

2016-2017 BUDGET QUESTION
Response to Request for Information

DEPARTMENT: Austin Transportation

REQUEST NO.: 242

REQUESTED BY: Pool

DATE REQUESTED: 9/2/16

DATE POSTED: 9/8/16

REQUEST: Please detail the strategies that the Austin Transportation Department plans to use to address the City Auditor's findings and recommendations in the Transportation Effectiveness Audit (AU15103). Please identify the resources included in the FY 2017 Proposed Budget that will be used to implement these efforts.

RESPONSE:

The strategies the Austin Transportation Department (ATD) is using to address the City Auditor's findings and recommendations in the Transportation Effectiveness Audit were addressed in the enclosed memorandum response dated April 14, 2016 which outlines the department's management responses to the three audit findings.

There are no identified resources related to audit finding 1 in the FY 2017 proposed budget since the finding addressed communication and coordination efforts in relation to mobility with our internal departments.

In an effort to address audit finding 2, ATD has included in the FY 2017 proposed budget three additional traffic signal technicians and two engineering staff to address inadequate staffing levels. The staffing additions in our Signals Division will allow our traffic signal technicians the ability to move closer to achieving our goal of performing preventative maintenance once a year on each signal and the additional engineers will move us closer to the industry standard of retiming signals at the recommended frequency of once every three years. The total cost of these five additional positions is \$479,587 in FY 2017.

ATD has also budgeted \$1,000,000 in the FY 2017 budget to address audit finding 3 which will be used to assist in the safety enforcement program and in supporting education efforts.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Corrie Stokes, City Auditor

CC: Robert Goode, P.E., Assistant City Manager

FROM: Robert Spillar, P.E., Director, Austin Transportation Dept. 

DATE: April 14, 2016

SUBJECT: Response to Audit Findings – Transportation Effectiveness Audit

On behalf of the Austin Transportation Department (ATD), I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the City Auditor in identifying solutions to determine the status of our Transportation Effectiveness, identify areas of needed growth and celebrate our accomplishments.

The 2015-2016 Transportation Effectiveness Audit had three findings. In general, the department concurs with all three findings and with recommendations on resolutions. Below is a response by individual finding and recommendation (findings and recommendations are paraphrased in each response).

Finding 1: To ensure effective stakeholder communication and coordination, the Transportation Director should work both internally across the departments that share responsibility for mobility – Austin Transportation, Austin Police, Public Works, Planning, and Watershed Protection – and with partner entities to implement and monitor mechanisms that support a culture of continuous communication and coordination and include all stakeholders in key decisions. Where barriers and resource constraints prevent or hinder effective coordination, the Director should engage with the City Manager’s Office to facilitate a timely and effective resolution.

Management Response: As Director, I concur with this finding and appreciate the nudge to redouble our efforts to coordinate across all departments and partner agencies. For many decades, the transportation portfolio in this region was purposefully divided into silos because of funding restrictions, differences in mission scope and differing jurisdictional authority. The Texas Department of Transportation is responsible for the freeway system; the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority is responsible for the transit system; the

Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority is responsible for local tolled facilities; the Texas Turnpike Authority is responsible for interregional tolled facilities; and various City and Travis County departments are responsible for traffic operation, project development, development impact review, traffic enforcement, roadway maintenance, etc. Clearly, our customers do not perceive the differences in ownership, they only care about making their travel easier and their modal choices more robust while assuring that their tax dollars are used efficiently.

Finding 2: To ensure the City achieves its mission related to the transportation system, the City's Transportation Director should work with internal and external partners to identify and address gaps between needs and resources; explore opportunities to leverage resources, including technology and data, on a regional basis; and conduct a periodic analysis of planning and prioritization models.

Management Response: As Director, I concur with this finding and the recommendations to efficiently expand funding for operational needs. ATD was formed as an independent department in 2008. Prior to that formation, its divisions resided in several other departmental programs: Public Works, Watershed Protection, and Planning and Zoning. In 2015, ATD established full financial independence and has since worked to prioritize and expand transportation funding and staffing. Because of the decades of inadequate investments in transportation operations (ATD's portion of the transportation portfolio) there is ground to be made up in terms of achieving an adequate investment level in operations, adequate staffing and sufficient investment into the transportation system. Similarly, traffic enforcement activities, largely the responsibility of the Austin Police Department (APD), have been understaffed and underfunded. Effective transportation engineering and traffic operation requires adequate enforcement support. ATD is working directly with APD to support the addition of traffic enforcement capabilities to the police force and reestablish maintaining mobility as a primary element of their mission.

Finding 3: To mitigate the impact of crashes and reduce the number of traffic-related fatalities, the Austin Transportation Director, working with the Austin Police Chief, should ensure the City captures and analyzes all relevant crash data, including data from external entities, to identify issues that could lead to targeted engineering, enforcement, or educational actions.

Management Response: As Director, I concur with this finding. The tools available to the City for analyzing traffic accidents have not allowed for robust analysis. Data collected by APD is stored in the Brazos Program, a City-owned data management system, as opposed to the State-wide CRISS System. The City-owned data tool is not programmed for easy engineering analysis. In the past, APD had a trained analyst to provide data in formats that can be imported into other traffic analysis tools. However, this resource left the City, creating a gap in capabilities. ATD recently hired and established its own staff resources responsible for mobility safety. Specifically, this past year we added a Transportation Safety Engineering employee. This employee is responsible for looking across the transportation portfolio and

addressing safety concerns. This includes accessing both the APD and State safety database systems to conduct more robust analysis of traffic incidents and data. Additionally, ATD is pursuing an investment strategy in new technologies that will provide greater data collection and analysis capabilities. These new investments allow us to collect real-time travel speeds and travel times, and better analyze incidents that cause recurring congestion. This enables us to better manage arterials using adaptive signal control and other techniques.