nueces Street would be constructed and existing bicycle facilities improved to mitigate this loss.

Local traffic would be maintained along Guadalupe Street in this section, including use by buses and emergency vehicles, and for local delivery and garage access. General or through-traffic access in this area would be relocated to Lavaca Street, which would be converted to bidirectional flow between MLK Boulevard and 2nd Street. To support the change in traffic patterns, Lavaca Street would be restriped between East MLK Boulevard and Cesar Chavez Street. The new lane configuration would allow for two-way vehicular traffic from East MLK Boulevard to West 2nd Street. The roadway would include two northbound and two southbound travel lanes, with left-turn lanes at some intersections. Existing curbs and sidewalks would be maintained for much of the corridor. In some locations, the curb would be reconstructed to accommodate the roadway width necessary for two-way traffic, and corner radii would be modified to accommodate new turning movements. A northbound bicycle lane would be provided between 4th Street and Cesar Chavez Street. All traffic signals would be modified to facilitate two-way traffic.

To support connectivity and traffic operations to the south of this part of the Project, the South 1st Street bridge would be restriped to accommodate a northbound left-turn lane for buses to access northbound Guadalupe Street, and bicycle traffic on the bridge would be relocated from the existing on-street bicycle lanes to the existing side paths. At the northwestern corner of West Riverside Drive and South 1st Street, a new sidewalk connection would be constructed to

connect the intersection north to the western side path of the bridge, with the existing sidewalk on that corner repurposed as a dedicated bikeway. Additionally, the West Riverside Drive and South 1st Street traffic signal would be modified to install a northbound bus queue jump. This would facilitate the movement of northbound buses from the outer traffic lane to the innermost traffic lane to access the northbound left-turn lane onto northbound Guadalupe Street.

At the intersection of Guadalupe Street and 3rd Street, the alignment would extend east on 3rd Street, cross Congress Avenue, and connect to Trinity Street. Between Colorado Street and Congress Avenue, vehicular traffic would be prohibited and redirected to surrounding roadways and nearby thoroughfares (e.g., 2nd Street and 4th Street). The existing protected bikeway along 3rd Street would be relocated to 4th Street. 4th Street would be modified between Nueces and Trinity Streets to include protected bicycle lanes in each direction of travel. The existing parking on 4th Street would be modified or removed as necessary to accommodate the bicycle lanes while maintaining one lane of vehicular travel in each direction. Sidewalk modifications may be necessary to accommodate the new bicycle lanes while maintaining the existing loading docks in the block between Lavaca Street and Colorado Street.

The light rail alignment would turn south from 3rd Street onto Trinity Street and would cross Lady Bird Lake on a new light rail bridge. Dedicated bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be provided as part of the new bridge crossing of Lady Bird Lake, with connections to the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail in Waller Beach at Town Lake Metro Park, and future bus use of the bridge would not be precluded by the proposed design.

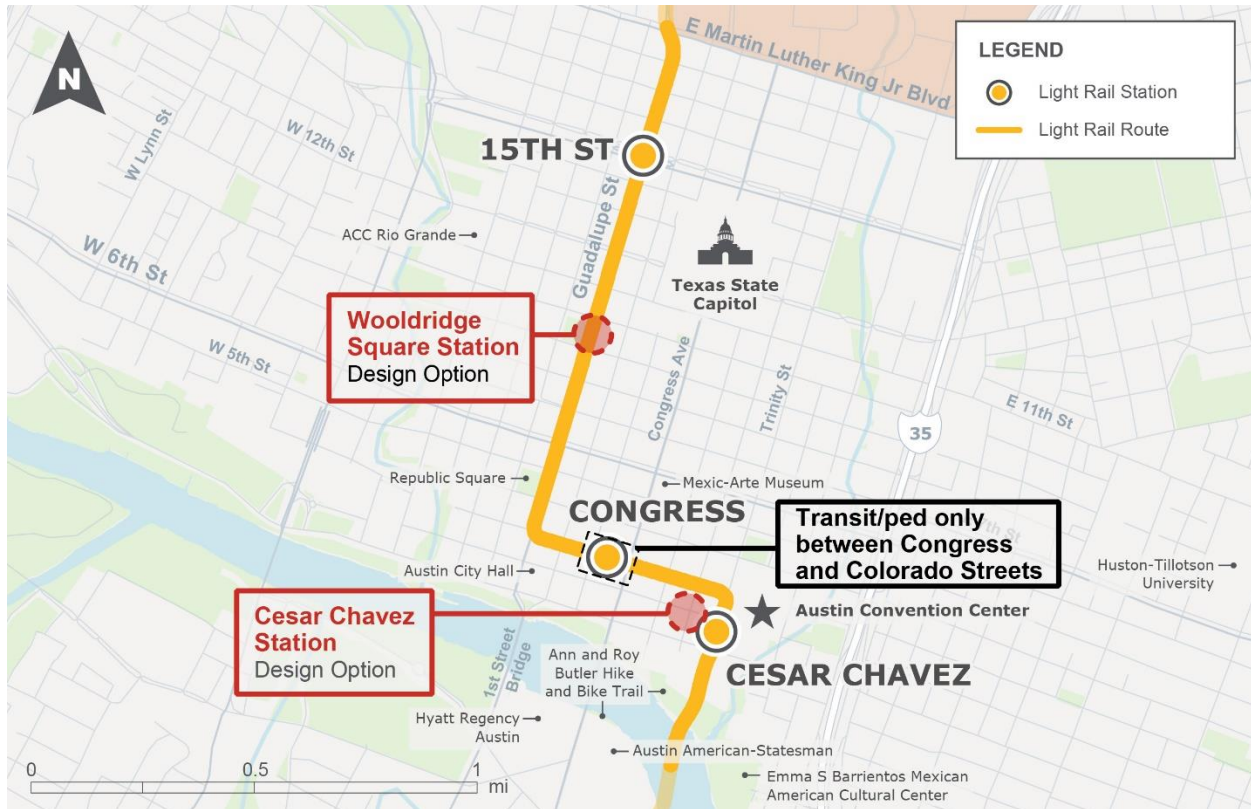
Under the Build Alternative, three stations would be located in the Downtown Section:

- **15th Street Station.** A side platform station on Guadalupe Street between West 16th Street and West 14th Street accessed via crosswalks at the adjacent intersections.
- **Congress Station.** A side platform station on 3rd Street between Colorado Street and Congress Avenue accessed via adjacent sidewalks.
- **Cesar Chavez Station.** A side platform station on Trinity Street between East Cesar Chavez Street and 2nd Street accessed via adjacent sidewalks.

ATP is evaluating two Design Options in the Downtown Section, as shown in **Figure 2-7**:

- **Wooldridge Square Station Design Option** would add a station on Guadalupe Street between West 10th Street and West 9th Street at Wooldridge Square. ATP developed this Design Option in response to public support for improved access to light rail via closer station spacing in Downtown Austin.
- **Cesar Chavez Station Design Option** would locate the station and guideway off-street on a diagonal through private property, integrated with the transit-oriented development that is being planned for the site. ATP developed this Design Option to explore the potential for a joint development opportunity with a private developer.

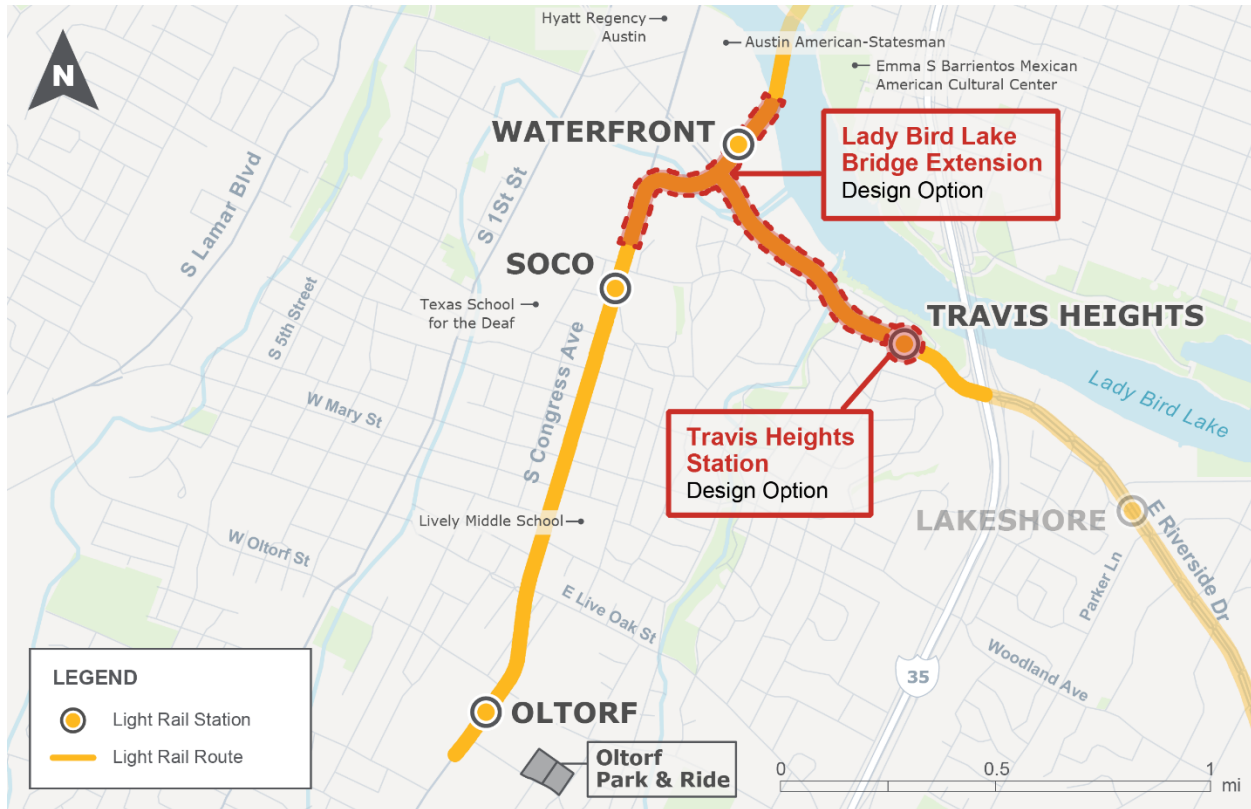
Figure 2-7: Project Components in the Downtown Section



2.3.2.3 South Section

The South Section extends from Lady Bird Lake south to Oltorf Street and from South Congress Avenue east to I-35. On the south shore of Lady Bird Lake, the alignment would connect to East Riverside Drive, where it would split into two branches, crossing over East Bouldin Creek in both directions. Under the Build Alternative, the center-running at-grade alignment would extend southward on South Congress Avenue, terminating at the intersection of South Congress Avenue and Oltorf Street. This area on South Congress Avenue hosts a high activity mixed-use district and education facilities including Lively Middle School and the Texas School for the Deaf. The center-running at-grade eastern portion of the Build Alternative would traverse the neighborhood of Travis Heights and parkland on the south shore of Lady Bird Lake. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be provided throughout the corridor and would include variations of bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and/or shared use paths with connections to existing and planned facilities. Two Design Options and a park-and-ride would be located in this section, as shown in **Figure 2-8**.

Figure 2-8: Project Components in the South Section



Under the Build Alternative, four stations would be located in the South Section, three along the southern branch and one along the eastern branch:

- **Waterfront Station.** A side platform station on East Riverside Drive at the Barton Springs Road extension accessed via adjacent sidewalks.
- **South Congress (SoCo) Station.** A center platform station on South Congress Avenue between Academy Drive and James Street accessed via crosswalks at the adjacent intersections.
- **Oltorf Station.** A center platform station on South Congress Avenue between Oltorf Street and Long Bow Lane accessed via crosswalks at adjacent intersections.
- **Travis Heights Station.** A center platform station on East Riverside Drive east of Travis Heights Boulevard, accessed via the crosswalk at the Travis Heights intersection.

An at-grade surface park-and-ride near the Oltorf Station would be located on Long Bow Lane, east of South Congress Avenue and one block south of Oltorf Street. A parking facility is currently operated at the site, and ATP would seek a leasing agreement for the proposed park-and-ride. The site is approximately 2 acres and able to accommodate approximately 100 parking spaces.

ATP is evaluating two Design Options in the South Section:

- **Lady Bird Lake Bridge Extension Design Option** would include an elevated Waterfront Station and the extension of the elevated structure south of the station toward South Congress Avenue and in the median of East Riverside Drive to Travis Heights Boulevard. ATP developed this Design Option to address the surrounding topography challenges and the difficult traffic operations that would result from an at-grade alignment of the junction (connection point) of all three light rail branches at East Riverside Drive.
- **Travis Heights Station Design Option** would eliminate the station at Travis Heights. ATP is evaluating this Design Option to avoid the “use” (i.e., acquisition) of parkland in consideration of Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act, address technical challenges with topography, and avoid overlapping construction sites with the planned I-35 Capital Express Central Project. This Design Option is estimated to result in approximately 100 fewer daily boardings.

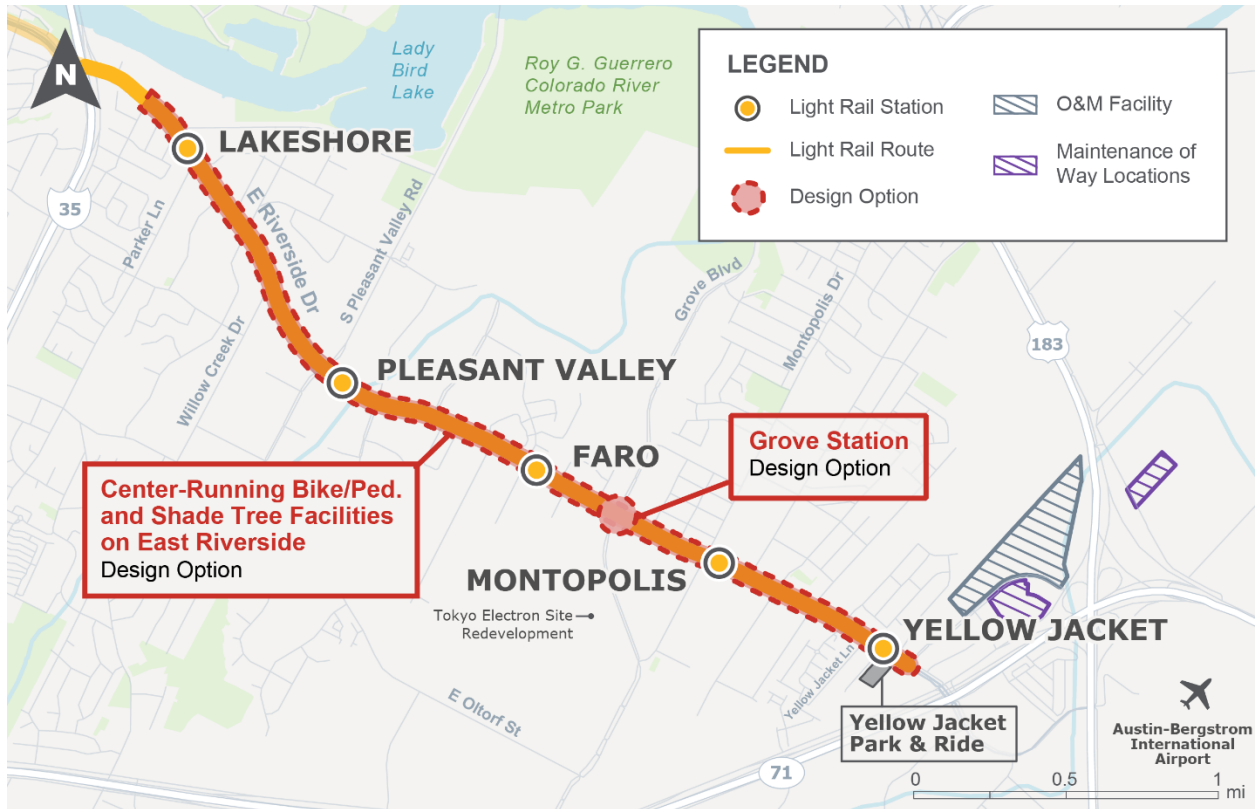
2.3.2.4 East Section

The East Section extends along East Riverside Drive from I-35 to Yellow Jacket Lane along a commercial corridor. The center-running at-grade alignment would extend southeastward, terminating just west of SH 71 at the Yellow Jacket Station. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be provided throughout the corridor and would include variations of bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and/or shared use paths with connections to existing and planned facilities. Two Design Options, a park-and-ride, the OMF, and the MOW shops would be located in this section, as shown in **Figure 2-9**.

Under the Build Alternative, five stations would be located in the East Section:

- **Lakeshore Station.** A center platform station on East Riverside Drive between South Lakeshore Boulevard and Shore District Drive accessed via crosswalks at the adjacent intersections.
- **Pleasant Valley Station.** A side platform station on East Riverside Drive southeast of South Pleasant Valley Road accessed via an adjacent transit plaza in the median of East Riverside Drive.
- **Faro Station.** A center platform station on East Riverside Drive between Faro Drive and Penick Drive accessed via crosswalks at adjacent intersections.
- **Montopolis Station.** A center platform station on East Riverside Drive between Montopolis Drive and Vargas Road accessed via crosswalks at the adjacent intersections.
- **Yellow Jacket Station.** A center platform station on East Riverside Drive between Yellow Jacket Lane and Coriander Drive accessed via crosswalks at the adjacent intersections, with a connection to the proposed park-and-ride.

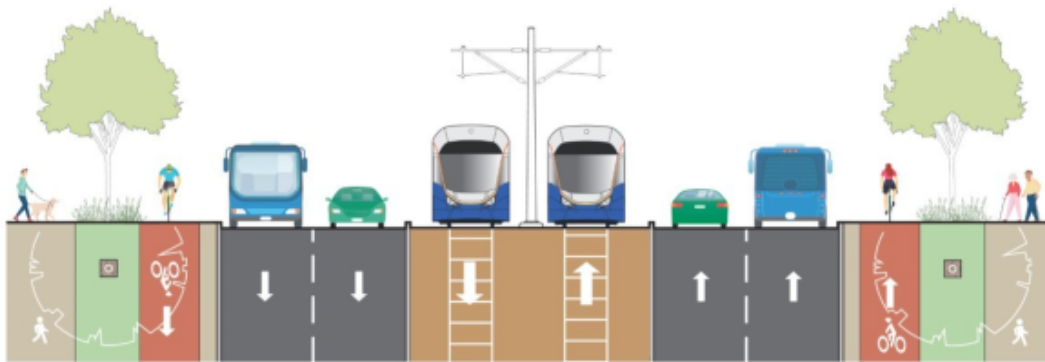
Figure 2-9: Project Components in the East Section



ATP is evaluating two Design Options in the East Section:

- Center-Running Bike/Pedestrian and Shade Tree Facilities on East Riverside Design Option** would include center-running bicycle and pedestrian lanes next to the light rail east of I-35 on East Riverside Drive. In this part of the Project corridor, the roadway ROW is relatively wide, and there is a lack of shade and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure serving the adjacent communities. The Design Option for a center-running configuration recognizes an opportunity to improve mobility options and user experience across all modes of travel in the corridor by providing continuous bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that minimizes conflict points with driveways. This Design Option is also an opportunity to improve shade cover and plant taller trees along the corridor. The separated traffic in this configuration could contribute to better speed management and safer conditions for all users. The bicycle/pedestrian and shade tree configurations for the Build Alternative and Design Option are shown in **Figure 2-10**.
- Grove Station Design Option** was initially proposed to combine the Montopolis and Faro Stations into a single station at Grove Boulevard in order to improve bus connectivity to a nearby Austin Community College campus and provide direct access to planned affordable housing. This Design Option was presented during scoping meetings in February 2024. In response to public feedback, a Variation to the Grove Station Design Option was developed. The variation retains two stations in this area but would locate the Faro Station 800 feet to the east, closer to Grove Boulevard.

Figure 2-10: Side- and Center-Running Bicycle and Pedestrian Lanes



The Build Alternative would provide dedicated lanes for pedestrians and bicyclists on both sides of the roadway.



The Design Option would locate the bicycle and pedestrian lanes near the middle of the right-of-way next to the light rail with an opportunity for more shade trees.

A surface park-and-ride near the Yellow Jacket Station would be located on the south side of East Riverside Drive southwest of Uphill Lane. The 2-acre site would provide 150 parking spaces.

The OMF is proposed near the U.S. Highway 183 (US 183) / SH 71 interchange near Airport Commerce Drive in an area developed with commercial and light industrial uses, with residential use restrictions due to its proximity to the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. The proposed site would include space for administration, operations and maintenance staff, a light rail control center, light rail vehicle storage tracks, and MOW shops. Light rail vehicle access to the OMF is shown in the conceptual engineering drawings in **Appendix C**.

2.3.3 Operating Characteristics

Frequent service would be provided on the light rail system. In the North and Downtown Sections, between the 38th Street Station and Waterfront Station, trains would operate

approximately every 5 minutes most of the day and up to every 7.5 minutes during off-peak hours. In the South and East Sections, peak-period service would operate every 10 minutes, with an off-peak service frequency of up to 15 minutes. Train speed would adhere to posted arterial automobile speed limits. The service would operate Monday through Friday 5:00 a.m. to 12:30 a.m., Saturday 5:50 a.m. to 12:30 a.m., and Sunday 6:00 a.m. to 12:30 a.m.

2.4 Steps in the NEPA Process

ATP solicited public and agency feedback on the Build Alternative and six Design Options during the NEPA scoping period held between January 19 and March 4, 2024. FTA and ATP identified which of the six Design Options were recommended after consideration of more than 3,860 comments received during public scoping and subsequent technical evaluation. The scoping process is summarized in **Appendix B**, and the rationale for the identification of the Preferred Alternative, including Design Options, is provided in **Chapter 7**.

This DEIS will be available for public and agency review and comment for 60 days. ATP will hold public hearings during this comment period to receive input on the findings and conclusions in this DEIS.

After consideration of the analyses and findings contained in this DEIS and review of public and agency comments, FTA and ATP intend to issue a combined FEIS and Record of Decision. Federal regulations direct agencies to expeditiously develop a single document that consists of an FEIS and Record of Decision unless:

1. the FEIS includes substantial changes to the Project that are relevant to environmental or safety concerns; or
2. there is significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns that bears on the Project or the effects of the Project.

The combined FEIS and Record of Decision will respond to the public and agency comments received on the DEIS, state FTA's decision on the Project, and list mitigation measures that ATP would implement. ATP must issue the combined FEIS and Record of Decision before federal funding can be allocated to the Project.

2.5 Estimated Project Cost and Schedule

The capital cost of the Project, estimated to be approximately \$7.1 billion in year-of-expenditure dollars (excluding financial costs), is based on the conceptual design drawings presented in **Appendix C**. ATP will update cost information at key milestones as more detailed design and updates to key cost factors are developed. The Project's construction schedule is anticipated to extend from 2027 to 2033, with service scheduled to begin shortly thereafter.