



City of Austin

Steve Adler, Mayor

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May 20, 2016

Dear Secretary Foxx,

Our community is excited to submit the accompanying Phase II application for USDOT's Smart City Challenge. It's clear that Austin has already benefitted from this process, which has focused us on our biggest challenges and encouraged us to draw from what is best about Austin. It has also plainly laid out that overcoming our greatest liabilities – those around growing inequity – are directly linked to our ability to transform our mobility infrastructure.

We know well that our city faces a confluence of mobility, equity and opportunity challenges that has plainly reached crisis levels. It's estimated that our region's population will double in the next 30 years. At the same time, many are being left behind. Austin is the most economically segregated community in the country, and this segregation increases as the poor are pushed to the margins of an increasingly unaffordable city and region.

As we became a technology hub and center for entrepreneurship over the last 30 years, much of our local workforce wasn't sufficiently prepared to compete for the new jobs that were created. While this has drawn new people into the city, the resulting increase in housing costs has forced many to move to places inaccessible to public transit and employment centers. This makes our residents more car-dependent, effectively doubling Austin's congestion problems.

The timing of this Challenge couldn't be better. Austin has been building the networks, policies and framework for a model 21st-Century region over the past decade. The concept of complete, sustainable communities as advanced by the current Federal administration is being put to action already in Austin. It is a cornerstone of our Imagine Austin comprehensive plan, and a guiding principle behind our current revision of the development code. The Smart City Challenge presents an opportunity to bring all of that together to capture and accelerate a truly transformative period in Austin's history.

We envision this partnership as an opportunity to not only improve everyday lives and reach our sustainability goals, but also an opportunity to strike at the heart of a historic divide that is symbolized by the most visible piece of transportation infrastructure in Austin: IH35. Austin's notorious 1928 city plan segregated the African-American community (and later the Hispanic community) east of downtown. That dividing line became what is now the most congested highway in the state of Texas. It is time to reconnect Austin, both physically and virtually, using every tool at our disposal.

Admittedly, we initially saw the Smart City Challenge exclusively as a “tech grant” to deal with mobility. After all, applying technology to our world-class traffic problems is in our DNA. Our partnership with the University of Texas’ Center for Transportation Research has focused on using data to manage traffic. The creation of a new research triangle with the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M Transportation Institute, and the Southwest Research Institute is designed to bring together the brightest traffic engineers in the state. We were at the front of the line to leverage Google’s work on automated vehicles. Austin has innovation and technology to spare – now it’s time to bring that to a human scale.

You’ve made us focus further – to address the fundamental reasons why it’s important to fix our traffic problems. This proposal begins with the transformative change we seek for underserved communities. Driverless shuttle buses, smart traffic signals and Smart Transit Stations make mobility a service that is accessible to all. At the same time they reconnect low-income Austinites to workforce development programs, increase their access to health care, and make their commutes cheaper and easier.

Our work on this Challenge has informed community conversations across a variety of initiatives that will continue even if we’re not selected. We’re closing in on an initiative to lower a significant segment of IH35 to reconnect our city. We’re about to launch new social investment initiatives to preserve affordable housing. We’re already considering a substantial \$40 million investment in our proposed East Riverside Drive Smart Corridor. And in the proposed Rundberg Smart Station area of north Austin, we will strategically align capital and social equity projects to accelerate proposed improvements.

In short, Austin is ready to put “skin in the game” should we be selected, and believe that our selection would greatly accelerate our current trajectory:

- If awarded the grant, the City will commit a significant contribution of in-kind staff support, which we currently estimate to have a value of \$10 million over a three-year period, and which will come from City operating funds.
- We will jointly propose to the City Council a mobility bond in November 2016 to include \$40 million in physical improvements to the Riverside Corridor to allow the proposed e-BRT to operate on this multi-lane arterial. The investments will establish the future cross-section of the roadway by funding the final configuration of transit priority lanes and stations, and bike and pedestrian facilities in the corridor.
- We will recommend to the City Council that we join our state senator and regional partners to find the financing to lower lanes on I-35 in a way that will decrease traffic congestion, increase transit options, and finally reunite our city.

There is no other city in the country more in need of transforming mobility to make it more accessible and equitable, and there is no other city better positioned to accelerate the potential of the Smart City initiative and serve as a model and partner worldwide. Austin is ready, Austin is smart, and an investment in Austin will be an investment not just in our country but also in the world.

We hope you will choose Austin to be the USDOT's Smart City of the future. But if you do not, trust that we will look back on this application process as the moment Austin focused on the opportunity to transform itself into a more equitable, more mobile, and more connected version of itself – and seized it.

We are honored to be among the 78 cities that initially applied for this Challenge, and the seven finalists. We commit to work with this community so that we all learn from one another and move forward together.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Adler".

Steve Adler
Mayor, City of Austin

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc A. Ott".

Marc A. Ott
City Manager, City of Austin