



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council
Chair and Capital Metro Board Members

FROM: Robert Spillar, P.E., Director, Austin Transportation Department
Sharmila Mukherjee, Executive Vice President Capital Metro

Robert Spillar, P.E.
Sharmila Mukherjee
AICP

DATE: January 26, 2021

SUBJECT: East Riverside Drive Interim Transit Priority Lane Installation

The City of Austin, in partnership with Capital Metro, will begin installing interim transit priority lanes along East Riverside Drive in late February to provide near-term mobility improvements for transit. These lanes will prioritize bus transit along the two-mile segment of East Riverside Drive between Summit Street and Grove Boulevard. Street markings, signage, and robust public communications will maintain the integrity of these lanes, making them similar in design and operation to those already installed in downtown on Guadalupe and Lavaca. Installation is anticipated to be complete by April, with Capital Metro buses utilizing these new lanes to improve bus service immediately upon their opening.

The transit priority lanes are an interim improvement to deliver improved bus transit service pending further investment as part of Project Connect. The new transit priority lanes will better organize traffic flow and improve the corridor's efficiency and safety prior to the implementation of the Blue Line as part of Project Connect. Once the Blue Line is implemented, the need for the transit priority lanes will be reassessed.

East Riverside Drive is a major transit corridor for Capital Metro, and the nine bus routes that will operate in these transit priority lanes carry almost 20% of Capital Metro's riders. During pre-COVID normal traffic periods, the thousands of Austin residents on board these routes experienced persistent delays during peak hours while traveling to work, school, and other destinations. With current COVID operating conditions, additional buses have been placed on these routes and additional transit priority will improve operation of the routes.

The installation of transit priority lanes on this corridor, we estimate the potential for transit travel time savings of up to 5.5 minutes during peak periods compared to pre-COVID travel times. General purpose traffic may see an increase in travel time during peak periods, but these impacts are anticipated to be minimal. Staff will monitor performance, and project results will be included in the Transit Speed and Reliability annual report. Lane designation is being accomplished within the authority of the City Traffic Engineer to designate lane restrictions for City of Austin streets.

Public communications and outreach for this project includes stakeholder and neighborhood briefings, block walking to area businesses, a joint media release, and outreach through social media, newsletters, and other online channels.

Alignment with City and Capital Metro Policies and Goals

Transit priority lanes are a proven way to attract more riders to transit and will enhance the overall person-carrying capacity of the East Riverside Drive corridor, supporting the City's mode-shift goals. This project is funded through the 2018 Transit Speed & Reliability Interlocal Agreement between Capital Metro and the City and is the result of ongoing collaboration between our two agencies. The East Riverside Drive transit priority lanes support the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan Public Transportation System Policy 1 "Give public transportation priority," and align with City Council's Austin Strategic Direction 2023 Mobility Strategic Outcome of "getting Austinites where we want to go, when we want to get there, safely and cost-effectively." Per Capital Metro's Connections 2025 Transit Plan, projects like the East Riverside Drive Transit Priority lanes improve both service reliability and travel time, making transit more appealing for current and future riders.

These improvements demonstrate a meaningful response to the community demand for better public transportation options in Austin, as evidenced by input received during the City's Mobility Talks initiative and the passage of the 2016 Mobility Bond and Propositions A and B in 2020.

In addition, an investment in transit is an investment in equity. This project will provide enhanced transit services that improve access to employment on a corridor where many rely on transit. Prioritizing travel for these essential workers while using transit is critical to health and economic recovery for our community.

If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (rob.spillar@austintexas.gov), ATD Assistant Director Anna Martin (anna.martin@austintexas.gov) or Capital Metro's Vice President of Planning, Sharmila Mukherjee (Sharmila.Mukherjee@capmetro.org).

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
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