



## M E M O R A N D U M

**To:** Mayor and City Council  
Capital Metro Board of Directors

**From:** Randy Clarke, CEO and President, Capital Metro   
Gina Fiandaca, Assistant City Manager, City of Austin 

**Date:** May 6, 2020

**Subject:** **Update on Project Connect System Plan Recommendation, public engagement and next steps**

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The purpose of this communication is to provide you with an update on Capital Metro's Project Connect, the region's high capacity transit expansion plan.

As we're all aware, CapMetro, the City of Austin and other community organizations are working together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are proud to be part of this community that has shown great dedication and resilience in the response. We will get through this together; when we do, there will be more need than ever for a high-quality transit system that can provide access to jobs, education and healthcare, ease traffic, address climate change, and help resolve longstanding community inequities.

### March 9 Recap

Our last major touchpoint with you was on March 9, when we hosted a joint meeting of the City Council and Capital Metro Board of Directors. During the meeting, City and Capital Metro staff [presented you with the draft System Plan Recommendation](#), as well as a tentative approach for funding and governance of the recommendation. The plan is designed to significantly expand Capital Metro's network to improve safety, capacity, frequency and travel time – now and into the future. The March 9 draft Recommended System Plan included:

- Light Rail Transit as the primary mode proposed for the Orange and Blue Lines, – operating on dedicated transit lanes called transitways
- A downtown transit tunnel and underground stations
- A new Bus Rapid Transit service on the new Gold Line
- 24 new and improved Park & Rides and station amenities
- New and expanded MetroRail service with more frequency and hours of operation on the Red Line and proposed new Green Line commuter rail service
- 7 new MetroRapid routes
- 8 new MetroExpress commuter routes
- New fleet of all-electric, zero emissions vehicles
- Enhanced MetroAccess service
- New circulators providing Pick-up service to more than 30 neighborhood zones

The financial modeling used a 40 percent federal share funding estimate, contingent upon a local, long-term investment of approximately \$5.6 billion. Staff from both Capital Metro and the City continue to work collaboratively to establish a proposed framework for a joint venture or local government corporation to manage Project Connect investments and implementation.

### **Updates to System Plan Recommendation**

As stated at the March 9 work session, technical staff needed to complete the final Gold Line system analysis using the preliminary CAMPO 2045 demographics (we had previously included 2040 demographics) and develop the overall system analysis using CAMPO 2045. Based on the change in the anticipated ridership along the Gold Line, the final System Plan Recommendation includes the Gold Line as Light Rail Transit (LRT). The line was proposed to be Bus Rapid Transit in the March 9 recommendation; however, the demographic modeling supports the need for increased ridership capacity, deliverable by LRT.

Staff also revised the Red Line recommendations. As the final system analysis was completed, the limited gain on extending Red Line platforms did not yield enough additional ridership to justify the \$380 million investment over the next 30 year period.

Both of these updates are included in upcoming public engagement opportunities and will be discussed during future meetings with you.

### **Public Engagement**

The community has always been at the forefront of this planning process. Public transit investment has been an ongoing conversation in our community since 2000. Project Connect began its current plan analysis in August 2018, and we've hosted seven public joint meetings with the City Council and Capital Metro Board over the last two years. Project Connect community engagement, built on top of the [community engagement for ASMP](#), has been ongoing since 2018, and to date more than 40,000 people have interacted with the program. The Project Connect [community engagement dashboard](#) highlights what we've heard. Community engagement will continue to be an integral part of each step of the process, ensuring that every voice has an opportunity to be heard.

We're excited about a future when we can be together again; in the meantime, we're launching virtual input opportunities for people in our community to weigh in again on Project Connect. This Thursday, May 7, Capital Metro will resume community engagement on Project Connect with multiple opportunities for virtual participation. A self-guided "open house" will be launched on [ProjectConnect.com](#), and community meetings will be streamed live over Zoom through the end of May. These meetings are currently being advertised by Capital Metro, and as you are aware members of the Capital Metro board, Mayor and City Council have agreed to participate in live Q&A sessions. Public service updates from Workforce Solutions and the Central Texas Food Bank will be included during the meetings. The full schedule will be posted to the Project Connect website by Friday, May 8.

### **Next Steps**

We anticipate an update on the System Plan Recommendation and public engagement during the CapMetro board meeting on May 22 and an upcoming meeting of the City Council Mobility Committee on May 28.

The next major milestone of Project Connect will be during a joint meeting of the Council and Board on June 10, 2020. We will present the final staff-recommended System Plan and associated Locally Preferred Alternatives, in anticipation of action from both the Board and Council. Decisions on investment options and governance will occur at subsequent joint meetings, later this summer.

Details and technical documentation for the Recommended System Plan can be found at [ProjectConnect.com](http://ProjectConnect.com), along with more information about the upcoming community meetings. Please encourage others to visit the site and learn more.

Again, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to our partners and everyone on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. We will continue to keep their spirit and dedication at the forefront of our planning processes as we move forward together.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to either of us by email to [Randy.Clarke@capmetro.org](mailto:Randy.Clarke@capmetro.org) or [Gina.Fiandaca@austintexas.gov](mailto:Gina.Fiandaca@austintexas.gov).

**CC:** Spencer Cronk, City Manager