



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Richard Mendoza, P.E., Interim Director
Austin Transportation and Public Works 

THROUGH: Robert Goode, P.E., Interim Assistant City Manager 

DATE: June 1, 2023

SUBJECT: Barton Springs Road Safety Pilot Project

Austin is a Vision Zero community, adopting the goal of zero traffic-related serious injuries and deaths in 2015 and recommitting to the goal through multiple policies and plans since then. After an egregious crash on Barton Springs Road that seriously injured ten people in April 2022, Austin Transportation and Public Works (TPW) staff are proposing a Vision Zero-led Safety Pilot Project to evaluate safety and mobility impacts over a 12-month period. Proposed improvements include a reconfiguration of lanes from Lou Neff Rd. to South Lamar Blvd. to calm vehicle speeds and reduce the likelihood of severe crashes, enhanced and physically separated bicycle lanes, sidewalks connecting ADA-accessible pedestrian routes through Zilker Park, and upgraded transit stops.

Background

A severe crash occurred in April 2022 when a driver traveling westbound at over 50 mph on Barton Springs Road collided into another driver who was turning left at Sterzing Street. The impact of the collision sent the second driver's vehicle into a crowd of people who were on the sidewalk, resulting in ten serious injuries. After that crash, TPW's engineering and Vision Zero teams completed analysis of the traffic volumes, speeds, crash history, and existing conditions on this section of Barton Springs Road to determine potential engineering treatments that would improve safety for everyone using this street.

Over a recent five-year period, from May 2018 through April 2023, there were over 240 documented crashes on Barton Springs Road between Stratford Drive and South Lamar, 81 of which we have full crash reports from peace officers. On average, a motor vehicle-related crash happened every 7.5 days over that five-year period. The five-year [comprehensive crash cost](#) for this section is \$19,210,000.

As an initial response to the crash and data collected, from December 2022 to February 2023 the City [lowered the posted speed limits from 35 mph to 30 mph](#), added dynamic speed display devices to show drivers their speeds, and made additional [access changes](#) to encourage safer travel in the area. Unfortunately, data from the first four months of the year demonstrate that over 70 drivers per day continue to drive at least 15 mph above the current posted speed limit.

Planned Improvements

Recognizing Barton Springs Road is an important motor vehicle connection between MoPac Expressway and central Austin, the design for Barton Springs Road is intended to maintain motor vehicle capacity while improving safety for all users of the street. Safe access to Zilker Park and nearby destinations will be improved for people walking, bicycling, rolling, and taking transit. The concept will:

- Provide one vehicle lane in each direction between Azie Morton Road and South Lamar Boulevard to calm motor vehicle speeds and reduce the risk of severe collisions
- Maintain motor vehicle capacity along the corridor by providing additional vehicle lanes at the intersections of South Lamar Boulevard and Azie Morton Road
 - Motor vehicle congestion typically occurs at signalized intersections because each direction of traffic must stop while other directions take their turn; detailed traffic modeling shows the design would add some length to motor vehicle queues at signals but drivers are expected to get through the signalized intersections in the same signal cycle as today
- Upgrade bicycle lanes by increasing their width and adding physical separation from motor vehicle traffic to improve safety for people in the bicycle lane and on the sidewalk
- Create safer and shorter pedestrian crossings on Barton Springs Road and side streets
- Connect a future continuous ADA-accessible pedestrian route through Zilker Park along the north side of Barton Springs Road
- Relocate bus stops to locations with safer pedestrian crossings
- Improve safety of left-turn movements by maintaining U-turns for local access

Relationship to Zilker Park Vision Plan and the Barton Springs Road Bridge Design Process

TPW staff have communicated with the project management teams for the two related, but independent, initiatives. While there is geographic overlap and shared goals between the three initiatives, each stands alone in their respective processes. As the Zilker Park Vision Plan moves towards adoption, it is recognized that mobility-related aspects in the plan will need further detailed analysis for the section of Barton Springs Road west of Lou Neff Road to MoPac before implementation occurs, and results of this Safety Pilot Project will help inform future analysis. The Barton Springs Road Bridge design process is in its preliminary phase and construction funding has yet to be identified for the bridge, so the Safety Pilot Project will provide the necessary improvements to enhance safe, multimodal access over the bridge for the near-term future.

Evaluation and Next Steps

The project will be in place for 12 months and we will evaluate the impact of the changes at six months comparing pre- and post-pilot data and observations. Evaluation of the pilot will consider changes in crashes (including severity and modes), motor vehicle driver speeds, multimodal access, public feedback, and motor vehicle operations.

Starting June 1 until June 30, 2023, we are gathering public feedback on the 12-month pilot concept design through postcard mailings and in-person conversations with nearby residents and businesses and visitors to the area, online webpages with detailed project information, and a citywide online survey. Staff will provide a project update in July 2023 prior to implementation.

Please find more information on the proposed pilot at <http://AustinTexas.gov/BartonSpringsRd>. For additional information or further discussion, please contact Lewis Leff, Transportation Safety Officer, Lewis.Leff@austintexas.gov.

cc: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager