

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DRAFT FOR REVIEW



AUSTIN URBAN TRAILS MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MASTER PLAN

Austin is two things: active and growing. Because of the favorable weather throughout most of the year and a plethora of opportunities to be outdoors, Austin is a very active city. Furthermore, Austin was rated as the number one fastest growing city in the nation by *Forbes Magazine* in 2013 and will continue to grow rapidly over the decades to come.

Providing an active transportation network allows Austin residents to commute by alternative modes. This long range plan envisions a system of Urban Trails that connects all of Austin by allowing residents to go from one end of the City to the other in a safe and healthy way. The Urban Trails network is intended to work in conjunction with the on-street pedestrian and bicycle networks, giving residents the opportunity to commute greater distances across all parts of Austin and creating a true “8 to 80” network (where a child of 8 can walk or ride with an 80 year old). The Urban Trails network is also intended to provide access to scenic recreation corridors throughout the built environment of the City. The master plan:

- ◆ Outlines criteria for urban trail design standards;
- ◆ Identifies which of the existing trails in Austin should be designated as Urban Trails;
- ◆ Highlights the need for improvements to upgrade existing trails so that they meet minimum requirements for Urban Trails; and
- ◆ Incorporates recommendations for future expansion of the Urban Trails network throughout the City.

The Urban Trails Master Plan directly supports all eight of the priority programs in *Imagine Austin*, the City’s Comprehensive Plan. The eight priority programs described in *Imagine Austin* are intended to provide structure and direction for the actions recommended in *Imagine Austin*, and this plan and its related policies directly follow the vision and guidelines set forth in the comprehensive plan. As an amendment to the *Imagine Austin Plan*, this plan also serves as a regulatory plan within City of Austin jurisdiction.

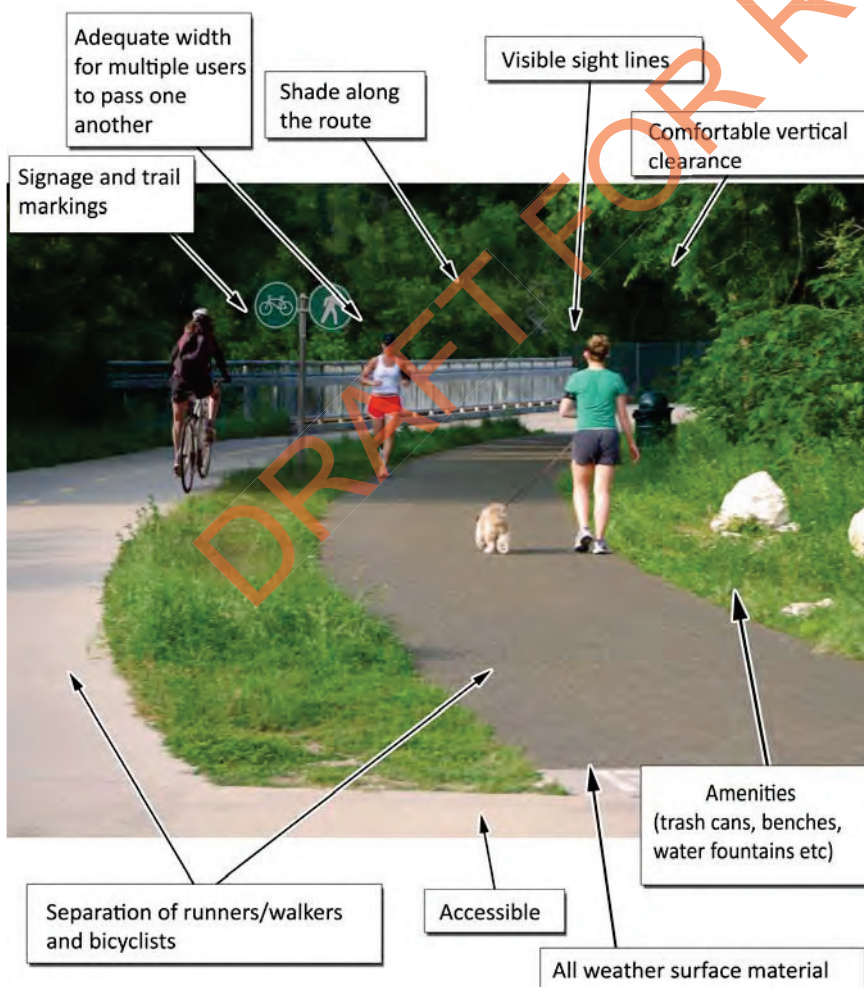
This plan is intended to be flexible and remain a viable tool as Austin continues to grow and change. The plan will continue to serve for many years, but should be periodically updated to reflect changing conditions within the City, the neighboring communities and the greater Central Texas area as a whole.

WHAT IS AN URBAN TRAIL?

The definition of an Urban Trail that was developed through this planning process follows the guidance and recommendations from *Imagine Austin*, and was confirmed by the Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) and the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). For the City of Austin, the Urban Trail network is defined as:

“A citywide network of non-motorized, multi-use pathways that are used by bicyclists, walkers and runners for both transportation and recreation purposes.”

Desired characteristics of an urban trail are shown in the illustration on this page.





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Intercept survey along Shoal Creek Trail near 3rd Street



Open House participants give feedback on bicycle and urban trail recommendations



In total, 6 public meetings were held during the planning process



Young participants learn about safety at the bicycle rodeo on Saturday, February 22, 2014

URBAN TRAIL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR AUSTIN

Goals and objectives for a plan such as this create the foundation for future decisions and development. Goals are an important part of the planning process in that they provide the underlying philosophical framework for decisions and also guide decision makers on issues. The goals expressed in this master plan reflect the desires of the citizens, elected and appointed officials, and the staff of the City of Austin, and build upon the vision established by the City's Comprehensive Plan. They are expressed as follows:

- ◆ Goal #1: Provide easy access to Urban Trails for both transportation and recreation users from all parts of the City.
- ◆ Goal #2: Link all Urban Trails to the on-street bicycle and sidewalk network around them.
- ◆ Goal #3: Ensure that all Urban Trails are adequately sized to accommodate both recreation and transportation uses.
- ◆ Goal #4: Incorporate trail amenities and features that transform them from a paved surface into unique greenways that reflect the City around them.
- ◆ Goal #5: Provide adequate funding and resources to maintain and operate urban trails in Austin.
- ◆ Goal #6: Ensure that all Urban Trails are context-sensitive and environmentally sustainable.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A detailed public input process was utilized to inform and engage the citizens about the Austin Urban Trails Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plan update. Since both plans work together to create the overall Active Transportation Network, the public input process for both was combined and occurred simultaneously. The wide variety of methods employed to gain public input included:

- ◆ A statistically valid citywide telephone survey (600 responses)
- ◆ A citywide online survey (2,400 responses),
- ◆ Trail intercept survey (conducted at 7 locations),
- ◆ Input from both a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) and a Technical Advisory Group (TAG),
- ◆ Public meetings (6 meetings), and
- ◆ Online open house (conducted over two months)

We learned valuable information regarding attitudes towards riding a bike and interest in using an Urban Trail:

- ◆ 41% of adults and 75% of kids ride bicycles in Austin.
- ◆ The majority of people in Austin want to ride more than they currently do.
- ◆ The majority of residents and current bicyclists are not as comfortable in a traditional bicycle lane but would feel very comfortable riding on a separated path.
- ◆ Residents of Austin are much more willing to ride a bicycle if there is some sort of separation between themselves and on-street traffic.
- ◆ The most important actions and improvements for Urban Trails are:
 - Improve access to trails from nearby neighborhoods or businesses,
 - Improve smoothness of trail,
 - Widen trail surface,
 - Create separate areas for walkers and bicycle riders,
 - Add lighting as appropriate,
 - Provide more shade,
 - Provide more drinking fountains, and
 - Trim landscaping and obstructions to improve sight lines.

EXISTING AND RECOMMENDED URBAN TRAILS

Austin has many opportunities to create a citywide network of Urban Trails. The City currently has approximately 300 miles of trails of all types, and approximately 30 miles of these existing trails can be defined as Urban Trails. The Austin Urban Trails map on the following page shows existing and proposed Urban Trails.

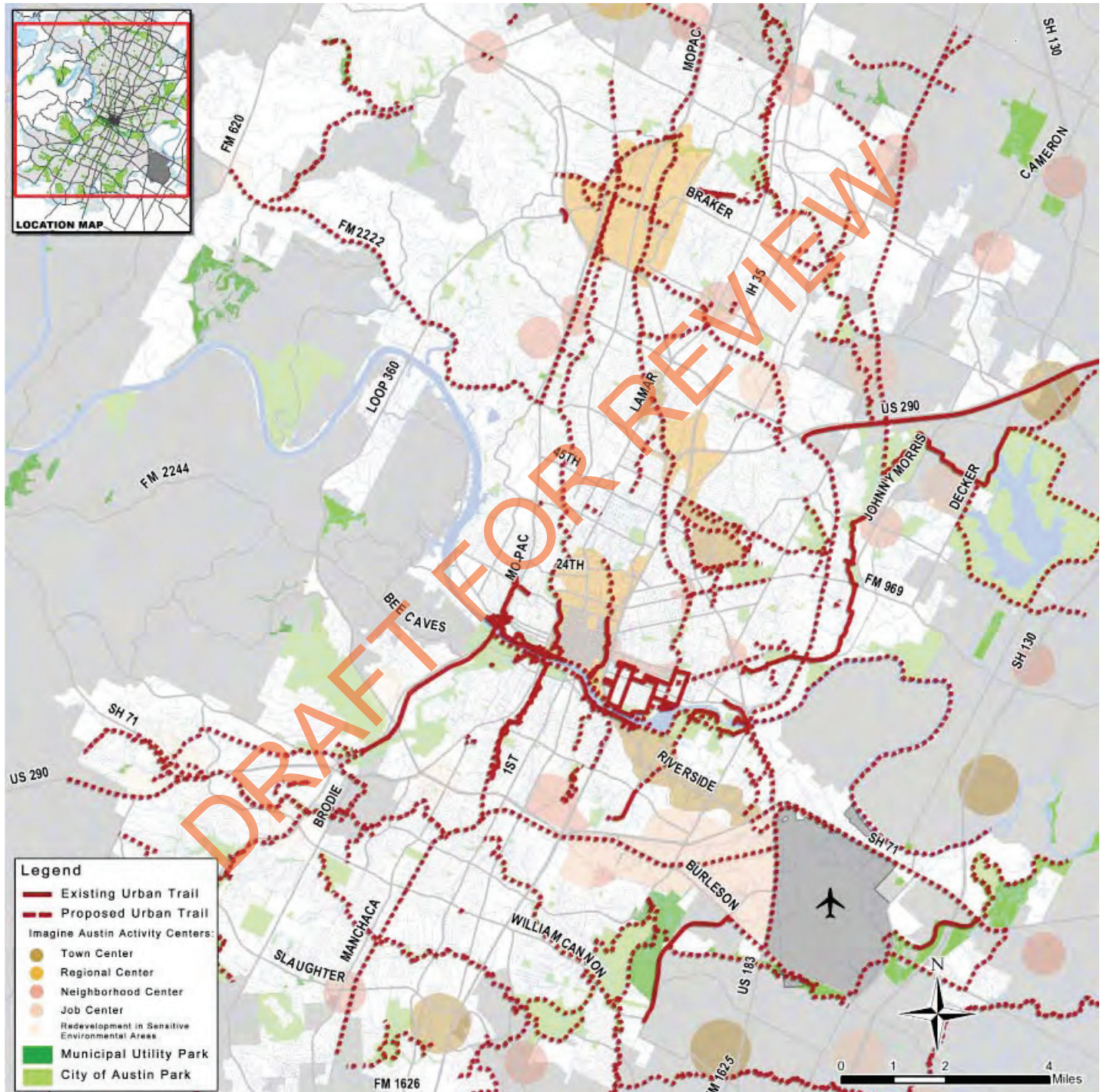
There are currently many opportunities for Urban Trails in Austin, and over the next two to three decades it is anticipated that many of those opportunities can actually be developed. However, the City's efforts should be focused on those corridors that provide the most significant beneficial impact and that truly contribute to the citywide Urban Trails network.

Trails with the highest priority include those that provide a strong potential for both transportation and recreation use, that serve significant surrounding populations and that enhance connections to the on-street bicycle and sidewalk network, and that are sensitive to the existing environment along the corridors that are used. The ultimate goal of this plan is for the development of the majority of the high priority projects to be completed within approximately ten to fifteen years. Additional trail segments identified in the plan can be undertaken in partnership with other agencies, non-profit entities or private development or re-development efforts.



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AUSTIN URBAN TRAILS



Alignments shown are conceptual, and are intended to show geographic connectivity. More detailed routing, environmental evaluations and area connections will be developed for each corridor as funding is identified. Pending a more detailed analysis and adjacent, adequate bicycle/pedestrian facilities, a "no-build" option may be appropriate.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

From the federal to local level, policies affect the integrity and mechanisms of the Urban Trails Master Plan. There are many new and developing planning initiatives in Austin, including CodeNEXT, the Sidewalk Master Plan and Prioritization Matrix, and the Wayfinding Project, which merit recognition and coordination of goals and operations. The Urban Trails Master Plan reviews and summarizes some of the more recent policy changes that may impact the design, placement and funding opportunities for Urban Trails in Austin.

Policy and plans for consideration include:

- ◆ MAP-21
- ◆ FHWA Memorandum supporting NACTO and AASHTO bicycle design guidelines
- ◆ CAMPO 2035
- ◆ Imagine Austin
- ◆ Capital Improvement Plan
- ◆ Watershed Protection Ordinance
- ◆ Heritage Tree Ordinance
- ◆ Land Development Code
- ◆ Technical Criteria Manuals - Environmental Criteria Manual, Drainage Criteria Manual, Transportation Criteria Manual
- ◆ Other adopted plans - 2009 Bike Plan, Sidewalk Master Plan, Parks and Recreation Long Range Facilities Plan for Land, Facilities and Programs, Downtown Austin Wayfinding Plan

Watershed Protection Ordinance

The new Watershed Protection Ordinance (WPO) was passed in October 2013 and provides important guidance for the Urban Trails Master Plan. The intent of the new ordinance is to protect area watersheds through clear policy and guidance. One of the Watershed Protection Department's goals is to improve the urban environment by maximizing use of waterways, drainage facilities and floodplain areas for public recreation. The Urban Trails Master Plan helps the Watershed Protection Ordinance achieve its goals by creating green infrastructure and reducing transportation pollution through the enhancement of non-motorized transportation.

Goal: Improve the urban environment by fostering additional beneficial uses of waterways and drainage facilities.

Objective: Maximize the use of waterways and drainage facilities for public recreation; and, Maximize areas for public use within floodplains.

- Watershed Protection Department Master Plan Goals and Objectives



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PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

Interdepartmental and interagency collaborations are a critical component of developing a regional network of Urban Trails, and achieving the goals and objectives of this plan. Moreover, many federal-aid funding opportunities require cooperation among local and regional entities in developing and implementing goals. By partnering with other agencies and organizations, funding resources can be utilized more efficiently. Various City of Austin departments, including Parks and Recreation, Transportation and Public Works, may all have an interest in Urban Trails from different perspectives and different funding opportunities. Private or nonprofit groups like The Trails Foundation or the Hill Country Conservancy also promote Urban Trails through different means. Collective efforts can make the legal, financial and political process of improving and expanding Austin's Urban Trail system more efficient.

Some recommendations in this plan will require partnerships and collaboration with other City departments, municipalities, agencies, and organizations across the region. The Public Works Department should coordinate with other City of Austin departments, agencies, and organizations where necessary to implement the Urban Trails Master Plan by identifying and pursuing funding partnerships and support from other departments, agencies, and organizations.

URBAN TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Effective trail maintenance is critical to the overall success and safety of Urban Trails in Austin. Maintenance activities typically include pavement stabilization, landscape maintenance, facility upkeep, sign replacement, mowing and litter removal. A successful maintenance program requires continuity. Routine maintenance on a year-round basis will not only improve trail safety, but will also prolong the life of the trail. This plan includes operation recommendations for providing effective and appropriate trail maintenance. The Urban Trails Program seeks to clarify maintenance policy to maximize the quality and enjoyment of our Urban Trails.

The Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) retains the approval authority on trails within parkland as well as corresponding maintenance responsibilities. PARC and the Public Works Department (PWD) have created written agreements regarding operation and maintenance responsibilities for trails to clarify duties and ensure adequate trail maintenance.

Upon adoption of the Urban Trails Master Plan staff will found

an Interdepartmental Agreement (IDA) between the Parks and Recreation Department, Watershed Protection Department, Health and Human Services Department and other internal City departments as needed to create an over arching agreement regarding maintenance of Urban Trails. This IDA will address levels of responsibility and will define expectations, contacts and jurisdictions for maintenance.

CONSTRUCTING FUTURE URBAN TRAILS

This master plan identifies key Urban Trails and connections, as well as prioritizes these corridors based on the criteria discussed in the previous chapter. Once an Urban Trail corridor is selected for implementation, it then goes through a separate process of identifying the exact trail alignment. Implementation of an Urban Trail is based on:

- ◆ Funding
- ◆ Environmental Constraints
- ◆ Stakeholder/resident input

Once a funding source for Urban Trail development is identified, a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) process is started. This PER process evaluates all the environmental constraints of the corridor including: topography, drainage, various soil types, tree canopy, wildlife habitat, floodplain, surrounding land uses, location of utilities, property ownership, as well as several other elements. The entire length of the corridor will be reviewed by the Watershed Protection Department and Planning and Development Review to ensure the environmental constraints are accurately recorded before any design process begins. During the PER process the public, residents and area stakeholders are also engaged at a public open house to get feedback about the corridor, voice any concerns, and help identify potential access points. Once the PER process is complete, a preferred alignment for the trail is developed based on the environmental constraints and public input. The trail then goes into the process of design and developing construction documents. From there, it is then in the bidding stage for construction, and once a contractor is selected construction of the trail begins.