



M E M O R A N D U M

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Richard Mendoza, Director, Public Works Department

Date: June 1, 2020

Subject: **Urban Trail and Sidewalk and ADA Transition Plan updates**

Introduction:

On the June 4, 2020 agenda, Council will consider an item to authorize staff to negotiate and execute a professional services agreement to update the Urban Trail and Sidewalk and ADA Transition Plans. This memorandum provides background on the past plans and the impetus for plan updates.

Background:

The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP), adopted in 2019, sets forth a citywide goal of achieving a 50/50 mode split by 2039, where half of Austinites would commute by modes other than driving alone. The ASMP recognizes both the Urban Trail and Sidewalk systems as vital components of the transportation network necessary to meet this goal. Public Works and Austin Transportation staff are beginning the process of updating the 2014 Urban Trails Plan and the 2016 Sidewalk and ADA Transition Plan to expand upon the ASMP's goals and policies.

The demand for new sidewalks and urban trails has also increased as more people are relying on the network for both recreation and social-distanced commuting due to COVID-19.

Urban Trails Plan:

The 2014 Urban Trails Plan defined urban trails as "a citywide network of non-motorized, multi-use pathways that are used by bicyclists, walkers and runners for both transportation and recreation purposes." The Urban Trails Plan identified 47 miles of Tier 1 (high priority trails) and 360 miles of Tier 2 (lower priority) trails throughout the city. Prioritization was based on four factors: proximity to attractors and destinations such as schools, parks, and employment centers; residential population of census tract within half a mile; connectivity to existing sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and transit; and community support. As of spring 2020, 50 miles of urban trails exist throughout Austin.

One goal of the Urban Trail Plan Update is to re-examine the proposed trail network and prioritization criteria, which includes adding equity into the prioritization matrix. As part of this update, an equitable and extensive public engagement initiative will allow members of the community to provide input on new trail alignments and locations where trails should be prioritized.

The Plan Update will incorporate a preliminary feasibility study of trail alignments, along with cost and benefits of proposed trails to ensure that trails are not recommended in areas where construction would be unfeasible or cost prohibitive. The update will also incorporate more short connections with big impacts, such as connections between dead-end cul-de-sacs or other areas where they overcome existing bicycle and sidewalk network barriers.

Additionally, the update will review interdepartmental policies for trail permitting and suggest best practices to improve efficiency, incorporating feedback from the urban trail stakeholder group established under Council Resolution 20200220-045.

Sidewalk and ADA Transition Plan:

The City of Austin 2016 Sidewalk/ADA Transition Plan established asset management policies and practices for sidewalks in Austin. For new developments and subdivisions, sidewalks are required on both sides of the street. In areas that were originally developed without sidewalks, the Sidewalk Plan goal is to retrofit sidewalks on both sides of collector and arterial streets, and one side of residential streets. This approach realistically addresses utility and drainage constraints and preserves mature trees while ensuring every street has pedestrian access. However, the 2016 Sidewalk Plan did not undertake the detailed analysis necessary to identify block by block where sidewalks should be included to ensure a coordinated and complete network. Analysis and recommendations on specific pedestrian crossing improvements were also beyond the scope of the 2016 Sidewalk Plan.

The update will engage Austin's citizens in a robust and equitable public process to tackle this next level of analysis. It will incorporate and leverage the most up-to-date research and planning from Capital Metro, Project Connect, Vision Zero, Safe Routes to School and the recently launched Healthy Streets initiative. The goal is an updated, comprehensive, coordinated, transit-supportive sidewalk and pedestrian infrastructure plan with the supporting policy and implementation recommendations necessary to meet ASMP goals.

Schedule and Next Steps:

Following Council direction on June 4, staff will move scope definition and contract negotiation forward with the goal of having a consultant under contract this summer. The City will task one consultant team with updating both plans, but the plans themselves will remain separate. As part of scope negotiation, staff and the consultant team will partner and designate tasks based on who is best positioned to complete the work and taking into consideration overall project budget.

Public engagement can be expected to kick off this fall. From fall 2020 through fall 2022, the update process will consist of public and stakeholder listening sessions, responses to findings from public and stakeholder input, and updates based on boards and commissions final input. Simultaneously, following the consultant award in summer 2020, the project team will provide analysis and draft the plans before returning to council for plan adoption in fall 2022.

Please contact Katie Wettick, Urban Trails Program Manager, at 512-974-3529 or katie.wettick@austintexas.gov with any questions or for additional information.

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