



# NEPA Overview – The City’s Role Orange & Blue Lines

Austin City Council

Mobility Committee Meeting 3/11/21





- In 2019, the Austin City Council approved the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP)
  - ASMP is part of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. It establishes a policy goal to reduce driving alone to 50% by increasing the share of biking, walking, transit, and other active transportation by 2039
  - Transit mode share is currently ~4% and needs to increase to ~16%
  - Project Connect is essential to meeting the transit portion of the 50% sustainable mode share
- The Project Connect Vision Plan is included as an integral part of the ASMP and both initiatives provide a way forward for solving future mobility challenges the region faces



# Approved Project Connect Program Sequence Plan

Years based on federal NEPA and funding approvals



LIGHT RAIL

Orange Line (LRT)

Blue Line (LRT)



METRORAIL

Red Line (Commuter Rail)

Green Line (Commuter Rail)



METRORAPID

Phase I

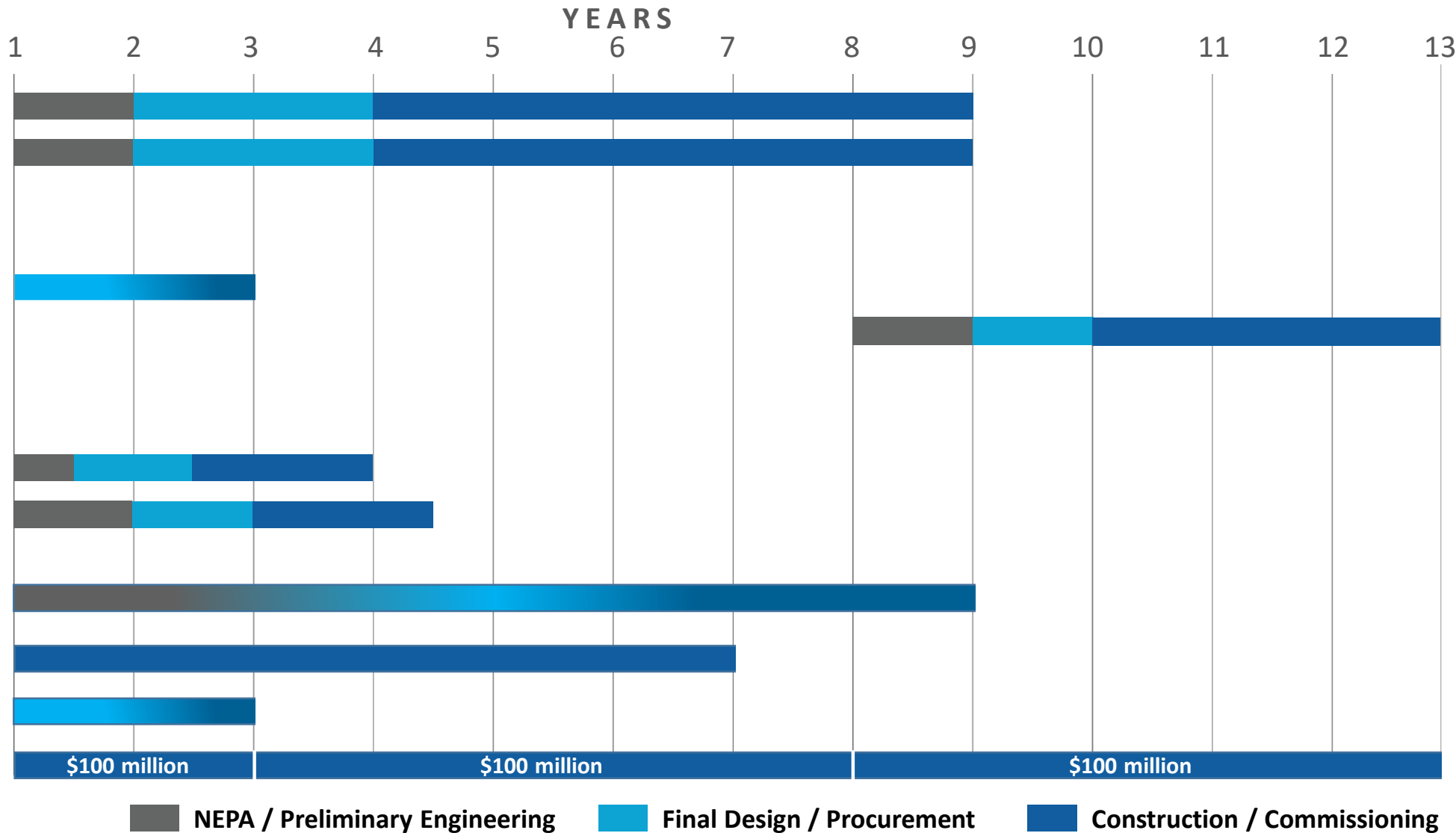
Gold Line (Complete NEPA)

METROEXPRESS &  
PARK AND RIDES

METROBUS & METROACCESS

CUSTOMER TECH SYSTEMS

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT  
INVESTMENTS



# NEPA and Project Implementation



Federal Transit  
Administration

NEPA Lead Agency



NEPA Sponsoring Agency



Participating Agency/  
Project Partner



Post-NEPA Project  
Implementation



# National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

- Enacted into law in 1970, NEPA is a federally-mandated public planning process for projects involving federal funds or federal involvement
- Defines the need for the project, develops and screens alternatives, evaluates viable alternatives, and selects a Preferred Alternative
- May include required mitigation to offset identified impacts
- Different federal agencies have differing processes for NEPA. Project Connect's NEPA requirements fall under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).



# National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)



Helps us learn more about  
and better define project



Allows community to  
understand and help guide  
project development



Fulfills requirement to  
receive federal funds



# NEPA – Environmental Review – Three Different Levels

- **Categorical Exclusion (CE) – examples, EXPO and Pleasant Valley MetroRapid Lines**
  - Limited documentation and public involvement
  - FTA Regional Administrator signs the CE
- **Environmental Assessment/Finding of No Significant Impact (EA/FoNSI)**
  - Extent of project impact is unknown or is assumed not to result in impacts
- **Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – examples, Orange and Blue Lines Light Rail**
  - Projects that are assumed to result in impacts
  - Involves public and agency input and participation throughout the process
  - Follows prescribed guidelines for document terminology, analysis, review, and approval
  - Results in the development of a Record of Decision (ROD) that includes prescribed mitigation measures to avoid, limit, or off set identified impacts



# The NEPA Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Steps



**Scoping (Early  
Scoping Conducted  
through the PEL  
Process)**



**Draft Environmental  
Impact Statement (DEIS)**



**Final Environmental  
Impact Statement (EIS) &  
Record of Decision (ROD)**





# Multi-Disciplinary Assessment



Collaboration is needed!

## NEPA

- Transportation
- Land Use
- Public Policy
- Zoning
- Neighborhoods
- Community Facilities
- Property Acquisitions
- Displacements
- Economic Activity
- Parks, Recreational Land
- Historic Properties
- Archaeological Resources

- Visual
- Air Quality, Energy Use
- Noise, Vibration
- Habitat, Wildlife
- Water Resources
- Topography, Geology, Soils
- Hazardous Materials
- Utilities
- Environmental Justice
- Construction
- Section 4(f)



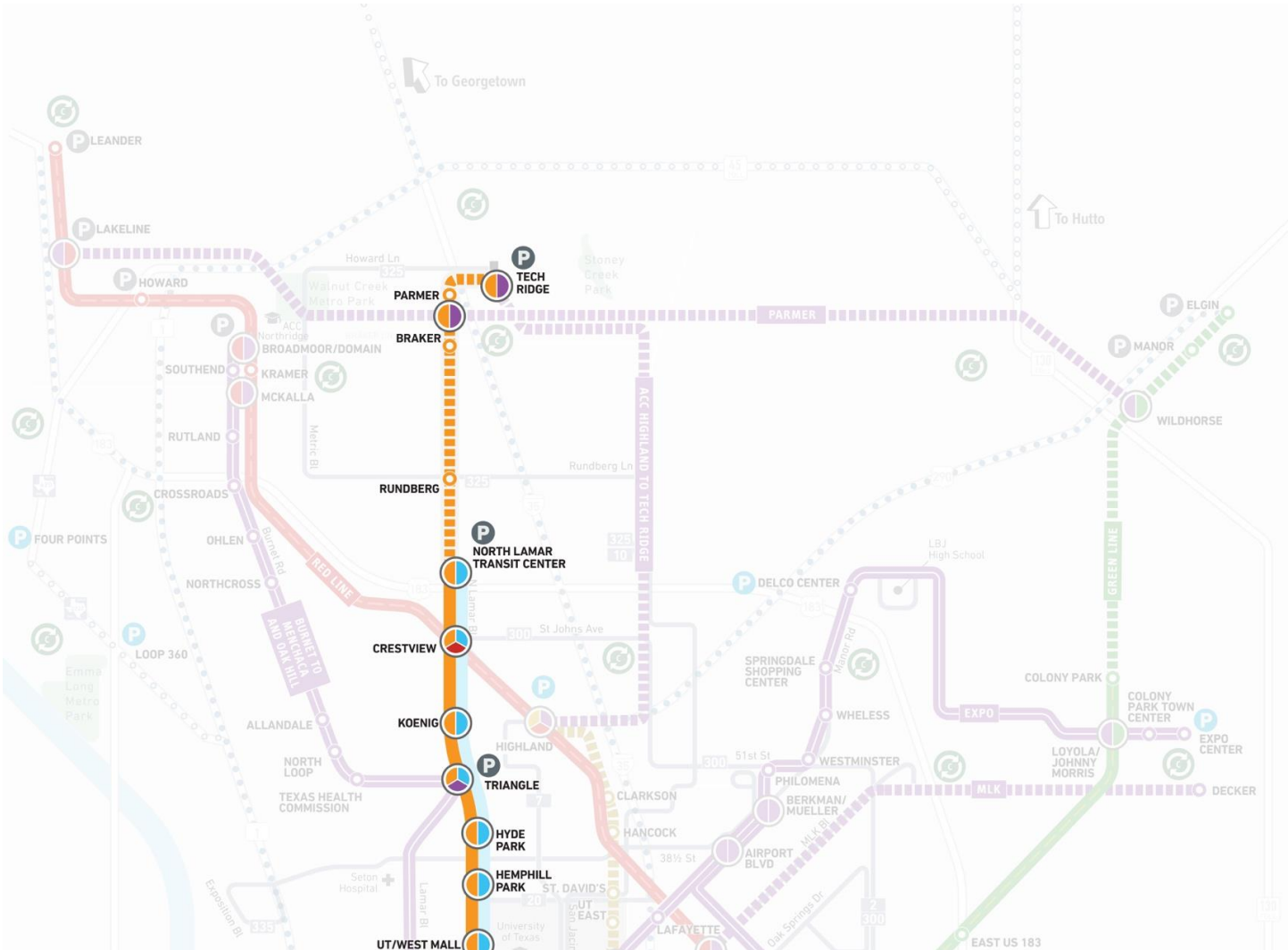
# New Rail System

## ORANGE LINE



Light rail to connect north and south Austin.

From Tech Ridge (initially from North Lamar and U.S. 183) and extending to Slaughter (initially to Stassney Lane).



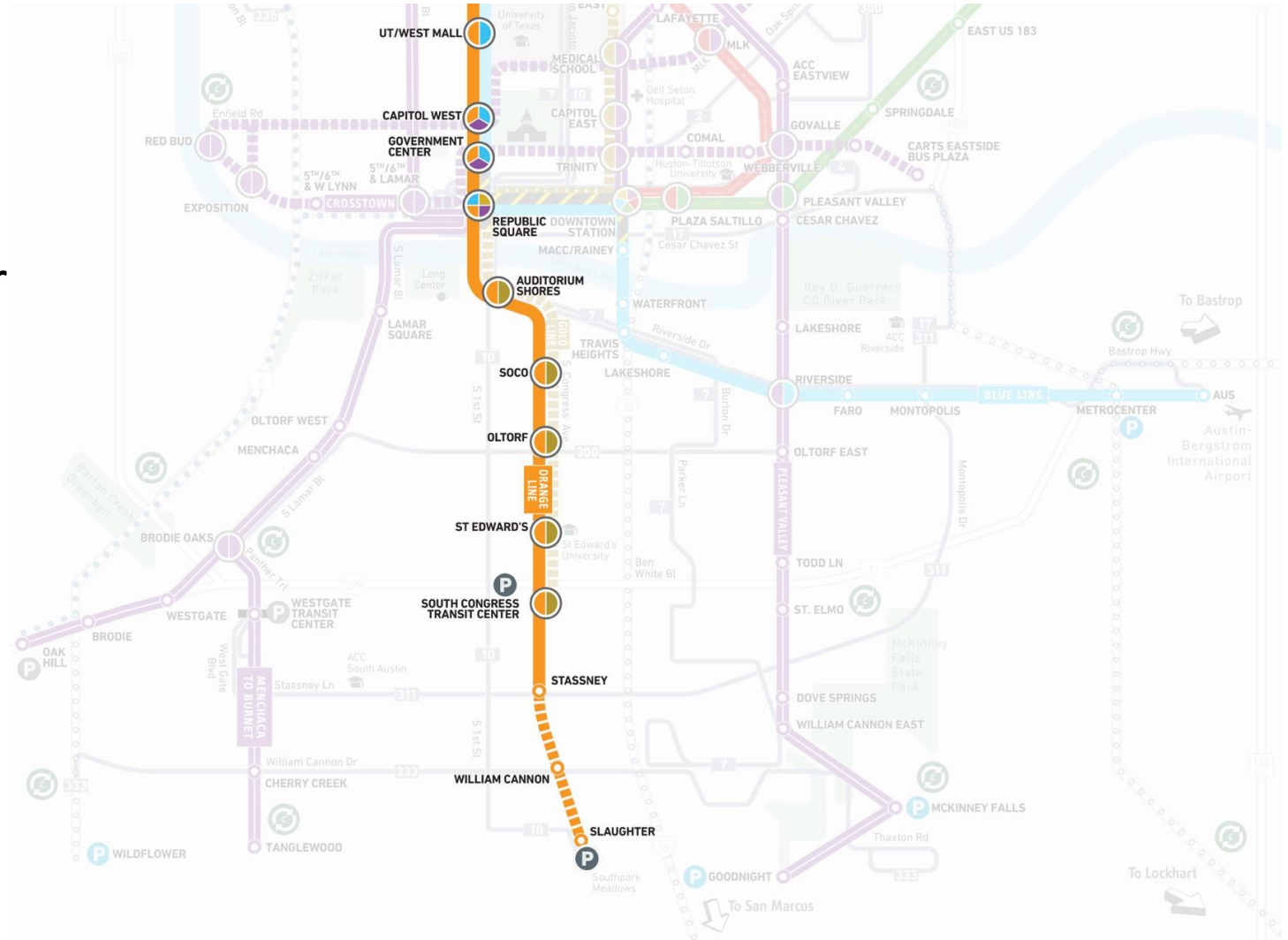
# New Rail System

## ORANGE LINE



### Destinations include:

- North Lamar Transit Center
- Crestview
- UT
- Republic Square
- Auditorium Shores
- The SoCo District



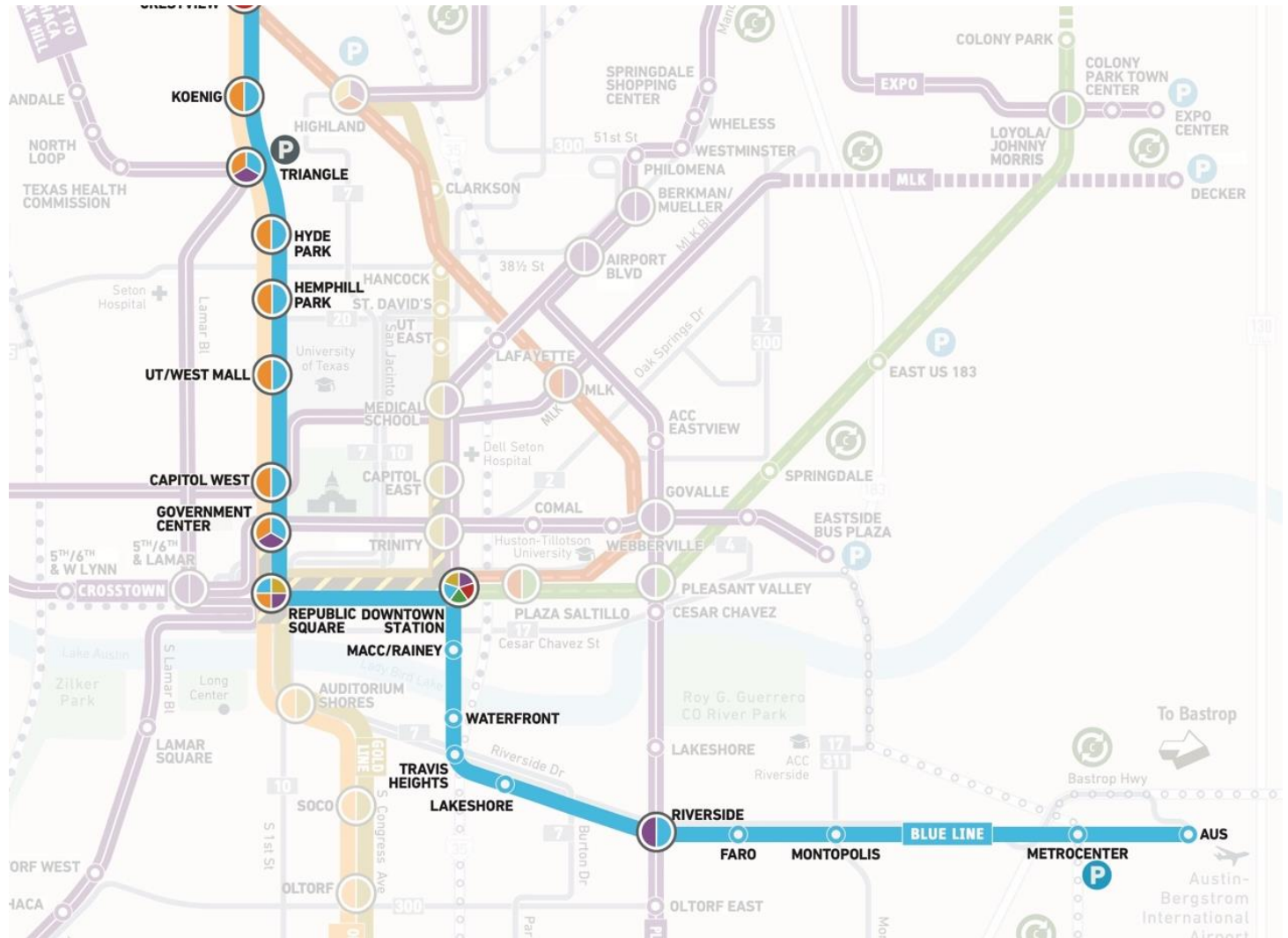
# New Rail System

## BLUE LINE



Light rail service  
to the airport.

Operating from North Lamar  
and U.S. 183 to downtown  
and directly  
to the airport.





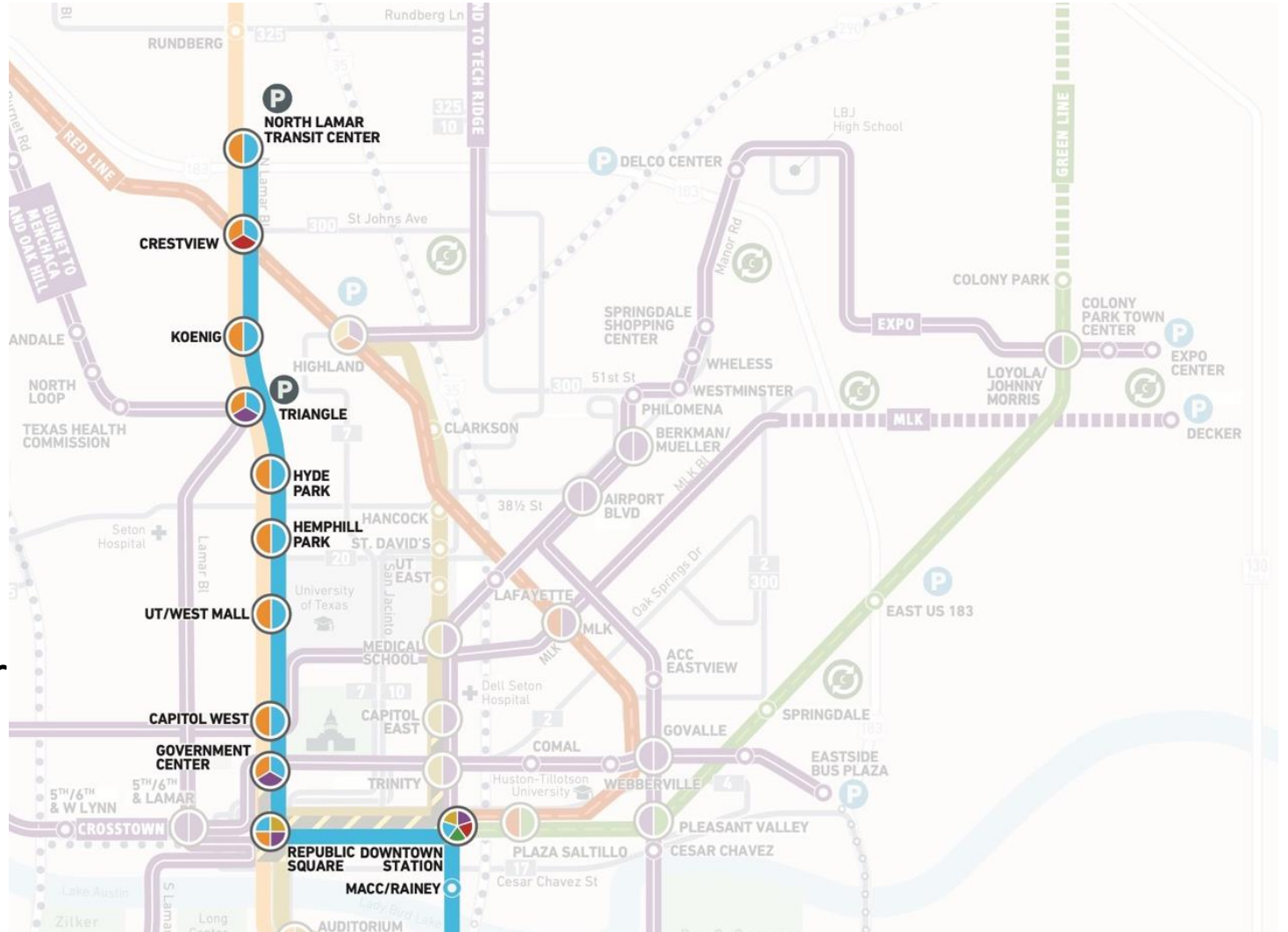
# New Rail System

## BLUE LINE



### Destinations include:

- Austin-Bergstrom International Airport
- Lakeshore Drive
- Convention Center
- Rainey Street
- UT
- Crestview
- North Lamar Transit Center



# NEPA Reporting – Key Elements of an EIS

- Determining the **Purpose and Need** of the Project
- Developing **Alternatives** that address the Purpose and Need
- Analyzing the **Existing Conditions** of the Project Area/Corridor
- Determining potential **Environmental Impacts** of the Project
- Identifying and Evaluating opportunities to **avoid, minimize, mitigate** identified impacts
- **Blue and Orange Line** Projects will require **NEPA EIS** documents.



# NEPA Roles – Agencies

## Cooperating agencies (federal)

- Regulatory jurisdiction
- May adopt NEPA document
- Consultation, review, concurrence

## Participating agencies (state, local, non-governmental entities)

- Regulatory jurisdiction
- Consultation, review



# NEPA Roles - City of Austin – Two Roles

The City of Austin is both a “**Participating Agency**” under NEPA and a key Project Connect “**Program Partner**” in the development and execution of the program.

As a NEPA **Participating Agency**, the City’s responsibility includes:

- Providing input to the project that is specific to City of Austin authority and jurisdiction
- Identifying issues of concern regarding the Project’s potential environmental or socioeconomic effects.
- Providing input to develop mitigations

As a **Project Connect Partner**, the City’s responsibility includes:

- Ongoing collaboration in the development of Project Definition and NEPA documents.
- Sharing in key decision points and milestones within the process.





# Role of City of Austin Project Connect Office

- Solicit and organize input from City depts.; City is a participating agency; all City departments invited to participate
- Facilitate data and information sharing between City depts., Capital Metro, the Austin Transit Partnership

Sample of City Departments To Date			
Watershed Protection	Austin Convention Center	Austin Transportation	Austin Resource Recovery
Austin Fire Department	Austin Energy	Corridor Program Office	Public Works
Development Services Department	Intergovernmental Relations	Austin Water	Small and Minority Business
Parks and Recreation Department	Office of Sustainability	Aviation Department	EMS
Office of Real Estate Services	Austin Public Health	Austin Resource Recovery	Public Works Dept
Communications & Technology Management	Housing and Planning	Equity Office	



## Next Steps

- Project Connect Office to set proactive meetings with Dept SPOCS
- Suggested Dates and Deadlines for input on the Purpose and Need and Scoping –
- Communication with between City Departments and Project Connect Office will remain ongoing throughout the entire process; more info earlier is best
- Project Connect Office to communicate next steps after comments on Purpose and Need and Scoping complete; approx. two-year process **Suggest Saying in place with previous approvals of City Council**





# Questions & Discussion

## Thank you!

