Executive Summary

CONTENTS

FIGURES

TABLES

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ATP	Austin Transit Partnership
CAMPO	Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
CapMetro	Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority
City	City of Austin
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EJ	environmental justice
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
I-35	Interstate 35
MLK	Martin Luther King Jr.
MOW	maintenance of way
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended
OMF	operations and maintenance facility
Project	Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project
SoCo	South Congress [Station or District]
UT	University of Texas at Austin

Executive Summary

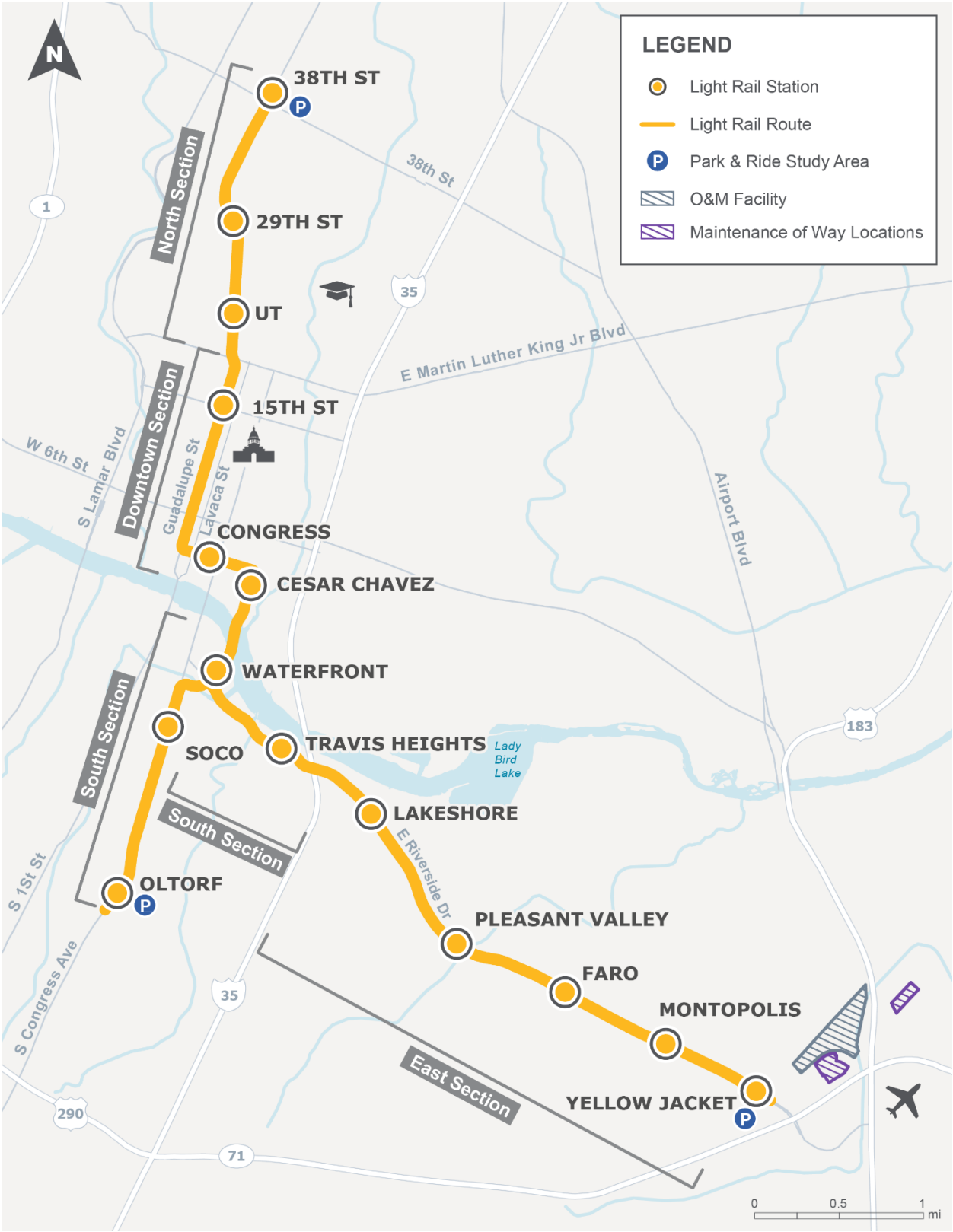
Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) proposes to construct the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project (the Project). The proposed Project is a 9.8-mile light rail transit branched line from points north, south, and east of Downtown Austin, as well as an operations and maintenance facility (OMF), maintenance of way (MOW) shops, and associated light rail equipment storage functions (see **Figure ES-1**). The Project is one of multiple planned high-capacity transit projects that implements the Project Connect System Plan (Project Connect) and includes a voter-approved dedicated local funding source for light rail.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), as the federal lead agency, and ATP, as the local Project sponsor and joint lead agency, have prepared this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) and its implementing regulations. It includes a Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation, prepared in accordance with Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act, and a Draft Section 6(f) Evaluation prepared in accordance with the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.

FTA is aware of the November 12, 2024, decision in *Marin Audubon Society v. Federal Aviation Administration*, No. 23-1067 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 12, 2024). To the extent that a court may conclude that the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA are not judicially enforceable or binding on this agency action, FTA has nonetheless elected to follow those regulations at 40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500–1508, in addition to FTA's regulations implementing NEPA at 23 Code of Federal Regulations Part 771, to meet the agency's obligations under NEPA, 42 United States Code §§ 4321 et seq.

This Executive Summary summarizes the major conclusions of ATP's social, economic, and environmental analyses for the No Build Alternative and the Build Alternative and six Design Options that were presented to the public during the NEPA scoping process initiated in January 2024. Based on information provided and in accordance with applicable federal law, FTA has not identified any possible conflicts between the proposed action and the objectives of local, state, regional, federal, and tribal plans or policies. FTA and ATP invite comments on the No Build Alternative, the Build Alternative and Design Options, and the information and analyses in this DEIS. FTA's final determinations will be presented in a combined Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision pursuant to 23 United States Code § 139(n)(2) unless statutory criteria preclude issuance of a combined document.

Figure ES-1: Build Alternative



ES.1 Purpose and Need for the Project

The purpose of the Project is to address growing corridor travel demand with a reliable, safe, cost-effective, time-competitive, sustainable, and equitable light rail system that operates in a dedicated guideway.

The lack of transportation options and limited roadway capacity to accommodate growth in central Texas may hinder the continued vitality and economic health of Austin and surrounding areas in the future. Inadequate transit access coupled with rising travel demand have resulted in longer travel times, decreased mobility, and additional travel costs for residents and businesses.

The Project is needed to:

- increase the transportation network capacity to meet existing travel demand;
- sustainably support Austin's population and employment growth;
- improve transit access between affordable housing and jobs; and
- support growth of and connectivity to regional activity centers.

With growth in the region expected to more than double to nearly 4.7 million residents and 2.4 million jobs by 2045 (Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization [CAMPO] 2024) and limited land available for roadway expansion in Austin, more efficient use of existing transportation infrastructure is needed. Key City of Austin (City) goals include reaching net zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 (City of Austin 2021) and achieving a 50/50 mode share for commuting to manage congestion in Austin as the region continues to grow (City of Austin 2023). The Project is an integral part of the City's response to climate change and supports the 2040 net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions goal by increasing the number of trips made by transit and reducing vehicle miles traveled by private automobiles. The Project is also integral to the region's transportation plans to increase capacity and improve mobility.

While employment options in Downtown Austin continue to grow, the cost of living in Austin has increased substantially. Over the last 10 years, jobs in high-tech industries rose nearly 62 percent in the Austin Metro Area and account for 17 percent of all jobs according to the Austin Chamber of Commerce (2021). While these high-paying jobs have accelerated the area's economy, more than one-third of local households remain cost-burdened. Home prices, rents, and property taxes pose challenges for vulnerable populations living in the community. The City is working to implement plans and policies to increase density along with preserving and creating affordable housing. The Project is integral to the City's equity goals and land use plans, which rely on a major transportation investment to connect affordable housing to viable employment opportunities.

Planned economic growth centers in Austin include Downtown Austin, the University of Texas at Austin (UT) West Campus, South Central Waterfront, and East Austin. The Project is a key component in the community-driven local land use plans in these areas. The Project supports the City's strategic growth objectives by linking key activity centers with a fast and efficient mode of transportation.

ES.2 Summary of Alternatives

This DEIS evaluates the No Build Alternative, the Build Alternative, and six Design Options. A range of build alternatives was examined, from modest investments in shared-use roadways in a Transportation System Management Alternative to major investments in dedicated bus rapid transit and light rail. The alternatives development and analysis process encompassed extensive community planning and stakeholder engagement, as well as comprehensive planning and data-driven analysis that began in 2018. Throughout the public engagement process, from early feedback to the current scoping period (held in early 2024) to satisfy NEPA requirements, light rail has been identified as the most appropriate mode of transportation for Austin.

Austin voters approved a ballot measure in November 2020 that increased the City's property tax rate to provide a dedicated local funding source for the Project Connect program, including light rail. Following extensive public participation and coordination with Project stakeholders, in June 2023 the fiscally constrained Project was defined and adopted by ATP, the City, and the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro).

ES.2.1 No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative assumes that light rail would not be implemented in Austin but that other transportation projects, CapMetro services, highway networks, traffic volumes, and forecasted 2045 population and employment growth identified in the region's long-range plan would be realized (CAMPO 2024).

ES.2.2 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 ES-1** above. The components of the Build Alternative and Design Options are described for the North, Downtown, South, and East Sections of the alignment. The Build Alternative and all Design Options include a new light rail bridge and bicycle and pedestrian lanes crossing Lady Bird Lake to connect the neighborhoods in East Austin and South Austin to the central business district and points north. Bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and/or shared use paths with connections to existing and planned parks and trails would be provided throughout the light rail corridor.

ES.2.2.1 North Section

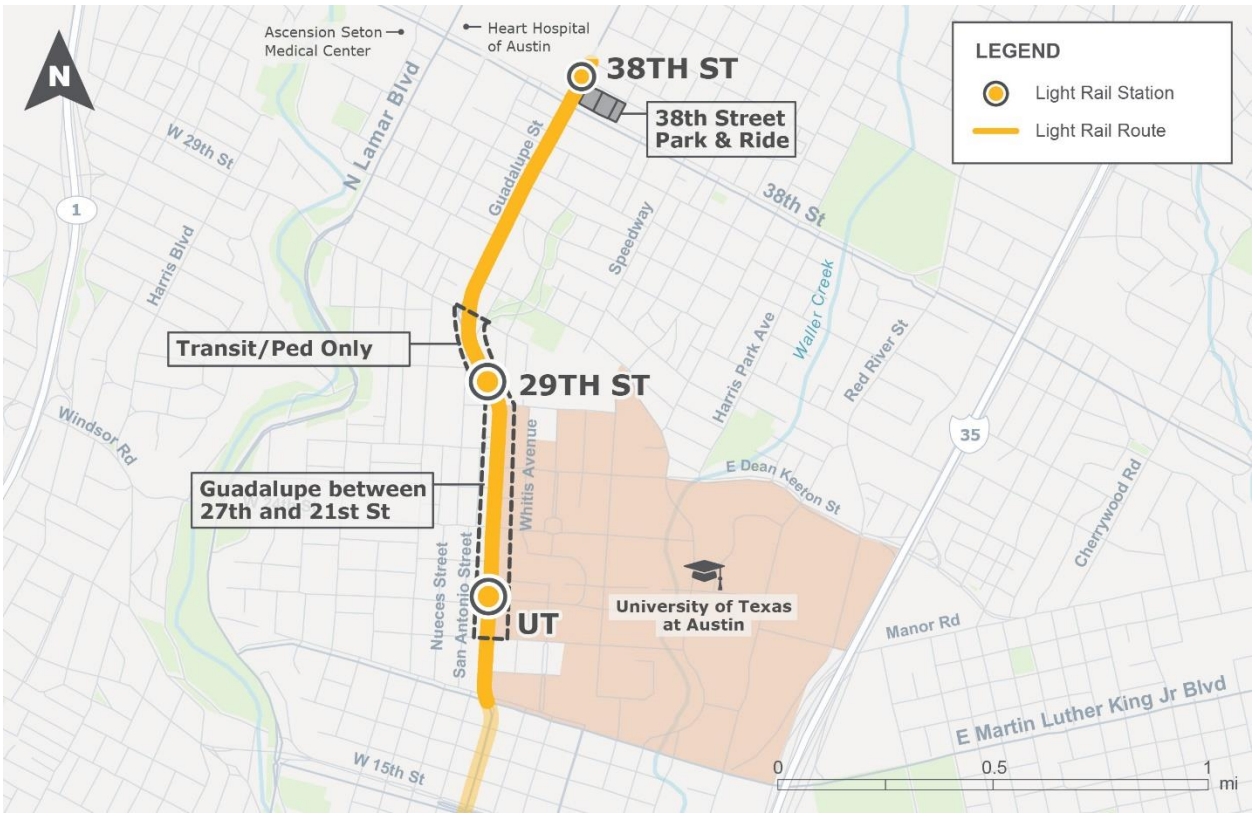
The North Section of the alignment extends from 38th Street to Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Boulevard and serves the UT campus, medical facilities, and the Museum District among other key destinations. Beginning at the intersection of Guadalupe Street and 38th Street, the center-running at-grade alignment would extend south to UT. Due to a high level of pedestrian activity on Guadalupe Street, a light rail/pedestrian corridor would be established between 29th and 27th Streets, and a transit/bike/pedestrian corridor would be established between 27th and 21st Streets. Cars traveling through the area would disperse to surrounding roadways and thoroughfares, which could include San Antonio Street, Whitis Avenue, or Nueces Street.

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.

As shown in **Figure ES-2,** a park-and-ride garage would be located near the 38th Street Station. ATP would design the facility to accommodate 300 parking spaces to meet the estimated Project demand.

Figure ES-2: Project Components in the North Section



ES.2.2.2 Downtown Section

The Downtown Section extends from MLK Boulevard to Lady Bird Lake and serves 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. 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. The light rail alignment would turn south on

Trinity Street and 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.

Guadalupe Street would have center-running light rail with one traffic lane in each direction on either side of the guideway between MLK Boulevard and 3rd Street for buses, emergency vehicles, and local delivery and garage access. General traffic would be relocated to Lavaca Street, which would be converted to bidirectional flow between MLK Boulevard and 2nd 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. Between Colorado Street and Congress Avenue on 3rd Street, vehicular traffic would be redirected to surrounding roadways, and the existing protected bikeway along 3rd Street would be relocated to 4th Street to accommodate the Congress Station.

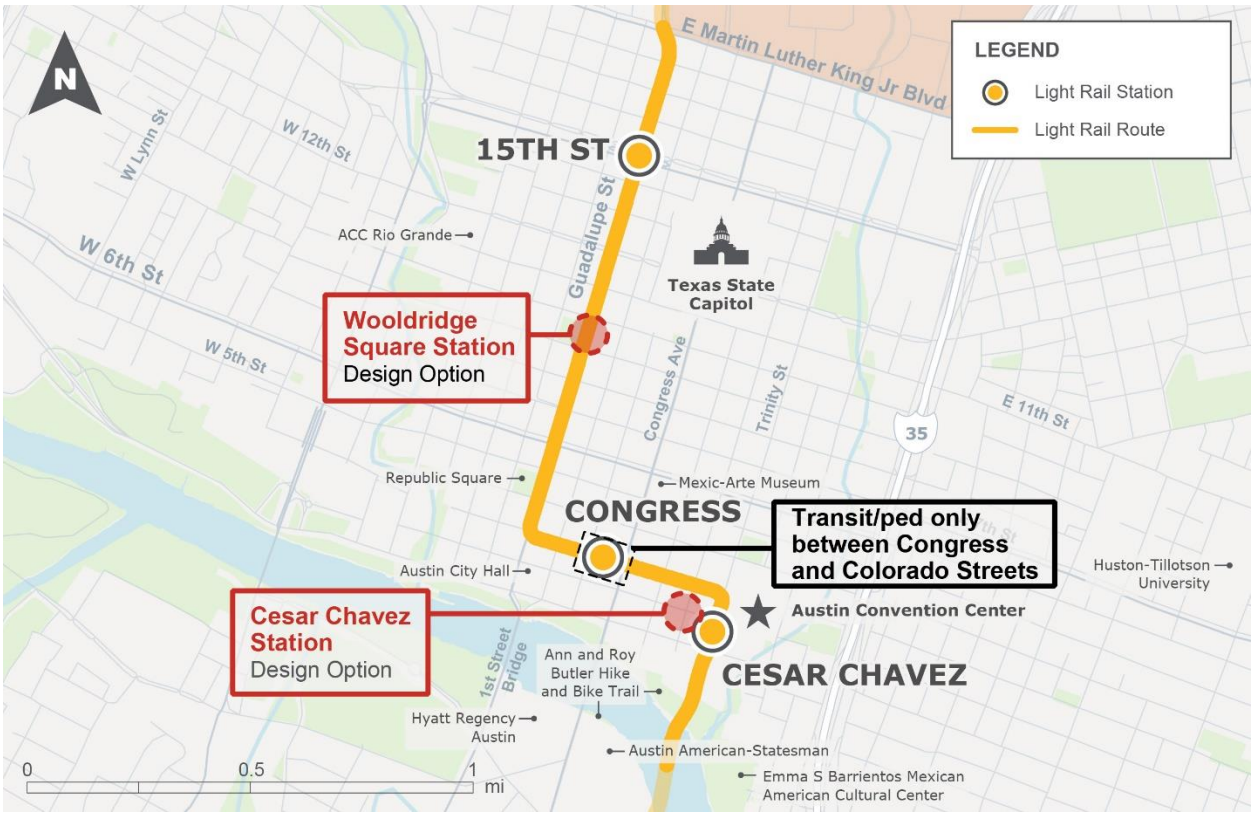
Under the Build Alternative, three stations would be located in the Downtown Section:

- **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 ES-3**:

- **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 ES-3: Project Components in the Downtown Section



ES.2.2.3 South Section

The South Section extends from Lady Bird Lake south to Oltorf Street and from South Congress Avenue east to Interstate 35 (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.

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

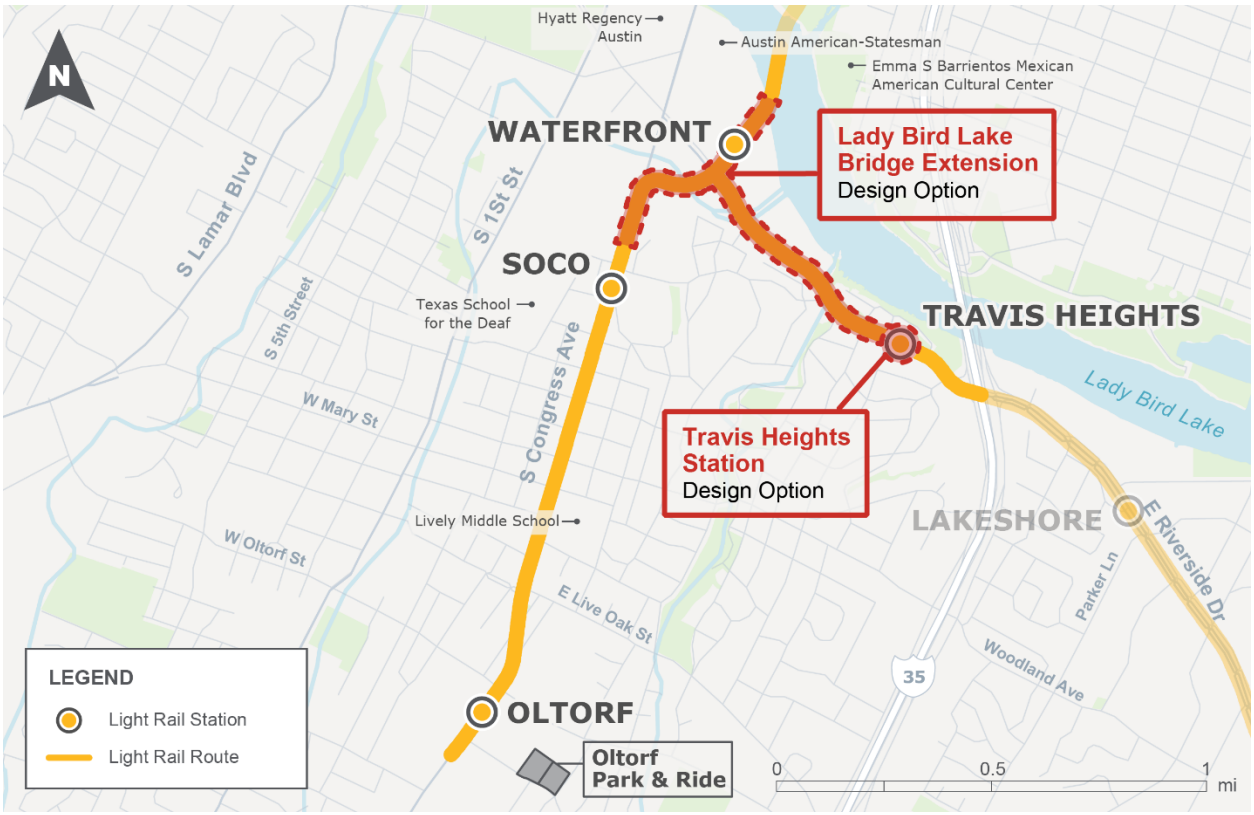
- **Waterfront Station.** A side platform station on East Riverside Drive at the Barton Springs Road extension accessed via adjacent sidewalks.
- **South Congress (SoCo) Station.** A center platform station on South Congress Avenue between Academy Drive and James Street accessed via crosswalks at the 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 would be located near the Oltorf Station and planned to provide about 100 parking spaces.

ATP is evaluating two Design Options in the South Section, as shown in **Figure ES-4**:

- **Lady Bird Lake Bridge Extension Design Option** would include an elevated Waterfront Station and 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 projected ridership, and avoid overlapping construction sites with the planned I-35 Capital Express Central Project.

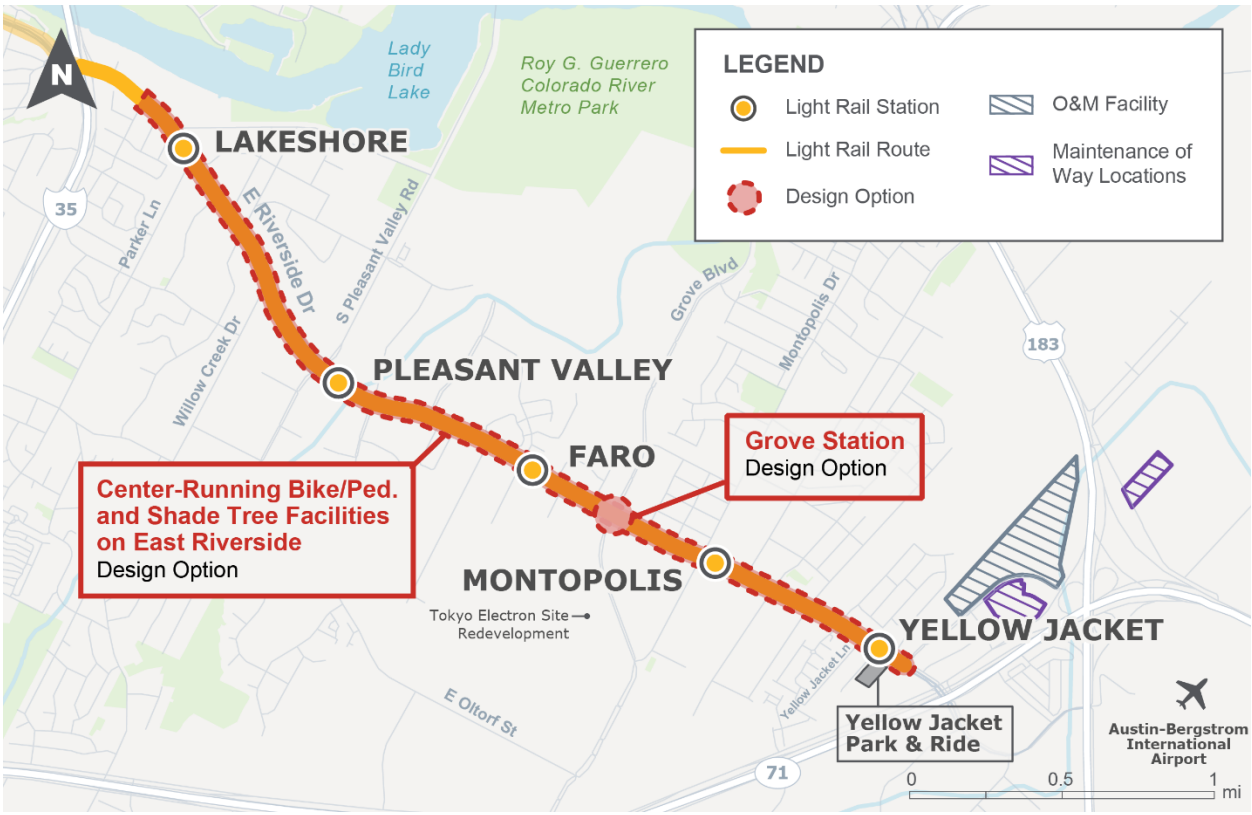
Figure ES-4: Project Components in the South Section



ES.2.2.4 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 State Highway 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. A park-and-ride, the OMF, and MOW shops would be located in this section, as shown in **Figure ES-5**.

Figure ES-5: Project Components in the East Section



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.

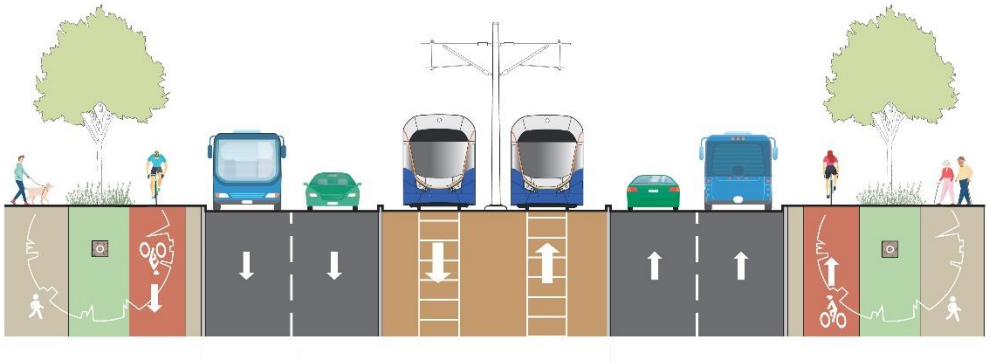
A surface park-and-ride near the Yellow Jacket Station would be designed to provide 150 parking spaces and is shown in **Appendix C**.

The Project would include an OMF to store and maintain the light rail vehicles and for materials and equipment needed to maintain the guideway and associated amenities. The OMF is proposed near the U.S. Highway 183 / State Highway 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**.

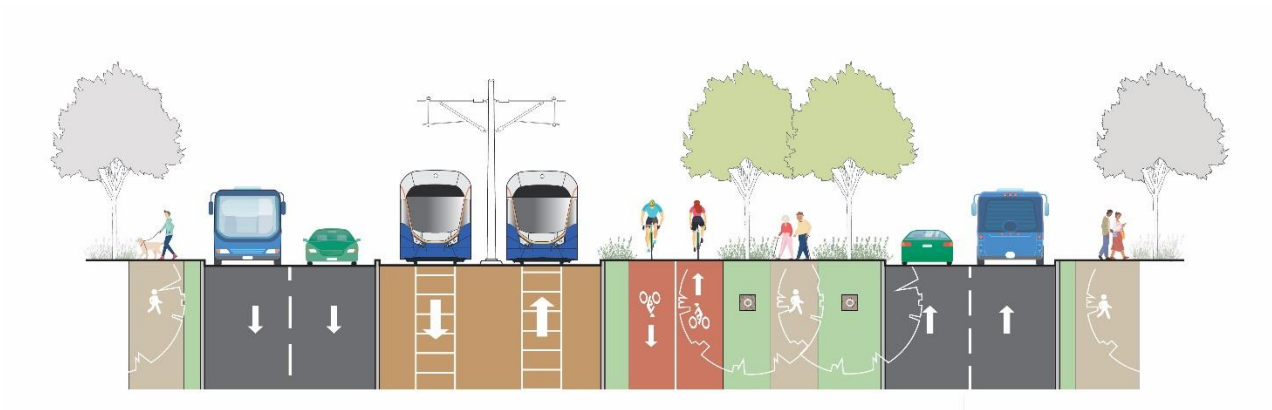
ATP is evaluating two Design Options in the East Section:

- **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 right-of-way 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 ES-6**.
- **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 ES-6: 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 provide shade trees and bicycle and pedestrian lanes near the middle of the right-of-way next to the light rail.

ES.2.2.5 Light Rail Equipment

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. Train control and communication cabinets would be approximately 0.5 mile apart along the alignment.

ES.2.2.6 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.

ES.3 Transportation Effects

The light rail would connect to CapMetro bus and rail service and enhance regional connectivity. Based on 2045 ridership forecasts, nearly 29,000 trips would be made on the light rail each weekday, with more than 40 percent of the trips new to transit. Most riders would bike or walk to stations, with less than 10 percent accessing stations by automobile. The Build Alternative would reduce 62,000 vehicle miles traveled by private automobiles in the region per day.

The Build Alternative would provide faster travel times compared to current bus service because it would provide direct routes in a dedicated guideway free from traffic congestion, allowing for greater efficiency and reliability. End-to-end travel by light rail would be about 20 minutes between 38th Street and Oltorf Street, 13 minutes faster than current bus service. End-to-end travel by light rail would be about 26 minutes between 38th Street and Yellow Jacket, resulting in a 19-minute travel time savings from current bus service, which requires a transfer.

Mobility benefits would be enhanced by protected bike lanes, new sidewalks, and shared used paths including for the neighborhoods in East Austin that currently lack continuous bicycle lanes and sidewalks.

ES.3.1 Traffic

With or without the Project, existing traffic congestion within 0.5 mile of the Project alignment is expected to worsen considerably by 2045, with a majority of intersections operating at unacceptable levels of service. With the Project, traffic patterns would change because of roadway reconfigurations near the light rail stations and the one-way traffic operation on Guadalupe Street with traffic redirected to Lavaca Street. Traffic signal prioritization for the light rail could speed up the trip for those traveling in the same direction but delay the trip for those who need to cross the tracks.

ATP continues to coordinate with the Austin Transportation and Public Works Department to address potential effects on traffic conditions and to incorporate measures to mitigate delay and optimize traffic flow in the Project's design.

ES.3.2 Parking

The Project would affect the corridor's roadway design configurations, affecting the amount of on-street parking in certain areas. The Project would remove up to 607 on-street parking spaces, most of which are on Guadalupe Street, Lavaca Street, and South Congress Avenue. There is a substantial amount of off-street parking that would absorb the loss of parking on Guadalupe Street (from 38th Street to 15th Street) and in Downtown Austin. While increased population and employment along with the City's recently adopted parking policies would increase the demand on the existing parking supply, the Project would reduce the demand for parking and result in a net benefit in the region.

ES.4 Summary of Environmental Findings

The potential beneficial and adverse effects of the Build Alternative are reviewed below in comparison to the conditions that would occur under the No Build Alternative. The trade-offs among the Build Alternative and Design Options are highlighted. This evaluation provides a basis for decision-makers and the public to assess the benefits and consequences of implementing the Project. **Table ES-1** summarizes the effects of the Preferred Alternative on transportation and the natural and built environment. ATP's proposed mitigation measures to minimize and mitigate the effects of the Project are included in the table.

Table ES-1: Effects of the Preferred Alternative and ATP Proposed Mitigation Measures

Impact Category	Preferred Alternative	ATP Proposed Mitigation Measures
Traffic and Parking (Chapter 3)	• Modified roadway configurations, traffic patterns, and intersection operations. • Conversion of Guadalupe Street between 29th and 27th Streets to a light rail/pedestrian corridor. • Conversion of Guadalupe Street between 27th and 21st Streets to a transit/bike/pedestrian corridor. • Conversion of 3rd Street between Colorado Street and Congress Avenue to a light rail/pedestrian-only corridor and relocation of 3rd Street bicycle lane to 4th Street. • Localized level of service impacts and delays at intersections. • Loss of up to 607 on-street parking spaces along Guadalupe Street, in Downtown Austin, and on South Congress Avenue. • Potential increase in travel time for emergency response due to increased delay at light rail crossings; emergency access would be accommodated through design.	• Traffic signal optimization, additional turning lanes, and optimized queue storage. • New bicycle lanes (15 blocks) and improved bicycle lanes (3 blocks) on Nueces Street to mitigate the loss of lanes on Guadalupe and Lavaca Streets. • Continued coordination with Austin Transportation and Public Works Department and emergency response providers to minimize effects on traffic and parking during construction and operation. • Preparation of a Construction Management Plan addressing maintenance and protection of traffic, truck routes, maintaining access to businesses and residences, and communication protocols for road and lane closures and bus stop relocations.
Acquisitions and Displacements (Chapter 4, Section 4.1)	• Permanent acquisition of approximately 85 acres, which includes the 62-acre OMF site. • 28 full parcels and 280 partial parcels totaling 308 parcel acquisitions. • Potential residential displacement due to acquisition of up to four single-family homes; continuing design will prioritize reducing the impacts on potential residential displacements. • Up to 64 business displacements resulting from full acquisitions. • Loss of some parking and/or access to businesses resulting from partial acquisitions, which could require relocations.	• Financial compensation and relocation assistance in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. • Coordination with affected property owners to reach formal agreements for acquisitions and address access and parking needs. • Implementation of best management practices to minimize construction effects. • Restoration of temporary easement areas to existing conditions or better once construction is complete. • Development of a Business Assistance Program to reduce the burden on businesses prior to and during construction.
Land Use and Zoning (Chapter 4, Section 4.2)	• Consistent with local and regional land use plans and zoning. • Supports the City's mobility, clean air, and equity goals. • OMF operations permitted under the City's zoning code.	No adverse effects anticipated; mitigation not required.
Neighborhoods and Community Resources (Chapter 4, Section 4.3)	• Consistent with neighborhood character and fosters neighborhood cohesion. • Relocation of one community facility, the Waller Creek Boathouse. • Vehicular and pedestrian access affected by changes in circulation patterns.	• Relocation of Waller Creek Boathouse in accordance with Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice (Chapter 4, Section 4.4 and Chapter 6)	• Sustainably supports economic growth in the region. • Creates jobs and supports increased economic activity during construction and operation; over 7,200 jobs each year during construction are estimated and over 1,100 new permanent jobs each year during operations. • Potential for disproportionate and adverse effects in environmental justice communities reduced through the efforts of ATP and the City's Displacement Prevention team. • Loss of tax revenue from property acquired and converted to transportation use, which would be offset by the increased land value of higher density development near stations. • Potential short-term loss of business revenue due to reduction of on-street parking supply offset by station area activity and growth in population.	• Continued support of the Community Advisory Committee's Anti-Displacement objectives to develop and implement programs funded by the $300 million allocated for anti-displacement efforts. • Support of regional Workforce Programs to provide community members with access to jobs and career growth opportunities in the infrastructure industry. • Implementation of a Business Assistance Program to reduce the burden on small and local businesses prior to and during construction.
Visual Quality and Aesthetics (Chapter 4, Section 4.5)	• New light rail visual features introduced into the urban realm; prominent new bridge spanning Lady Bird Lake would result in neutral effects on park and trail users on both sides of the lake. • The Lady Bird Lake Bridge extension would be visible to several residents on East Riverside Drive, and park users and may experience obstructed views. • No impacts on Capitol View Corridors because Project elements would be below the height restrictions.	• Incorporation of context-sensitive design features at stations, new bridges, elevated structures, the OMF, and associated facilities. • Coordination with affected stakeholders for architectural treatments, visual screening, landscaping, and outdoor lighting design.
Cultural Resources (Chapter 4, Section 4.6)	• Partial acquisitions of historic built properties, which would not result in adverse effects on their qualifying characteristics or the activities, features, or attributes qualifying the property for protection under Section 106 and Section 4(f) regulations. • Disturbance of areas with moderate or high probability of containing archaeological deposits.	No adverse effects anticipated; mitigation includes: • Section 106 consultation with Texas Historical Commission and Consulting Parties on determination of effects and measures to minimize construction effects. • Pre-construction archaeological surveys conducted in areas with moderate and high probability for containing deposits. • Archaeological monitoring during construction of sensitive areas that are currently inaccessible for survey because of existing pavement or structures.
Hazardous Materials (Chapter 4, Section 4.7)	• Disturbance, removal, and transporting of hazardous materials.	No adverse effects anticipated; mitigation includes: • Adherence to local, state, and federal regulations governing the removal, handling, storage, and transport of hazardous materials. • Pre-construction site investigations, remediation (if required), and preparation of hazardous waste and safety plans in accordance with regulatory requirements. • Monitoring of contractor compliance.

Impact Category	Preferred Alternative	ATP Proposed Mitigation Measures
Utilities (Chapter 4, Section 4.8)	• Relocation of utilities in advance of construction. • Overall reduction in energy consumption compared to the No Build Alternative.	No adverse effects anticipated; best management practices would be implemented.
Safety and Security (Chapter 4, Section 4.9)	• Introduction of new transit mode designed for safety in accordance with FTA design criteria. • Improved safety for bicyclists and pedestrians from new protected lanes and the traffic calming effect of light rail.	No adverse effects anticipated; mitigation includes: • Compliance with local, state, and federal safety and security regulations, including development of an Agency Safety Plan in accordance with federal requirements. • Monitoring contractor compliance.
Noise and Vibration (Chapter 4, Section 4.10)	• FTA's methodology for identifying noise impacts is conservative, and the predicted increases in noise due to the Project would be barely perceptible or not noticeable in most locations. Noise impacts would be noticeable in areas where there is relatively low ambient noise; in areas where noise levels are typical of dense urban environments, moderate and severe impacts are identified by FTA criteria when the incremental change would not be noticeable. • Moderate impacts at 22 buildings (514 dwelling units); severe impacts at 9 buildings (439 dwelling units). • Vibration impacts at a hotel along Riverside Drive and a multi-family building as a result of the lead track to the OMF.	• Evaluation of special trackwork, noise barriers, and building sound insulation, and identification of mitigation in the FEIS and Record of Decision.
Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases (Chapter 4, Section 4.11)	• The Project would be electrically powered with no direct operational emissions. • Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. • Temporary and localized increase in dust and air emissions during construction.	No adverse effects anticipated; mitigation includes: • Compliance with local, state, and federal air quality regulations. • Implementation of best management practices to minimize dust and air quality emissions during construction. • Monitoring of contractor compliance.
Energy and Electromagnetic Fields (Chapter 4, Section 4.12)	• Energy savings. • Potential for electromagnetic interference to result from electromagnetic field.	No adverse effects anticipated; mitigation includes: • Coordination with property owners that operate sensitive equipment and implementation of electromagnetic interference shielding, if required.
Soils and Geologic Resources (Chapter 4, Section 4.13)	• Effects would be minor and manageable through typical design efforts.	No adverse effects anticipated; mitigation is not needed.
Water Resources (Chapter 4, Section 4.14)	• 100-year floodplain impacts in 16 acres and 500-year floodplain impacts in 17 acres. • Wetland impacts of 4.2 acres (National Wetlands Inventory) and 0.05 acre (City-identified wetlands).	• Compliance with regulatory permit requirements and adherence to best management practices and conservation measures. • Identification of wetland mitigation in coordination with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the City, which will be presented in FEIS. • Incorporation of green infrastructure to reduce runoff and risk of flooding and to promote groundwater recharge.
Threatened and Endangered Species Chapter 4, Section 4.15)	• No adverse effect on threatened or endangered species habitat. • 245 protected trees and 211 heritage trees are within the limits of Project construction and require protection or removal.	No adverse effects anticipated on threatened and endangered species. Mitigation for tree impacts includes: • Adherence to best management practices and use of regionally native plants to provide natural habitat. • Development of tree mitigation plan in consultation with City Arborist. Preservation and protection of protected and heritage trees and replacement in consultation with City Arborist.
Cumulative Effects (Chapter 5)	• Adds incrementally to past, current, and future actions that contribute to gentrification. • During construction, increases number of detours and adds incrementally to visual intrusion; dust, noise, and vibration levels; and traffic congestion resulting from overlapping construction of public and private developments. • Encroachment on Waller Beach at Town Lake Metro Park resulting from past, present, and future projects.	• Collaboration with the City's Displacement Prevention team to develop and implement programs funded by the $300 million allocated for anti-displacement efforts. • Support of regional Workforce Programs to provide community members with access to jobs and career growth opportunities in the infrastructure industry. • Implementation of a Business Assistance Program to reduce the burden on small and local businesses prior to and during construction. • Coordination through the Construction Partnership Program to minimize construction effects and notify the public of detours and construction activities. • Development of a Construction Management Plan addressing best management practices and communication protocols. • Replacement parkland and mitigation in accordance with Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.
Parkland (Appendices G and H)	• Improved access to parkland through light rail service, and bicycle and pedestrian lanes on new bridge and throughout corridor. • Improvements to the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail for Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility. • Section 4(f) use and conversion of approximately 45,371 square feet (3.6% of 28.8-acre park) of Waller Beach at Town Lake Metro Park to transportation use. • Section 4(f) use of approximately 49,287 square feet (11.9% of 9.5 acres) of Norwood Tract at Town Lake Metro Park (which would be avoided under the Travis Heights Station Design Option).	• Replacement parkland for conversion property at Waller Beach at Town Lake Metro Park and mitigation in accordance with Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. • Coordination with the Officials with Jurisdiction to confirm determinations of *de minimis* impacts and use of Section 4(f) parkland, and to develop mitigation measures.

ES.4.1 Effects on the Human and Built Environment

The Project would be located primarily within the existing transportation right-of-way, requiring full and partial acquisition of properties to accommodate the light rail system as well as bicycle and pedestrian facilities and utility relocations in areas where the roadway width is narrow. The Build Alternative would require 27 full acquisitions and 277 partial acquisitions, resulting in 59 business displacements. The partial acquisitions would not interfere with the use or enjoyment of the property once construction is complete. The Center-Running Bike/Pedestrian and Shade Tree Facilities on East Riverside Design Option would result in the displacement of five additional commercial properties and four single-family homes that would not be affected under the Build Alternative. However, continuing design will prioritize reducing the impacts on potential residential displacements. For all acquisitions, financial compensation and relocation assistance would be in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970.

The level of land use change resulting from property acquisitions would not be expected to result in adverse effects on community cohesion or socioeconomic conditions in the Study Area. The OMF is a permitted use under City zoning, and its context-sensitive design would not result in visual quality or aesthetic effects on the residential communities north and west of the site. The Project would improve publicly accessible spaces and would support community cohesion by providing additional locations where people naturally interact, such as along bicycle lanes and sidewalks and at light rail station areas. Overall, the Project is expected to have beneficial effects on neighborhoods and socioeconomic conditions in the Study Area.

Increasing housing costs in Austin have affected low-income residents in Austin. An indirect effect of the Project is accelerating development in station areas, which could lead to gentrification (i.e., when low-income households are displaced by higher-income households to the extent of transforming a neighborhood). This is a concern, especially in the disadvantaged neighborhoods located in Downtown and East Austin.

ATP would mitigate hardships of property owners and tenants through its support of the Project Connect partnership with the City and through direct administration of programs that support the community. ATP would support regional workforce programs to provide community members with access to jobs and career growth opportunities in the infrastructure industry. ATP would create a Business Assistance Program to support businesses along the alignment, with direct focus on small and local businesses, as they navigate challenges before and during construction.

Additionally, ATP is collaborating with the City's Displacement Prevention team to develop and implement programs funded by the $300 million allocated for anti-displacement efforts. The Project Connect financial model includes $300 million in anti-displacement funding over a 13-year timeline with $100 million in expenditures planned in the first 3 years.

The new transit/bike/pedestrian bridge over Lady Bird Lake would require the displacement of one community facility—the Waller Creek Boathouse—and permanent acquisition of a portion of the historic parkland at Waller Beach at Town Lake Metro Park. The prominent bridge structure would affect the visual quality and aesthetics of the park, and the views of park users and those

on the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail on both sides of the lake would be affected. Parkland and historic resource effects would be mitigated by ATP through compliance with the applicable laws and regulations presented in **Appendix E-6, Cultural Resources**; **Appendix G, Section 4(f) and Chapter 26 Evaluations**; and **Appendix H, Section 6(f) Evaluation**.

Given the amount of private development and large public projects planned for the area, overlapping construction periods and cumulative construction effects of major infrastructure would likely occur. To mitigate potential construction effects, ATP would participate in a Construction Partnership Program to coordinate construction schedules, road closures, and detours and would implement best management practices to minimize the Project's construction effects.

ES.4.2 Effects on the Natural Environment

The Project is expected to result in decreased air and greenhouse gas emissions, and reduced energy use in the region and is consistent with global, state, and local policies to combat climate change. Noise and vibration levels would increase as a result of light rail operations and construction activities, and the Project's indirect effects of accelerating development near proposed stations would contribute to noise levels that are typical of high-density urban environments.

Most of the Project alignment would be built in previously disturbed areas with existing impervious cover and stormwater infrastructure. However, the Project would affect wetlands and floodplains and would require the removal of heritage and protected trees. ATP would meet all regulatory requirements and would continue to develop the Project design with the goal of minimizing effects. Conservation and compliance measures that would protect natural resources in the Study Area are outlined in **Appendix F, Natural Environment.**

ES.4.3 Environmental Justice

The Project would occur in communities subject to past discriminatory practices and disinvestment. The Project's benefits would accrue to minorities, low-income residents, and individuals with disabilities through a more reliable, efficient, and accessible transportation system that connects affordable housing to jobs; supports sustainable development in accordance with City and regional land use plans; supports the City and regional transportation objectives and clean air goals; and offers an affordable transportation option for transit-dependent residents in the environmental justice (EJ) communities. Although all communities along the alignment would have the same access to these same benefits, these benefits would be particularly meaningful to the minorities, low-income residents, and individuals with disabilities who rely on public transit for their mobility needs.

A critical component of the EJ analysis process is meaningful coordination with EJ populations on the Project effects and proposed mitigation measures. This coordination is ongoing and will extend until the close of the DEIS comment period. FTA's final EJ determination will be presented in the combined FEIS and Record of Decision.

ES.4.4 Preferred Alternative

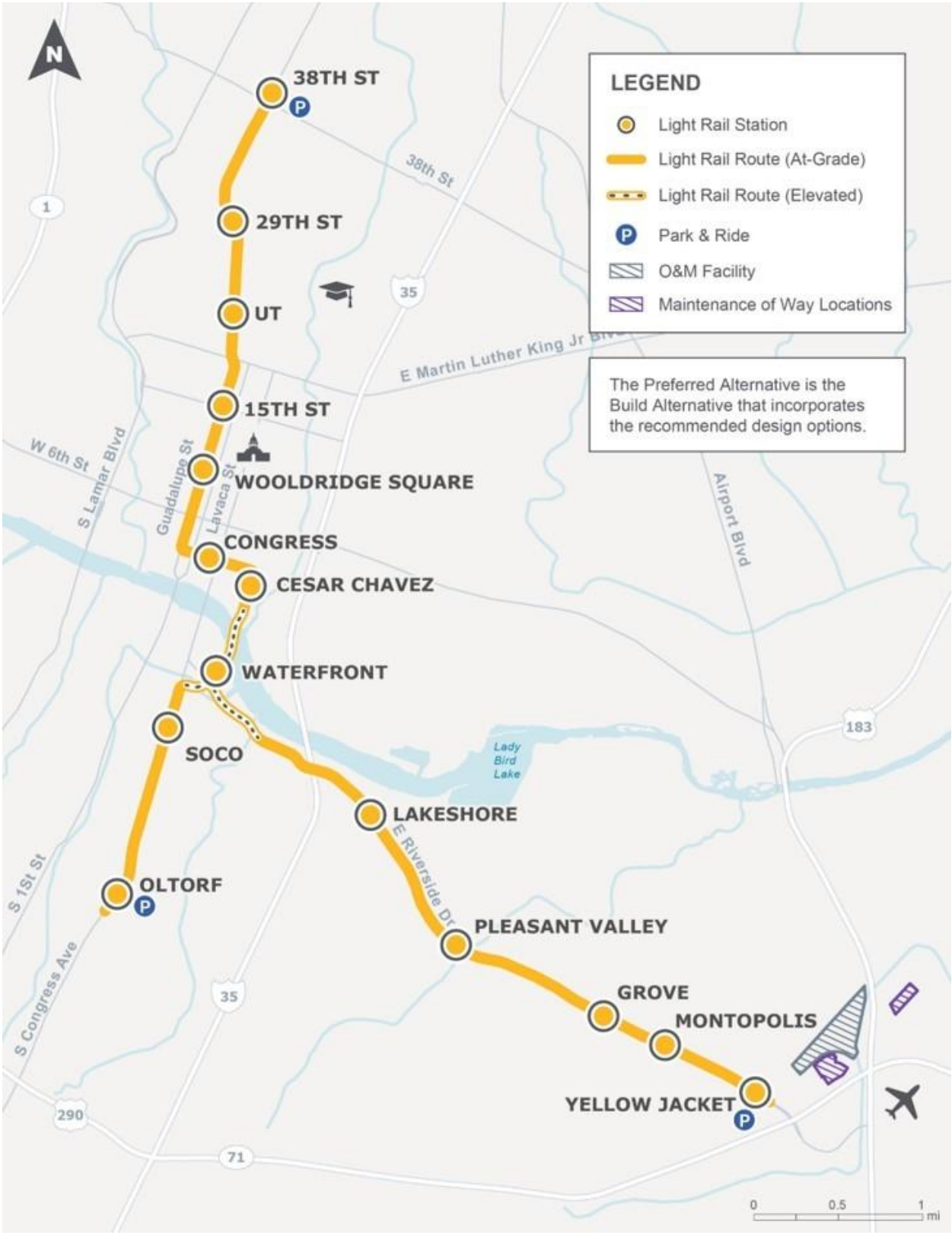
ATP evaluated the challenges, benefits, and adverse effects of each of the Design Options by considering:

- Technical feasibility:
  - Design and constructability;
  - Real estate and adjacent property availability; and
  - Contextual considerations of architecture and urban design;
- Operations, ridership, and user experience;
- Environmental (social and natural) considerations;
- Demographics; and
- Community feedback.

ATP does not recommend the Cesar Chavez Station Design Option. If developer agreements progress, this Design Option may be considered in the future. ATP recommends moving forward with the other five Design Options included in the Preferred Alternative, shown in **Figure ES-7**:

- **Wooldridge Square Station Design Option.** An additional station would improve access in the downtown area where stations were spaced farther apart in the Build Alternative. However, certain technical challenges exist due to grade and drainage issues.
- **Lady Bird Lake Bridge Extension Design Option.** This Design Option is recommended due to benefits related to light rail reliability, traffic operations, and adjacent property access. This Design Option would minimize the Project's footprint in the floodplain, would create an opportunity for an urban plaza that would provide real estate and community benefits, and would reduce effects on floodplains and trees. While this Design Option has the potential to result in visual and noise effects on nearby residents, there are opportunities to minimize effects through design and mitigation.
- **Travis Heights Station Design Option.** This Design Option would mitigate several design, construction, and environmental challenges and would avoid a Section 4(f) parkland effect with minimal effect on system ridership.
- **Center-Running Bike/Pedestrian and Shade Tree Facilities on East Riverside Design Option.** This Design Option would provide an enhanced experience for the entire community through shaded and protected bike/pedestrian lanes in an area that lacks adequate bike/pedestrian facilities. However, this Design Option would displace five additional businesses and four single-family homes in an EJ community. Continuing design would address mitigation for potential traffic/multimodal effects and would address additional safety measures.
- **East Riverside Station Design Option.** ATP recommends advancing a station on Grove Boulevard between the Montopolis and Pleasant Valley Stations. This reflects an adjustment from an initial station location at Faro Drive. This Design Option is recommended because it would directly serve existing riders in the Montopolis area while also supporting future service to planned affordable housing developments by locating a station closer to Grove Boulevard.

Figure ES-7: Preferred Alternative



ES.5 Areas of Known Controversy and Issues to be Resolved

No funding constraints or major environmental site or constructability risks have been identified for the Build Alternative and Design Options.

ATP and FTA are aware that constructing and operating a light rail maintenance facility has the potential to raise community concerns, particularly regarding its compatibility with surrounding land uses and perceived impacts on physical conditions and property values. ATP completed an extensive OMF siting analysis (available online at atptx.org) that examined numerous potential sites that were individually evaluated based on criteria that included land use compatibility, environmental impacts, and cost considerations (see Appendix A).

The analyses presented in this DEIS are based on conceptual design plans presented in **Appendix C, Build Alternative (Base Design) Conceptual Drawings**. ATP is advancing the Project's design to minimize property acquisition wherever possible and would develop formal agreements to compensate property owners and occupants fairly in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations. Design refinements would also be made to minimize effects on environmental and community resources to the extent practical, and mitigation measures would be developed in coordination with the regulatory community.

ES.6 Next Steps

This DEIS will be available for public and agency review and comment for 60 days from January 10, 2025, through March 11, 2025. ATP will hold public hearings during this comment period to receive input on the analyses and findings of the DEIS.

After consideration of public and agency comments on the DEIS, FTA intends to issue a combined FEIS and Record of Decision pursuant to 23 United States Code § 139(n)(2) unless statutory criteria preclude issuance of a combined document (i.e., the FEIS includes substantial changes to the proposed federal action that are relevant to environmental or safety concerns, or there is a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns that affect the proposed federal action or its impacts).

The combined FEIS and Record of Decision will include responses to public and agency comments received on the DEIS, state FTA's NEPA determination on the Project, and list mitigation commitments that ATP and its contractors will implement. The combined FEIS and Record of Decision must be issued before any federal funding can be awarded for the Project. FTA is currently evaluating the Project's eligibility for discretionary federal funding under FTA's Capital Investment Grants program.

ES.7 References

Austin Chamber of Commerce. 2021. High Tech Industry. June 8. Accessed May 14, 2024. https://www.austinchamber.com/blog/06-08-2021-high-tech-industry.

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