

# PROJECT CONNECT STATUS REPORT

## ATP BOARD BRIEF | MAY 2024



In November 2020, Austin voters approved Proposition A to dedicate new revenue to the implementation of Project Connect—a program of transit projects designed to provide transportation alternatives for our community. Voters simultaneously created the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) and tasked its Board of Directors with overseeing the program. This Project Connect ATP Board Brief serves as an update to the ATP Board about the progress of the projects that make up the Project Connect Program.

## PROGRAM UPDATES

### › LIGHT RAIL IMPLEMENTATION

Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) continues to advance engineering design plans to support the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), scheduled for release to the community later this fall. From January 19 through March 4, 2024, ATP conducted a formal public scoping process to gather feedback from our community stakeholders to inform required studies for Austin Light Rail Phase 1. The scoping process included review of station locations and opportunities for multimodal integration along the alignment. ATP hosted five in-person and one virtual open house events, maintained an online virtual survey portal, conducted bus stop outreach, and attended other tabling opportunities with community partners.

Throughout the scoping period, ATP engaged with over 2,000 people and gathered nearly 4,000 comments about the project. ATP reviewed each of the comments received during the public scoping period and continues to assess and implement input into the DEIS analysis.

ATP prepared the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project Scoping Summary Report, which will be available on ATP's website in May 2024. The report provides a description of the scoping process and activities, and comprehensive comments from the public, agencies, and partners.

The report and information about the scoping process will be available at [www.atptx.org/media-center/news/](http://www.atptx.org/media-center/news/).



Community member engages with ATP staff at February Open House

### › ATP REQUESTS TO ENTER PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

ATP submitted a request to enter Project Development for the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 project in March 2024. Upon approval of this request, the project is officially accepted into the FTA Capital Investment Grant Program (CIG). ATP continues to coordinate regularly with FTA partners as the project advances through the NEPA and CIG process.

Learn more at [www.atptx.org/austin-light-rail-submitted-project-development/](http://www.atptx.org/austin-light-rail-submitted-project-development/).

## › ATP ACHIEVES IMPORTANT FTA DESIGNATION

ATP achieved a major milestone in the program when, on April 24, the FTA officially recognized Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) as an active grantee/direct recipient of federal funds. This critical milestone signifies that FTA has determined that ATP has the legal, technical, and financial capacity to manage projects and funds through FTA grant programs.

## › ATP PAVES THE WAY FOR SMALL & DISADVANTAGED BUSINESSES TO FORM NEW PARTNERSHIPS

On April 30, ATP hosted Connect & Build: Partnerships for Austin Light Rail, an opportunity for small businesses (including Disadvantaged Business Enterprises “DBE,” minority, and women-owned businesses) to learn how to qualify for the [federal DBE program](#) and requirements and opportunities to participate on federally funded projects in Austin and across Texas.

Austin leaders and entrepreneurs took part in an informational panel titled Big Projects: Small Business Insights, where small businesses received advice on how to connect to resources, build partnerships, and grow capacity for future project opportunities. The event also connected small businesses and vendor partners for a networking opportunity to create potential partnerships.



Representatives from the Texas Department of Transportation share information about partnering on federal contracts



Panelists discuss opportunities and resources available to small businesses

## ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

### › ATP RECOMMENDS ENGINEERING AND PLANNING SERVICES TO ADVANCE AUSTIN LIGHT RAIL

The Austin Transit Partnership Board of Directors will consider recommendations by ATP staff to approve contract awards necessary to advance Austin Light Rail Phase 1. The actions, if approved, will provide several important services for the project to include preliminary engineering across numerous aspects of Austin Light Rail Phase 1, including civil and systems, the bridge over Lady Bird Lake, and the operations and maintenance facility.

In addition, the Board will consider action for contractual services to provide planning and environmental work for the project, on an on-call basis, throughout the project's development and implementation, and include the following scope areas: (i) planning services, including transit planning, and to support ATP's sustainability program; and (ii) environmental services, including environmental support, compliance, and resource monitoring, excluding support for the current Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Environmental Impact Statement development.

ATP's Procurement and Contract Management staff will continue to use the Board Meetings to update the Board and community about upcoming procurement activities and overall progress implementing ATP's project delivery activities. For information about active or upcoming procurement activities, contact Brad Cummings, SVP Procurement & Contract Management, at [Brad.Cummings@atptx.org](mailto:Brad.Cummings@atptx.org).

# PROJECT CONNECT PARTNER REPORT

Regular updates contributed by partnering organizations.

## › CAPMETRO MILESTONES

CapMetro's ridership across the entire system continues to increase to its highest levels of the last three years. The current ridership trends are growing, and despite one-time events (e.g., McKalla Station Grand Opening, city special events, etc.), the upward trend appears to remain steady.

### Grant Awards

Since 2020, CapMetro has received over \$124 million in grants, including four ETOD grants, two Small Starts grants, and a RAISE grant. These awards recognized by our local, state, and federal leaders support our region's commitment to inclusive, multi-modal transit and responsible land use.

### Workforce Investments

CapMetro continues investing in the local workforce by providing good jobs to local people to get the community where they need to go. CapMetro is actively engaged in Workforce Solutions Capital Area and the Mobility & Infrastructure Academy. CapMetro has implemented seven new workforce pipelines and partnerships to prepare the agency. This includes onboarding new drivers and mechanics to support the upcoming CapMetro Expo Center and Pleasant Valley Rapid lines.

### CapMetro Pickup

As part of the January 2024 service change, the new Dove Springs Pickup Zone was launched on January 14, 2024, to great success. CapMetro hosted a grand opening event with a tour of key destinations accessible through the service, which was held on January 26, 2024. The zone is consistently one of the best-performing, with 5,000 recorded trips since the service began. This newly launched service is a Project Connect investment and connects southeast Austin customers to our public transit system, schools, grocery stores, health services, and the upcoming CapMetro Pleasant Valley Rapid Line.

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Additionally, CapMetro Pickup celebrated two key milestones in 2024: a single-day record of 2,000 rides and its one-millionth recorded ride in March and April, respectively. The latter milestone came just ahead of the services' five-year anniversary. Pickup is the agency's on-demand transit service and among the first on-demand microtransit services in the country. CapMetro celebrated the milestone by recognizing riders, drivers, and the transit staff who make the service possible.



CapMetro marks its one-millionth Pickup ride

## CapMetro Rapid

CapMetro continues to make progress toward the highly anticipated CapMetro Expo Center and Pleasant Valley Rapid Lines. The first two of 80 new CapMetro Rapid stations began serving the community in November 2023 and were designed to support the expansion of the region's emerging transit system. Since then, 33 additional station platforms have been completed, and an additional seven are currently under construction. Station amenities include cameras for enhanced security, shelter against extreme weather, improved lighting, ticket vending machines, and real-time arrival and departure technology. CapMetro is on track to begin operating and serving the community with both the Pleasant Valley and Expo Center Rapid Lines in 2025.

The Expo Center and Goodnight Ranch Park & Rides will support the upcoming rapid lines. These new locations will offer ample parking for commuters with connections to local routes and feature end-of-line charging for CapMetro's electric bus fleet.

## CapMetro & ATP coordination

CapMetro and ATP are actively collaborating and coordinating between our two agencies as we build out a regional transit system. CapMetro is working with ATP to provide experienced input on design and environmental materials. CapMetro is concurrently developing Transit System Plan 2035 which will establish the future bus network for the transit system as ATP advances the light rail design. Both agencies are working closely to ensure that these concurrent efforts connect together to create a stronger transit system.

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### › CITY OF AUSTIN'S SUPPORT OF PROJECT CONNECT SEEN IN TOKYO ELECTRON PURCHASE, CODE AMENDMENTS, & DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

The City's work on Project Connect this spring has shown to an amazing degree the breadth of the program's potential impact and demonstrates the importance of coordinating housing and transportation policies.

In March, the City purchased the 107-acre former campus of Tokyo Electron for \$87 million, including \$27 million of Project Connect displacement prevention funding. Situated off Riverside Drive near Grove Boulevard, and directly along the Austin Light Rail alignment, the property provides the Housing Department an enormous opportunity to develop additional income-restricted housing close to transit and other community amenities. Combined with an adjacent City-owned parcel, these properties will ensure Austinites at all income levels will benefit from close access to high-quality transit.

The Project Connect Office has been supporting ATP as they prepare to submit the federal Capital Investment Grants program funding application and the draft environmental impact statement later this year. This has entailed coordinating across City departments to identify data sources; review engineering designs and plans; provide helpful feedback on city policy, programs, and regulations as well as local knowledge and historical context where needed.

Finally, the Planning Department has brought forward a package of transit-supportive Land Development Code amendments designed to make housing more attainable throughout Austin and especially along the light rail corridor. City Council initiated these amendments in February, but this is a continuation of an effort that dates back more than a decade to the adoption of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, through the Land Development Code conversations over the years, and up to the dramatic spike in housing prices during the pandemic. Council is scheduled to take action on the amendments on May 16.



Example of homes built on small lots