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# AUSTIN STRATEGIC MOBILITY PLAN PHASE I ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

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## Background

The City of Austin Transportation Department (ATD) launched a public engagement campaign in March 2017 to support the creation of the [Austin Strategic Mobility Plan \(ASMP\)](#). The ASMP will be a comprehensive transportation plan, covering all transportation modes, future technologies and likely impacting the majority of people and transportation facilities in Austin. If adopted by the Austin City Council in 2018, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan will guide transportation investment, policy and programming in Austin for the next 20+ years.

The magnitude of the ASMP and the impact it will have on Austin makes it crucial that staff hear from as many people as possible while the Plan is in development. Since launching in March 2017, the ASMP Public Engagement Team has been working to engage the diverse and dynamic people of Austin who make the community what it is. By “doing things differently for different results,” the ASMP team hopes to give voice to those who have been underrepresented and build trust with those who have felt left out. The new and unique tools developed, along with traditional engagement strategies, provided staff the opportunity to engage with a wide cross section of Austin in order to build the foundation of a planning process that will reflect the entire community.

This report presents the strategy and results of the first phase of engagement for the ASMP. Future phases will be similarly captured and presented with the plan document. This document also serves as the “Insights” informing the development of the Mobility Outcome of the [City’s Strategic Plan](#). In early 2017, City Council identified Mobility as one of six strategic outcomes to focus on in the development and implementation of a strategic plan for the City. The Strategic Plan will contain the three to five year strategies for the City, and the strategies, metrics and targets for the Mobility Outcome will be informed by the ASMP and amended into the Strategic Plan in fall 2018.

## Strategy

When crafting the Public Engagement Plan for the ASMP, staff started with what we already know. This effort is not the first time the City has asked the community about their thoughts and priorities related to transportation; staff didn’t want the previous efforts on behalf of the community and the comments

received to not be considered as part of this process. Staff started with the [Mobility Talks](#) effort authorized by City Council Resolution No. 20160211-017. As part of the Mobility Talks effort, 52 previous plans were studied, from 1998 through 2015 from around the City, forming a succinct list of key themes and mobility considerations that have risen to the top in the past two decades. Of those previous plans studied, Imagine Austin represented the single largest public engagement effort in the city's history, with over 18,500 pieces of public input. In total, the more than 60,000 individuals who informed these plans came from all over the city, with each bringing a unique perspective on what is most important to consider for the future of Austin's transportation network. Their opinions, priorities, and concerns were crucial as the ASMP began setting its foundational goals and defining the City's key challenges. In addition to the review of past public engagement the Mobility Talks initiative included a survey that reached approximately 7,000 people, including residents from each City Council District.

Through Mobility Talks and the analysis of other community engagement efforts such as the Vision Zero Action Plan, Bicycle Master Plan, Spirit of East Austin and others, eight mobility considerations emerged as continuing themes raised by Austin residents. These themes now represent the goals of the ASMP and are as follows: **Affordability, Commuter Delay, Travel Choice, Health & Safety, Sustainability, Placemaking, Economic Prosperity, and Innovation.**

## Historically Underserved-Focused Engagement

While looking at what the City has already heard, staff considered who was missing. Many past engagement efforts were constrained by time, budget and/or a lack of expertise, and were missing critical voices of Austin. During the Phase I Engagement, the ASMP team focused its resources on hearing from those who have been historically underrepresented and underserved: minorities, seniors, youth and people with disabilities. The effort focused on thinking "outside the box" to provide a voice to these populations, including partnering with other community initiatives to engage with people in a meaningful way. Staff learned from the findings of the Community Engagement Task Force and asked the Austin City Council to identify people we should talk to, and at what locations we might be able to engage historically underserved communities.

### **Employment-Based Engagement**

Staff deployed "employment-based engagement" with a goal of reaching people where they work instead of asking them to come to a meeting or fill out a survey online on their personal time. Utilizing data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, we targeted employers that employ higher percentages of historically underserved communities, such as minorities, and worked to deploy teams to those workplaces.

This approach was a bold, new idea that needs further development to work better for future initiatives. Not all companies were well receiving; some were concerned that if they let one City department/initiative come in, they would have to say yes to everyone. Others had privacy or scheduling concerns.

In the end, staff hosted events at several employers including Samsung, the Public Works Department and Austin Public Health during the work day to hear from employees. While certainly participation was robust, the audiences engaging weren't necessarily representative of historically underserved communities. Never the less, this strategy broke down a common barrier to engagement: lack of time or energy to participate on nights and weekends.

### **Targeted Groups and Events**

The ASMP team also contacted groups on the City's Community Registry and the Mobility Talks stakeholder list, and worked with our Public Engagement Consultant to identify key people who we should add and/or reach out to personally. For example, we met with ADAPT of Texas, the Austin Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, the Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce, Habitat for Humanity, the Austin Arts Alliance and many others. To bolster this effort, staff sought out facilities that already had scheduled activities so we could engage people on the spot. Staff attended events at ACC Highland, Huston-Tillotson University, several City of Austin Senior Activity Centers, an educational seminar for local teachers hosted by the Austin Independent School District, a Saturday morning at the Millennium Youth Complex, and more.

### **Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan ([CHA/CHIP](#))**

Every five years, [Austin Public Health \(APH\)](#) and key community partners collaborate to carry out the Community Health Assessment (CHA), an effort to engage community members and local public health partners to collect and analyze health-related data from many sources. The CHA is then used to inform a three-year Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), an action-oriented plan that outlines the community health issues based on CHA findings.

The ASMP team partnered with APH in their efforts to gain community insights in the CHA/CHIP process. This was mutually beneficial because it allowed the ASMP staff access to data collected from high-health need communities, the same communities most impacted by transportation and affordability issues, and it provided APH additional staff-power to go door-to-door in the community.

Not surprisingly, Transportation was one of eight key themes that came up during the CHA effort. The Draft of the CHA report notes, "for community members who do not have access to a personal or family vehicle, public transportation is a critical need."<sup>1</sup> Participants in the process discussed the lack of public transportation options outside of Austin city limits and going into or out of Austin. Participants noted the challenges they face affording housing within the city limits on one hand, and, on the other, the difficulty they have traveling once they move to more-affordable suburban areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Health Assessment Austin/Travis County, September 2017 Draft.  
[http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/CHA-CHIP/ATC\\_CHA\\_DRAFT\\_09\\_26\\_17\\_\\_002\\_.pdf](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/CHA-CHIP/ATC_CHA_DRAFT_09_26_17__002_.pdf)

Some of the key transportation-related takeaways include<sup>2</sup>:

**Access to Health Care/Healthy Lifestyle**

Affordable and timely access to health care, healthy foods, and outdoor space for physical activity is wanted. Physical barriers such as distance to facilities, methods of transportation, and general affordability measures need to be addressed.

**Affordability**

With the migration of people further from Central Austin, due to housing affordability, there is a lack of efficient access and available/affordable mobility methods for those individuals concerning public transit.

**Health Coverage**

A proposed recommendation, concerning health coverage and general access to health care, was providing consistent and reliable services such as health care clinics and food distribution services.

**Cultural Competency**

There is difficulty for non-English speaking residents in understanding public transportation maps, signage, and other avenues of communication concerning transit options, availability, and pricing.

**Spirit of East Austin**

The [Spirit of East Austin](#) is a City of Austin-community partnership that has focused new energy and creativity into breaking down historic barriers to jobs and opportunities east of Interstate 35. Launched by a community event on Sept. 12, 2015, Spirit of East Austin has brought new voices and renewed hope for tangible change.

Historically, I-35 was the dividing line not only by race but also by economic possibilities. While the view eastward from I-35 today is one of revitalization, much of those who have lived for years in that community are left out of this economic upsurge and gentrification is threatening their neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup>

In an effort to include the voices of those who participated in the Spirit of East Austin effort, the ASMP team is reviewing all of the comments collected and including them as part of the comments collected through Phase I Engagement for the ASMP. The ASMP team is going beyond just those comments tagged as “Transportation” and identifying others that might be impacted or related to transportation, but are less specific such as “drug stores closer” or “market within short distance or transport to

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<sup>2</sup> Community Health Assessment Austin/Travis County, September 2017 Draft.

[http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/CHA-CHIP/ATC\\_CHA\\_DRAFT\\_09\\_26\\_17\\_\\_002\\_.pdf](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/CHA-CHIP/ATC_CHA_DRAFT_09_26_17__002_.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Spirit of East Austin initiative webpage. <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/spirit-east-austin>

neighborhood.” The comments will be used to evaluate the scenarios and identify possible projects that could be included in the final ASMP.

## Traditional Public Engagement

In addition to engagement activities focused on historically underserved communities, the ASMP team deployed traditional public engagement strategies, such as forming an advisory committee, maintaining a project website and e-newsletter, promoting an online survey, attending Council District Town Halls and others.

### **Multimodal Community Advisory Committee**

We worked with Capital Metro’s Project Connect team to form a Multimodal Community Advisory Committee (MCAC) composed of stakeholders representing a variety of interest groups and neighborhoods. Project Connect, Capital Metro’s high-capacity transit planning initiative for the region, is an important component to the development of the ASMP. As high-capacity transit is an important system in the City’s transportation network, it is critical to the success of both initiatives that they are highly coordinated. This joint advisory committee was formed to ensure the insights and diverse perspectives of our community are incorporated by both planning teams and to guide both public engagement efforts and be respectful of the community’s time. The MCAC meets quarterly to weigh in at major milestones, refine concepts, and confirm direction toward completion of the draft plans.

When creating the MCAC, staff reached out to stakeholders, and sought suggestions from the Austin City Council to supplement membership and work towards a diverse array of opinions and perspectives on the Committee. For example, members of the CodeNEXT Community Advisory Committee and the chairs of the Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commissions were invited to the MCAC. Staff encouraged prospective members to participate for the length of the process while recognizing each individual participant may substitute out for a different individual of their choosing due to time or scheduling constraints. The Committee structure is intentionally flexible to assure quality input from those interested in all or only specific aspects of the projects as they evolve.

### **Public Meetings**

We also partnered with [Capital Metro’s Project Connect](#) team to host a large, in-person community event at the Bullock Texas History Museum. The Traffic Jam held on March 4, 2017 was advertised far and wide, and attracted more than 230 people for the sole purpose of engaging with Project Connect and the ASMP. A summary of what we heard at that event was published in April and is available on the ASMP website.

We also attended City Council Town Halls in every district that hosted one during our engagement period (nine of ten districts), had a booth at the Earth Day Festival and spoke at several Boards, Commissions and Council Committees about the ASMP effort.

## Online Survey

To supplement our in-person engagement activities, we deployed an online survey. The survey was a low-cost, high-response rate tool developed in house. The survey was promoted on social media and provided to the City Council offices for distribution through their newsletters and social media accounts. The total number of survey participants was 945.

## Communication Support

The ASMP team used standard methods of communication to spread the word about this effort. Staff created a project webpage, used social media posts on Twitter, NextDoor and Facebook, partnered with media outlets to spread the word through earned and paid media, and worked alongside Capital Metro as they promoted Project Connect to tie in the ASMP. Staff also used the Community Registry to identify neighborhood associations and transportation-related stakeholder groups to target with quarterly e-newsletters.

## What we heard

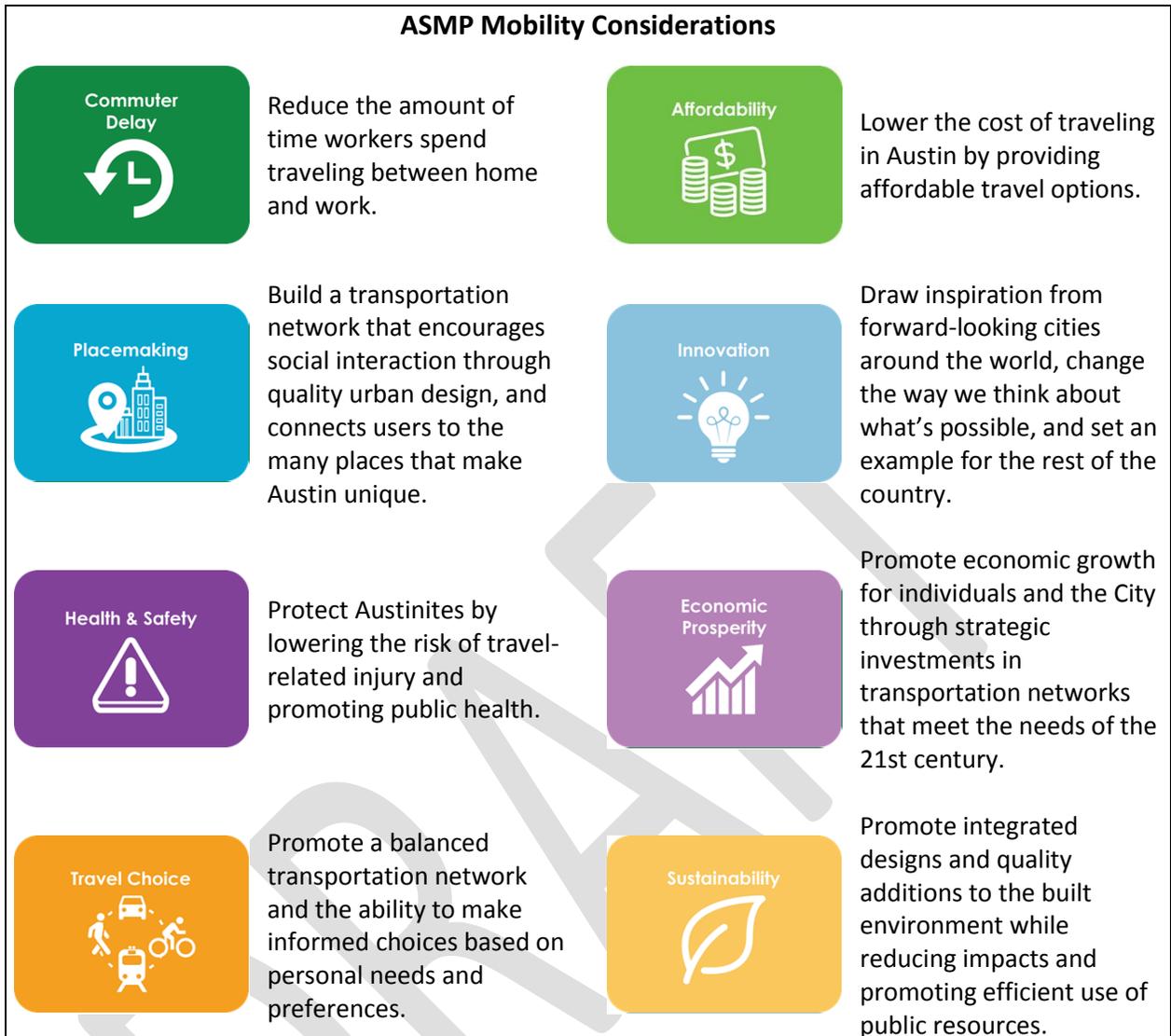
For each group and meeting set up by the ASMP team, we deployed the same three activities, making minor tweaks to be sensitive to the context of each group: the Thought Wall, Priority Pyramid and Live/Work/Play map. These activities are described in detail below. Only two minor modifications were made: on the online survey where we felt more comfortable asking demographic questions of participants, such as age and race/ethnicity, we did so; and at the Traffic Jam event we had an additional street builder game available which we found difficult to replicate at smaller, faster-paced engagement opportunities.

To ensure that minority voices weren't lost in the overall feedback, we followed the recommendation of the City's Equity Office and kept the dataset from each engagement separate from each other. This allows staff to better understand the needs and desires of specific communities so that they can be better represented in the final plan.

In total, the ASMP team collected more than 5,000 data points from the Austin community. We heard from people in all ten City Council Districts, and many of the communities surrounding Austin.

### Activity 1: Priority Pyramid

Participants were invited to review descriptions of the eight "Mobility Considerations" and prioritize their top six considerations into a pyramid template, with their personal top priority or consideration at the top of the pyramid. Requiring participants to think through which two of the considerations aren't a priority for them allows them to feel the constraints City planners must work within, and contemplate the tradeoffs of lowering the priority of a certain mobility consideration. Participants were encouraged to look beyond the intentionally-broad definitions provided by staff and interpret each "Mobility Consideration" how they wanted to.



Staff collected approximately 1,700 completed priority pyramids. The results varied from group to group, with Commuter Delay, Affordability, Health & Safety and Travel Choice being the typical front runners. This was especially interesting because participants were encouraged to interpret the Mobility Considerations in their own way. Staff saw seniors interpret affordability in terms of housing, likely because they're living on a fixed income and aging in place is a priority for them. On the other hand, younger people, such as students, tended to also prioritize affordability because they were more concerned with transportation affordability than housing. Students were concerned about the cost of owning a car more than their housing cost. Another remarkable difference was how much lower younger people ranked Health & Safety compared to seniors and the average participant.

Congestion was an overall contributor to the conversation. Employees expressed frustration at their lack of real alternatives to driving alone, with many people saying they don't think they would mind riding

transit but it's not time-competitive to driving alone. Others cited congestion as a contributing factor to health and safety. For example, participants during the employer-based engagement at Austin Public Health indicated their clients sitting in traffic (on a bus or in a car) often means they miss an appointment for extremely necessary items, such as food stamps. Other participants indicated they often feel angry sitting in traffic and believe it contributes to road rage and more crashes.

The following lists show the overall rankings of the Mobility Considerations from all participants and from underserved communities, respectively.

**Top Priority from all Participants**

*(in-person & online)*

- 1) Commuter Delay
- 2) Affordability
- 3) Health & Safety
- 4) Travel Choice
- 5) Sustainability
- 6) Placemaking
- 7) Economic Prosperity
- 8) Innovation

**Top Priority from the Underserved**

*Communities Outreach (in-person & online)*

- 1) Affordability
- 2) Commuter Delay
- 3) Travel Choice
- 4) Health & Safety
- 5) Sustainability
- 6) Placemaking
- 7) Economic Prosperity
- 8) Innovation

## Activity 2: Thought Wall

After completing the Priority Pyramid, participants were given index cards and asked to give more thought to their priorities. Participants wrote their number one transportation thought/concern/priority/wish/adoration and four other thoughts also personally important to them. They then assigned their thought to the Mobility Consideration it most applied to. For example, an individual might have said, "I want more bus service in my neighborhood"; they could have then placed that thought under the "Travel Choice" Mobility Consideration.

Key elements of this activity were not requiring participants to limit or broaden their thought in any way, and minimally assisting participants with matching their thoughts to a Mobility Consideration. In other words, in the same example above about neighborhood bus service, the individual could have just as likely been more specific about which route and which neighborhood, and considered their thought a priority under Health & Safety or Affordability rather than Travel Choice.

In total, and before including the Spirit of East Austin comments, the ASMP team received more than 2,900 individual comments. The majority of comments received in this activity pertained to Travel Choice and Commuter Delay, with Affordability coming in third. This is slightly different from the Priority Pyramid and shows the complexity of addressing affordability in Austin – not many know how to do it.

Many of the mobility considerations were cross referenced in the across multiple thoughts. For example, comments categorized as Innovation and Placemaking included a lot of discussion about transit and travel choice. Comments ranged in breadth from "I <3 CARTS [Capital Area Rural Transportation

System]” to more specific comments such as “Transit Center and pedestrian hybrid beacon Manchaca and Lightsey.”

Other key themes and takeaways from the Thought Wall comments include:

**Inadequate Connections to Jobs**

Barriers in mobility connectivity have created a large roadblock to individuals without vehicles or those who frequently rely on transit services to reach higher wage jobs in various parts of Austin. Communities outside the core of the city struggle to access frequent and reliable transit services near where they live and work. People who do live relatively close to where they work find transit uncompetitive with driving alone because of commute time.

**Affordable Housing**

Finding affordable housing for many Austinites is a huge challenge. Many families, especially middle and low income households, are being displaced in search of cheaper housing options on the perimeter of the city, which generally lack mobility options other than driving. Moving further away for more affordable housing often compounds transportation-related costs as well as congestion.

**Context-Sensitive Infrastructure**

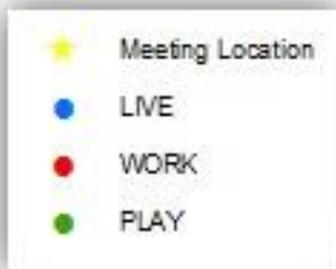
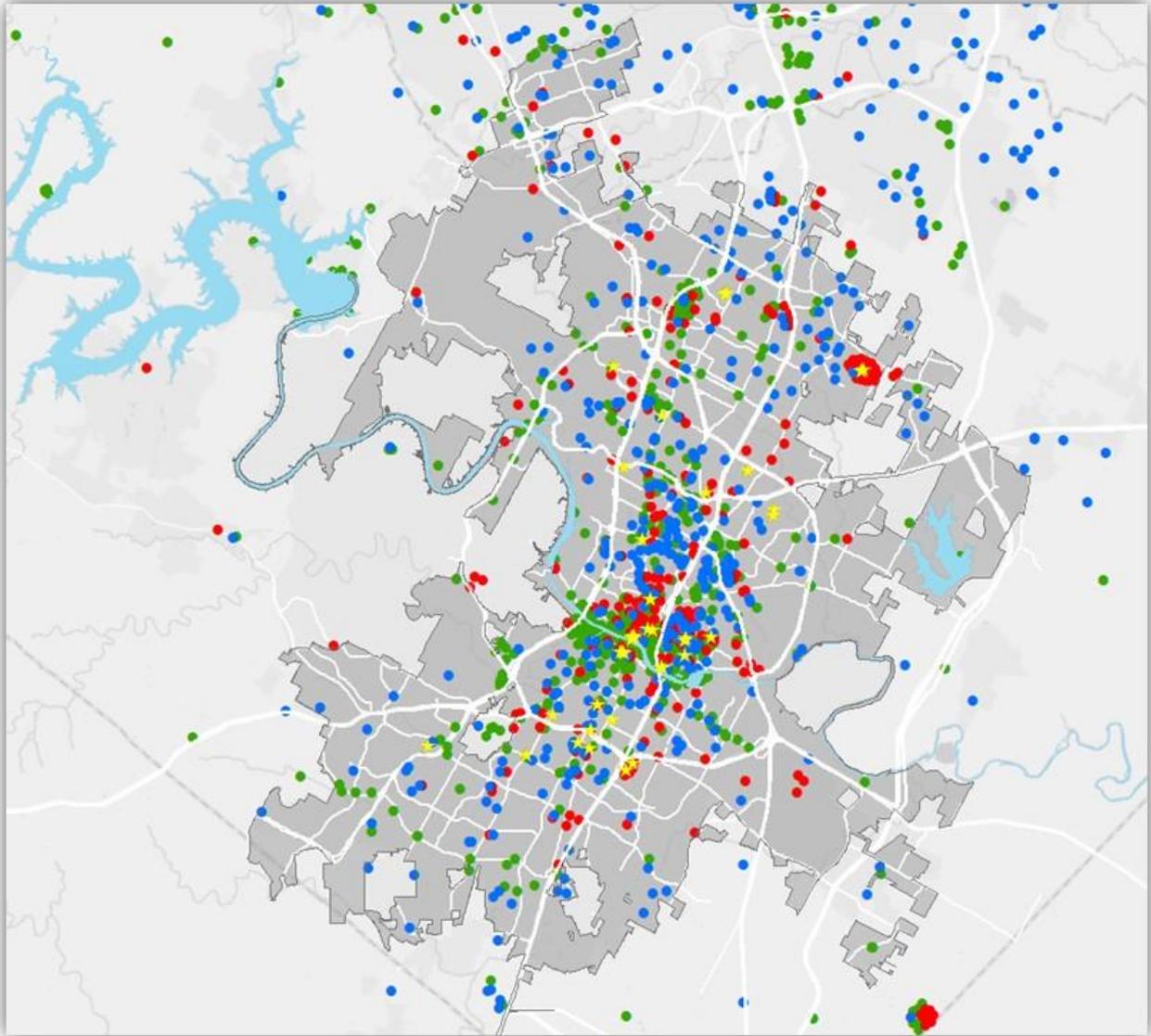
New transportation infrastructure should be context sensitive and conscious of the traditions, behavior, and fears of the people currently living in communities where it’s being constructed.

**Multimodal Options**

There was overwhelming support and desire to see alternatives to driving alone. Some participants preferred transit, some preferred sidewalks or bike facilities but most participants indicated the lack of options contributes negatively to quality of life, access to jobs and congestion throughout the community.

### Activity 3: Live Work Play Mapping

The primary purpose of the Live Work Play Mapping was to allow staff to see what areas of Austin were getting involved in the ASMP process, and what areas need to be targeted a little more. In total, 1,493 dots were collected from all areas of Austin, with some people indicating they work or play in Austin but live in one of the surrounding communities. Staff estimates about 480 individuals participated in the activity based on the number of “Live” dots. Input from neighboring communities and residents was included because regional travel patterns are impacting Austin’s transportation network.



## How we'll use the input

Typically Phase I public engagement would provide input on the development of a plan's vision and goals, but in the case of the ASMP, the team is using the Imagine Austin mobility vision and determined plan goals by using the results Mobility Talks. As mentioned previously, staff's analysis of past engagement processes led to the identification of eight Mobility Considerations which will serve as the goals going forward. Staff is using the Phase I engagement to further validate the goals and develop the mobility scenarios in the next phase of the ASMP process. For example, Commuter Delay is top priority from Phase I engagement overall, so staff would be looking at shaping the scenarios to create increased efficiencies in our roadway network while also being mindful of managing growth through investments in corridors and centers.

The data collected as part of this process will continue to be used to evaluate the mobility scenarios identified during the ASMP process with the goal of ultimately identifying a Preferred Scenario. In other words, the scenarios will be tested on how well they address and perform against the community's preferences.

Finally, all of the specific project and program requests identified through the hundreds of raw comments and concerns will be used to identify recommendations for inclusion in the final ASMP.

## Next Steps

In coordination with the release of the results of the technical scenario planning process currently underway, the ASMP team will launch Public Engagement Phase II in early 2018. Phase II will be focused around encouraging participation in an interactive, easy-to-use online survey to gather feedback from the community. The survey will ask participants to consider how well each scenario meets the goals of the ASMP, and whether or not the scenarios align with their personal preference. This information will be used to inform the creation of the Preferred Scenario and the Mobility Strategy of the ASMP.

In addition to promoting engagement opportunities to the general community, the ASMP team will continue to focus on hearing from historically underserved communities on their preferences on the scenarios. This will include a refined approach to the employer-based outreach, focus groups and efforts to visit people at locations convenient to them.

Below is the schedule and next steps in the ASMP planning process:

**August 2017 to December 2017** – Interim Engagement/Scenario Development

**January 2018 to March 2018** – Public Engagement Phase II/Scenario Evaluation

**April 2018 to June 2018** – Preferred Scenario Development/Plan Production

**July 2018** – Begin plan adoption process