

Chapter 6



Supporting Our Community

Our community is composed of the many different, unique, and important people that create distinct, vibrant, and special neighborhoods across our city. Everything that occurs on our transportation network, from building roads to fixing sidewalks, experimenting with new signal technology to planting street trees, is done to help our community get where we want to go in a safe and reliable way.

Our transportation network is an integral part of our community. This extends past the routes or modes we choose to go to work or school. This integration is based on the deep impact our transportation network has on the ways our community grows, where we choose to live, how we interact with each other, and how we support the different communities and populations within neighborhoods. Because our transportation network exists to support our community with the many different goals, tasks, and joys of our lives, we must ensure that our network is a positive influence; it must serve all of us.

This chapter addresses how transportation supports people across our city. It begins by recognizing the inequities of past land use and transportation planning and expresses our determination to take steps to improve outcomes for all. We know that transportation is expensive and that transportation improvements can affect displacement, both for people and for businesses. We must acknowledge and confront these affordability issues by working with all our communities to retain the unique character of our neighborhoods within the growing city. Accessibility for people with mobility impairments must be emphasized throughout the transportation network. To properly learn from and support our community we must proactively listen to and work with our community. As our transportation network grows within our city, we must ensure that the network supports our community and helps us grow and thrive.



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Equity

Equity is achieved when every member of the community has a fair opportunity to live a long, healthy and meaningful life. Embedding it into Austin's value system means changing hearts and minds, transforming local government from the inside out, eradicating disparities and ensuring all Austin community members share in the benefits of community progress. An equitable community is one where everyone can participate and prosper, and conditions allow all of us to reach our full potential.

We can think about transportation equity in several ways:

- Geographic equity: the treatment of and funding for different geographic areas in the city of Austin is equitable based on safety and mobility needs.
- Modal equity: the treatment of and funding for different transportation modes, like walking, driving, taking public transportation, and bicycling, is equitable based on community goals and system needs.
- Travel choice equity: users of the transportation network are provided meaningful transportation mode choices that enable access to jobs, healthcare, education, public amenities, and opportunities.
- Social equity: not only treating all people fairly, but also recognizing, acknowledging, and purposefully acting to right historical wrongs and inequities caused by transportation-related decisions.

As a transportation industry, we have historically used tools to focus on geographic, modal, and travel choice equity. While these approaches to equity are critical to achieving our mobility goals, this section is primarily focused on how we can better integrate and prioritize the fourth equity approach, social equity, into our transportation decision-making. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these four forms of equity are not mutually exclusive, and strategies to address one type can overlap with and either help or hurt the other types. Further, the City recognizes that race is the primary determinant of social equity and, therefore, racial equity is the starting point for the journey towards social equity.

Inequity in access and options can be a barrier that keeps us from reaching the benefits and opportunities for prosperity Austin has to offer. It can also be cyclical, leading to intergenerational disenfranchisement that prevents multiple generations of families from establishing financial security and accessing opportunities. In Austin, as in other cities, today's inequities stem from the past, both from active decisions to disrupt communities and from passive harmful neglect. Publicly-funded transportation decision-making and systems have been part of the problem of our city's history of systemic racism, leading to the inequitable outcomes we see today. We recognize the historical harm, acknowledge these inequitable outcomes, and, through this plan, we will address inequity throughout Austin as we move forward. All aspects of transportation decision-making need to be examined through an equity lens and transformed to better serve all Austinites, especially those most harmed by past decisions.

Indicators and Targets



Increase the mobility funding allocated to areas that are historically underserved



Increase the percent of transportation projects and programs that use the Equity Assessment Tool



Increase the percent of City employees receiving mobility equity training



Increase the number and share of people participating in transportation workforce training programs

Policy 1

Acknowledge and learn from the negative effects of past transportation and land use decisions

Recognize that historically communities of color, low-income communities, and people with disabilities have been most negatively impacted by transportation and land use policy and infrastructure due to barriers leading to a lack of representation and institutional power

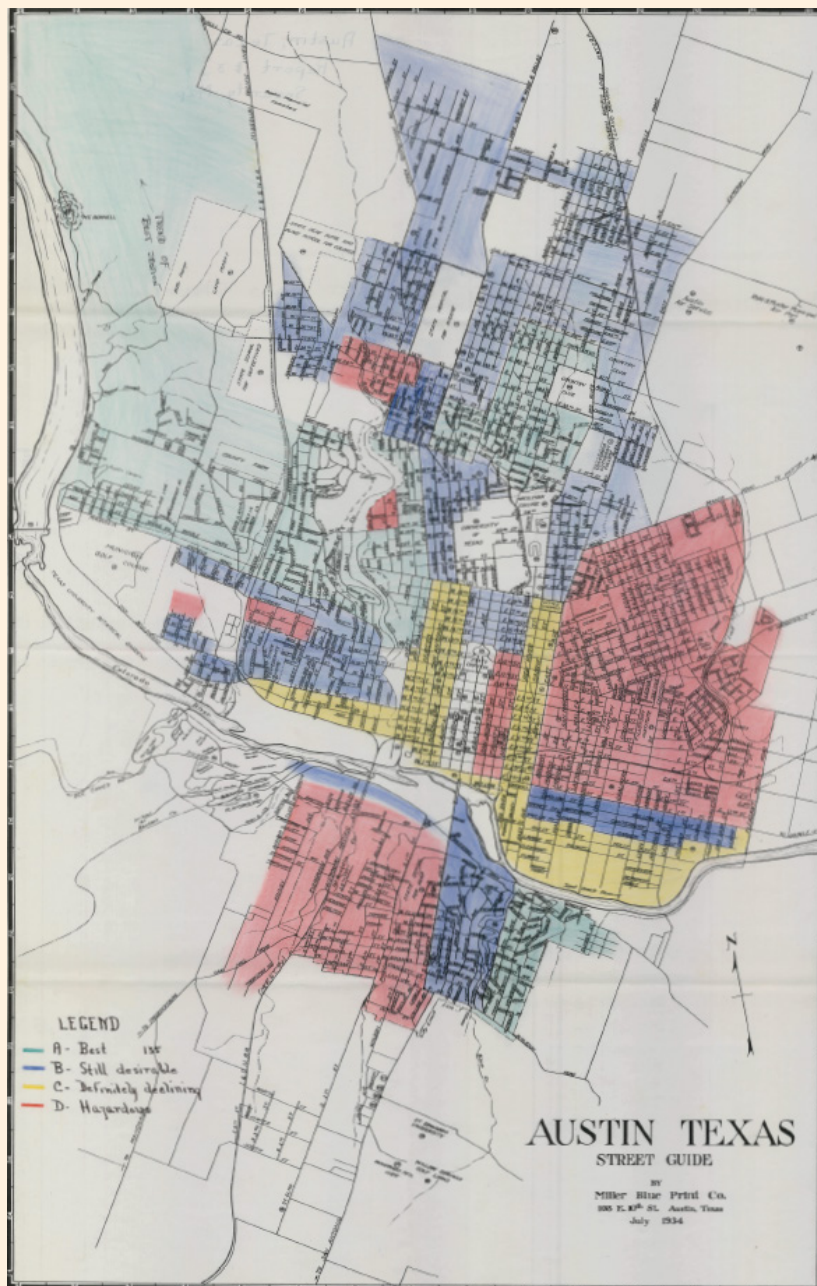
Austin has a history of systemic racism and racial inequity that continues to affect us in the present day. Decisions related to transportation and land use policy and infrastructure have resulted in the exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination of communities of color, low-income communities, and people with disabilities. Land use and transportation decisions, including the 1928 Master Plan of Austin adopted by an all-white, all-male City Council, worked together to segregate non-white residents in East Austin. African-Americans and Hispanic/Latinx community members who tried to settle in areas outside the designated "Negro District" were denied basic services such as utilities, parks, and public schools unless they moved into the district. Segregation resulting from Austin's 1928 Master Plan was deepened by later "redlining" maps depicting four levels of "residential security." The color red was given to areas, primarily in East Austin where many lower-income and/or non-white Austinites lived, which were deemed "hazardous" to extend mortgages and other financial services into. Redlining was a barrier to financial opportunities for non-white people, while at the same time increasing economic opportunities for white people, and it further encouraged spatial segregation.

Transportation planning and infrastructure decisions worked in concert with discriminatory land use policies to exacerbate inequities in Austin for communities of color. Vehicular travel on highways and other major roadways leads to increased pollution in neighborhoods located nearby. Higher rates of respiratory diseases such as asthma have been documented in many communities of color and lower-income communities who live or work close to these major roadways. Perhaps the largest and most obvious reminder of inequity and segregation in Austin is also a freeway: the double decks of Interstate 35 dividing downtown from East Austin. The highway follows along what was once East Avenue, the boundary line of the redlined "Negro District" and other parts of Austin. Today, the freeway acts as both a physical and symbolic barrier to opportunity and reminds us of the critical work left to be done to learn from our history.

Clarksville and the MoPac Expressway

The MoPac Expressway (Loop 1) was constructed in the 1970s through a historic black neighborhood, Clarksville, displacing nearly a third of the neighborhood's homes and forcing many Clarksville residents to be displaced to other homes outside of the tight-knit community. Only a few years later, a proposed crosstown expressway aligned along 15th Street and Enfield Road would have wiped out the rest of Clarksville and force the majority black residents to move from their community in West Austin. Clarksville community members banded together to successfully oppose this crosstown freeway, although gentrification pressures continue to threaten the community today.

1935 Home Owners' Loan Corporation Residential Security Map Showing Redlining in Austin



The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), sponsored by the U.S. federal government as part of the New Deal, was formed to offer assistance to homeowners and prevent foreclosures for those in default on their loans. The HOLC developed a series of residential security maps that deemed areas safe or hazardous to lend to. Areas in red were those deemed hazardous. These determinations further entrenched spatial segregation for many people of color into specific areas. This process is known today as "redlining."

Some negative effects of past transportation and land use decisions come from disinvestment rather than from the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects. Decades of neglect have had negative effects on neighborhoods such as Dove Springs and North Lamar where residents have had to make do without much investment in transportation infrastructure and other public and private services. Acknowledging this kind of long-term discriminatory disinvestment is just as important as acknowledging devastation caused by new construction projects.

All transportation and land use decisions need to first consider these and other historical events that have negatively impacted communities of color. Only then can we acknowledge them and create space for communities to share so that we do not repeat the same mistakes. Increasing equity throughout the transportation and land use decision-making processes will require more representative collaboration, input, ownership, and ongoing evaluation of existing and new policies to understand their implications for equity. We recognize that our decisions today will affect equity in the future.

Equity Assessment Tool

The Equity Assessment Tool, developed by the City of Austin's Equity Office, is a tool that can help all City departments in the following ways:

- Focusing on human-centered design and building institutional empathy;
- Engaging community members in decision-making processes, prioritizing those adversely affected by current conditions;
- Bringing conscious attention to racial and other inequities and unintended consequences before decisions are made;
- Advancing opportunities for the improvement of outcomes for historically marginalized communities;
- Removing barriers to the improvement of outcomes for historically marginalized communities; and
- Affirming our commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity.

The Equity Assessment Tool can be utilized to implement new policies, practices, and programs to help identify and address the inequities that negatively impact quality of life for low-income communities in Austin, which are disproportionately communities of color. The Tool asks who will benefit or be burdened by any particular proposal, and what it does to advance racial equity or mitigate unintended consequences. It also helps departments plan for data collection, engagement, implementation, and ongoing accountability and evaluation. A department-level equity assessment will be followed by a yearly Equity Action Plan of concrete steps the department is taking to improve equity.

Austin Transportation participated in the first cohort of departments to implement the Equity Analysis Tool. Following an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, Austin Transportation developed its first Annual Equity Action Plan for 2019. Action items identified through this process include, among others, establishing a single equity point of contact, establishing public interaction and equity policies through the ASMP to guide transportation decision-making, and establishing a public engagement and equity plan to help implement the ASMP after adoption.

Policy 2

Amplify the voices of historically underserved and underrepresented populations

Ensure that all voices are represented, especially those of historically underserved and underrepresented communities, throughout the planning, development, provision, and operation of the transportation network

In an effort to include all voices that will be affected by the outcome of a transportation decision, we need to speak with many different community members who have varying opinions, beliefs, and needs. We will take meaningful steps to hear from and listen to all members of our community, but especially those that have been marginalized or shut out from past decision-making processes. Because of the history of inequity in Austin and the many barriers to institutional power that have impacted historically underserved and underrepresented communities, we must go beyond simply hearing these needs. We will amplify the voices of those who have previously been silenced and those who we are not meeting the basic needs of today. This must be done inclusively, which means bringing traditionally excluded individuals or groups into transportation processes and sharing power authentically with them.

Many community members may have lost trust in the City or other public agencies after repeatedly feeling that they were not being listened to or supported and may have stopped voicing their concerns or input. Other community members may not interact at all with the public sector because their status is undocumented or they have had negative experiences with people acting in an official capacity. It is necessary to reach out to amplify these voices that are especially underrepresented in traditional transportation decision-making, and unconventional strategies may be the best way to connect with these Austinites. Focused efforts and long-term relationship building will be needed to repair and foster trust with community members who have lost that trust over long periods of time. Actions speak loudly, so incorporating input and implementing solutions must be done in a timely manner.

To better understand where we are and to continue to improve toward a more socially equitable Austin, we must work to know who we are and are not hearing from. This means looking at public feedback data not only to learn what Austin overall needs and wants, but digging further to see what different groups that have been marginalized in the past need and want. One strategy to better amplify these community members' voices could be analyzing feedback in a way that normalizes, or gives different weights, to feedback according to whether a group is over or underrepresented in a particular data sample. Another equally important strategy is to focus public engagement attention and resources on developing and maintaining relationships with individuals and leaders of communities that have been underrepresented and underserved. Tailoring our process to integrate and amplify the experiences and needs of marginalized voices should include holding in-depth focus groups that provide rich qualitative data on people's lived experiences to directly inform transportation decision-making. New models and processes may be needed to help bridge between the City and community members. Strategies that amplify and incorporate the voices of historically silenced Austinites can help to address previously harmful decisions and ensure we are advancing mobility equitably for everyone in our community.

Policy 3

Partner with the public and private sectors to expand and improve mobility solutions for historically underserved communities

Support the creation and integration of mobility solutions that address equity and access to opportunity and that maximize user choice and freedom of movement

Accessibility to and equity of multimodal transportation choices is one of Austin's City Council's top ten indicators for significant improvement in the near term. Increasing the accessibility of transportation choices for more people will be fundamental to addressing the historical inequities caused by or perpetuated in our transportation network. The fewer transportation choices and financial resources a family or neighborhood has, the greater their difficulty in accessing opportunities and services is. Limited transportation options can also lead to more constrained employment, educational, healthcare, and recreational opportunities.

The traditional transportation model to provide access to everyone involves providing partially or fully subsidized public transportation services. While expanding public transportation is one key strategy to increase access and equity, many areas of Austin do not fit the traditional public transportation service model. This can be due, for example, to development patterns and road networks that make it very difficult to provide cost-effective bus service. Service changes can create issues for people that rely on particular routes to access jobs, schools, and other opportunities.

Because one service type will not work for every person or place in Austin, we will need to partner with other service providers for more and varied solutions in addition to a high-quality public transportation system. Communities themselves should participate in planning which emerging mobility solutions do and do not work for them. We will support improvements and expansions to mobility services that prioritize social equity in an effort to better serve all of our communities, especially those who have been historically underserved.

People without cars, senior adults, and people with mobility impairments would all benefit from having more ways to get where they need to go. Communities of color, low-income communities, and people with disabilities that have been historically underserved by the City can be better served by new, innovative solutions to mobility concerns. New and emerging mobility solutions, like on-demand ride-share services, neighborhood circulators, and shared dockless mobility devices, can open up new options for many people throughout Austin currently underserved by our transportation network. We must prioritize where emerging mobility solutions are deployed to improve outcomes for historically underserved communities, and we should not limit ourselves to any one mode or service model as different communities will require different combinations of solutions. We must harness mobility technologies and partnerships with the private sector that help us address inequities of the past and expand access to opportunity in the future. By increasing our transportation choices, especially for those who need it most, we can connect people to all the opportunities and amenities Austin has to offer.

“We need more options that provide fast reliable transportation and connects all parts of the City, particularly working class neighborhoods and areas outside of Austin.”

—Community Member

Policy 4

Take steps to mitigate unintended consequences when they occur

Attempt to anticipate unintended consequences that may disproportionately affect historically underserved and underrepresented populations and proactively mitigate these effects

Well-intentioned policies and actions may still disproportionately benefit white, affluent groups, inadvertently harm marginalized groups, or—in some cases—do both. If a well-intentioned action has a positive overall outcome for our community but also has potential unintended consequences to equity, should we shy away from doing anything, leaving everything as it is in its current inequitable condition? We believe that the answer is no. We should take action and work to mitigate unintended consequences rather than simply doing nothing at all.

Take, for example, the question of safety and enforcement. We know that some groups in Austin are disproportionately affected by pedestrian crashes. Communities of color, lower-income communities, and communities with limited English proficiency have higher rates of serious pedestrian crashes than other groups. Factors in crash rates include mode of travel, transit ridership, and car-ownership, and various demographic factors like age can result in more serious injuries for some groups of people compared to others.

One strategy to mitigate safety-related consequences could be to increase and focus enforcement efforts in high-crash areas of Austin. This would potentially reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries overall and therefore for historically underserved and underrepresented groups. However, transportation enforcement practices have been shown to have a history of racial profiling and targeting, which has resulted in a disproportionate number of stops and arrests for people of color and has eroded community trust in police relationships.

Rather than completely ignoring the potential negative effects of increased enforcement, or declining to increase enforcement activities due to potential equity impacts, we choose a third option. We will work with communities to acknowledge and understand the unintended consequences of well-intentioned actions, and work with them to mitigate these consequences. Community input and preferences will have to guide the strategies that we use to mitigate unintended consequences. There is rarely a single easy fix for complex issues like addressing street safety, and this means that we must co-create solutions alongside those most affected by an issue.

One part of a solution could be to pair any increased enforcement with racial bias training for police officers, but this alone is no guarantee of a better outcome. Other solutions that are infrastructure-based, like installing pedestrian refuge islands, can make it easier to cross the street and help to increase safety. Connecting both of these with related efforts to develop restorative justice programs and to address other root causes of traffic fatalities will be necessary to proactively, sensitively, and thoughtfully take steps to mitigate unintended consequences. We must explicitly plan to incorporate equity into all transportation decision-making through community input from the earliest stages, including decisions about increases in traffic safety enforcement, to better address the needs of those disproportionately affected by traffic injuries and fatalities.

“Safety is a big issue for me. I see distracted driving all the time, and lots of unsafe driving (running lights, aggressive driving, speeding). Enforcement could be improved.”

—Community Member

Policy 5

Prioritize serving the most vulnerable populations in Austin by supporting broader efforts to provide social services

Acknowledge transportation's role in being part of the solution to addressing root causes of homelessness and poverty by increasing access to community support services

Transportation choice and freedom of movement can be powerfully beneficial or powerfully obstructive forces in access to basic services and support. There are many ways that transportation can negatively impact people's everyday lives. Unreliable or infrequent transportation access could affect a person's job performance or access to healthcare needs, like doctor's appointments. Many community members cannot enroll in or complete programs that provide assistance for things like job placement, education, healthcare, childcare, food assistance, and many other things because they lack the ability to get to where they need to go.

While we can work towards fixing existing transportation barriers like these, we can also do more, especially for people who need it most. Transportation planning and implementation cannot ignore the complex issues it affects and is affected by, such as lack of available and affordable housing and healthcare. We will participate in broader efforts across the community to address the underlying causes of homelessness and poverty. Affordable and reliable mobility solutions that help people access the services they need are the first step for many on a much longer journey toward financial security and stable housing. Transportation can help people access opportunities across town or in their own neighborhood. By thinking of transportation as one among many community support services, we can more holistically take up the complex and interrelated root issues of chronic homelessness and poverty.







Affordability

Transportation affordability is more than just the price of gas, hailing a ride, or a bike-share membership. Transportation affordability also includes the costs of being able to live in certain neighborhoods and locations that have access to high-quality schools, businesses, shops and medical services connected by safe, effective and well-maintained transportation infrastructure. Whether it is for renters or owners, people in single-family or multi-family buildings, or commercial or residential uses, our transportation network should support affordable communities.

Transportation costs are often a household's second highest expense after housing. The cost of owning a car is high, but the cost of living in a neighborhood that offers multiple transportation options and travel choices can be just as high or higher. Often, when we expand our transportation network with enhancements such as new roads, new public transportation service, or new sidewalks, the cost to rent or own a home in those neighborhoods goes up. This can lead to residential and commercial displacement as long-term communities are no longer able to afford housing, and they are forced to move further from the businesses and services they use. This leads to increased transportation costs for them as they pay more in gas and wear on their car, or they have to rely on unfamiliar or fewer transportation options in their new neighborhoods.

It is not just local community members who are vulnerable to this turn of events. Businesses also grapple with the impacts of rapidly-rising rents. If the customers these businesses have historically served no longer live in that neighborhood, these establishments must face the possibility of losing much of their business. If new residents do not patronize these establishments, these businesses may not be able to sustain themselves and could be forced to close or move.

Diminishing numbers of long-term community members and businesses unwind the fabric of many established communities. Affordable communities are important, and there is a close connection between transportation, affordability, and a high quality of life. It is critical that our transportation network supports our communities in a way that allows for sustainable neighborhood growth without necessitating the displacement of our long-term, established communities.

"We need more affordable housing, public transportation, safe bike lanes and infill to create a viable city center."

—Community Member

Indicators and Targets



Increase the percentage of affordable housing available at 60% MFI within 1/2 mile of transit and bicycle priority networks



Increase the percentage of affordable housing available at 80% MFI within 1/2 mile of transit and bicycle priority networks



Increase the number of 2 car households transitioning to 1 car households



Decrease the cost of transportation as a percentage of household budget

Policy 1

Proactively assess displacement impacts of transportation projects


Assess and consider impacts to housing and commercial affordability when planning and designing transportation infrastructure projects

We know that transportation improvements, while needed for our community, can lead to higher property values and rents. These results can eventually lead to displacement, disproportionately affecting lower income residents. It is important that we recognize this fact during the planning phase of all transportation infrastructure projects and that, before we begin the implementation of these projects, we work with our partners, develop strategies, and utilize tools to support current neighborhood residents and businesses, stopping or limiting their displacement.

There are several different ways that we can be proactive when planning and improving transportation infrastructure across Austin as outlined in the Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint (ASHB), Anti-Displacement Task Force recommendations, and other reports. Increased collaboration among City departments and partners is an important first step. Austin Transportation should work with other departments and agencies, such as City departments working on housing and real estate, and the local housing authorities, at the very beginning of planned transportation infrastructure improvements. This allows the City or private organizations the opportunity to purchase land, retain affordable housing, and implement programs to support the community before new development occurs. Even small-scale transportation improvements should be shared and integrated into plans for our partners so affordable housing can exist side-by-side with robust mobility options.

Other tools that could help local communities mitigate rising housing costs that may stem from transportation infrastructure projects include: using strategic land banking in underdeveloped areas; developing infrastructure in targeted areas to support Imagine Austin and ASHB affordable housing goals; leveraging value-capture programs such as tax increment financing or the transfer of development rights; and working with local homeowners and other City departments to take advantage of assistance programs, such as weatherization and home repair subsidies.

Assessing how transportation infrastructure projects may affect local residents will allow the City and other organizations to organize the best and most appropriate programs and services to support the current residents in the face of new costs that may accompany the new transportation infrastructure.



“I would also like the city to be mindful that artists, and people on low or fixed incomes commute into town to work because they have been priced out of housing.”

—Community Member

Strategies for Affordable Housing

Constructing and maintaining affordable housing requires the use of context-sensitive strategies, including a range of housing types, and displacement mitigation options that might be more or less feasible or effective in different parts of Austin. These strategies may differ based on whether they are targeted at renters or homeowners, seniors or families, in the urban core or on Austin's periphery, among other things.

Strategic Land Banking

A land bank is not a financial institute, but a public- or community-owned organization that acquires, maintains, and disburses property to support community-based interests, such as providing affordable housing. The City of Austin should strategically acquire and hold land in underdeveloped Imagine Austin activity centers and corridors, making it available to private or non-profit developers, or public-led development for the construction of income-restricted affordable housing as these areas develop. Land banking may also provide affordable space for important community-oriented uses such as creative venues and workshops, nonprofit offices, music venues, and small, local businesses integrated into mixed-use projects. Of the \$250 million approved by voters in the 2018 Affordable Housing Bond, \$100 million is allocated to strategic land banking.

Value Capture Programs

Value capture programs are strategies used to realize the increased value that often accompanies properties when infrastructure or other improvements are implemented. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is the most widely used of these programs to pay for affordable housing. TIF redirects some of the tax from the properties in a geographic area, designated as a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, to pay for improvements in the area. Other value capture programs include transfer of development rights, land value taxes, and improvement districts. Some value capture programs, such as linkage fees, which dedicate fees from market rate housing to affordable housing, are illegal in Texas.

Homeowner Assistance Programs

The City of Austin offers several homeowner assistance programs that support low- and moderate-income homeowners. These include down payment assistance for first-time buyers, weatherization assistance, and loans for home repair and accessibility modifications. These modifications could include upgrading homes to accommodate accessibility issues by installing wheelchair ramps or handrails, or other repairs that fix substandard housing conditions that range from siding to plumbing to roof repairs.

Policy 2

Work with communities to mitigate displacement impacts of transportation projects

Work collaboratively with communities to mitigate adverse impacts to housing and commercial affordability triggered by transportation projects

When transportation projects lead to displacement, the City must ensure that we are responding to the problem collaboratively, with a community-based approach. The City, or any individual department, should not make unilateral decisions on how best to handle or mitigate the situation. We must work together, led by the affected communities, to try to offset residential and commercial impacts that may occur resulting from transportation improvements. These coalitions must be diverse and representative of these communities. Different participants will bring different issues to light and different skills to the table. Educational, social, and cultural community leaders are a few examples of the different types of people that we must work with to lessen and remedy displacement that may occur as a result of transportation and land use decisions.

National Example: Twin Cities Central Corridor

Minneapolis-St. Paul's Central Corridor Light Rail (Green Line) was a \$1 billion project connecting the two cities' downtowns and running through several different neighborhoods. In anticipation of this project, regional and local governments, business associations, and community groups created a railway mitigation strategy to support businesses along the rail line that would be affected by construction and potential neighborhood changes. Forgivable loans, tax help, and marketing support were just a few services offered to business owners to help them continue their operations during construction and strengthen their businesses in the long term. This collaboration began several years before construction started on the rail line, and those leading it offered services in multiple languages and met with businesses in one-to-one meetings to help them identify, create, and conduct the specific work necessary to help each business.

Policy 3

Reduce transportation costs as a component of household affordability

Reduce personal costs associated with car ownership by offering more choices in how we travel

Transportation costs are high. Unfortunately, the high costs of owning and maintaining a car are often necessary due to limited transportation options and the large distances between where people live and work. More affordable transportation options, such as public transportation, walking, or carpooling, are sometimes available, but not at all times or throughout Austin. For locations where alternative transportation options are not widely available, we must seek to improve transportation choices. For locations where these transportation choices do exist, we must make it easier, safer, and more convenient for people to utilize these options.

Creating and improving transportation options and travel choices can happen through a wide array of programs and initiatives. Transportation demand management (TDM) programs often facilitate the use of cheaper transportation modes. For example, TDM programs that make it easier to carpool and can significantly reduce the amount of money households have to spend on maintenance and gas for their cars.

Our land development code should also utilize density bonus programs that help create and maintain affordable housing along the Transit Priority Network. Revising the sidewalk prioritization matrix to emphasize filling in sidewalk gaps near affordable housing, reassessing parking requirements for development, and prioritizing denser, affordable development in transit-rich areas are additional strategies that could reduce reliance on private vehicles and reduce the amount of money households spend on owning and operating a private vehicle.

Affordable Parking Program

The Affordable Parking Program is a collaborative public-private partnership between Austin Transportation, Downtown Austin Alliance, and commercial and government parking garages in downtown. The program was designed to serve hotel and service industry workers by providing cheap evening and overnight parking in existing downtown garages that typically empty out in the afternoon. Workers purchase monthly passes that typically cost \$40 or less for access to a specific participating garage every day. The Affordable Parking Program has been so popular that it took less than two years for the program to expand from 200 to 2,000 parking spaces.



Photo credit: Capital Metro

Accessibility

Austin's diverse community requires an equitable transportation network that supports the safe, comfortable, and efficient movement of many different people. An equitable transportation network recognizes that people have different functional abilities and move in very different ways. People with mobility impairments, seniors, and parents with strollers are some groups among many with different functional abilities that our transportation systems must accommodate and support.

It is especially important that our transportation network supports our community members most impacted by mobility barriers as they move throughout and across our network using different types of transportation. Our community's creativity, innovation, and determination are integral to creating the most accessible transportation network. This process requires creating infrastructure that is usable for all, providing services that go beyond minimum standards, and establishing transportation programs that are available to everyone. A transportation network that is safe, reliable, and efficient for people of different functional abilities is a transportation network that is safe, reliable, and efficient for our entire community.

"Accessibility for people with mobility impairments must be taken into consideration."

—Community Member

Indicators and Targets



Increase the percentage of accessible intersections and crossings

Install or upgrade curb ramps at 100% of all intersections and crossings to meet current standards



Decrease the percentage of the sidewalk system obstructed by vegetation or other barriers



Increase the number of accessible vehicles operated by shared mobility services and providers within the Austin area



Increase the number of accessible pedestrian signals

Policy 1

Ensure that people of all functional abilities have equitable access to the transportation network and mobility services

Provide a transportation network and travel options that allows everyone to move safely and easily across the city

Our transportation network exists to allow all users to move from one place to another safely and efficiently, and it must work for everyone regardless of functional ability. Everyone should be able to use our transportation network safely and comfortably, including people who use wheelchairs, walkers, mobility canes for the blind or low vision, supplemental oxygen, people who push strollers, older adults and children.

A transportation network that is built and oriented for people of all functional abilities must address infrastructural and service challenges to better serve our community. Infrastructural challenges include utility poles in the middle of the sidewalks, poorly maintained sidewalks or missing sidewalks and curb ramps, and overgrown vegetation. While some people may be able to navigate obstructions in their paths, such as large cracks, curbs, or rough terrain, many others may be unable to.

There are also limited accessible public transportation options available. Limited accessible services, finite spaces for wheelchairs on public transportation, and rideshare services that do not accommodate wheelchairs reduce the transportation options available.



Photo credit: Capital Metro

Policy 2

Advance public transportation and other mobility services for people with mobility impairments

Encourage travel options that allow people with mobility impairments to make mobility choices based on personal needs and preferences

Public transportation and other mobility services are continually working to create and improve travel options. However, it is important that these services are available to everyone. Our public transportation system must make it simple and easy for people with mobility impairments to use their programs. Wide pick-up and drop-off windows, limited service areas, and narrow qualifying criteria for riders can make it difficult for people to use these accessible services to get to their jobs, the grocery store, or visit their doctor.

New and emerging mobility services must also support people with mobility impairments. Vans and cars that are equipped to carry wheelchairs, as well as a variety of ride-hailing options, should be made available so that all people across our community have access to these important and innovative services.

Partners across regions and sectors are another important part of improving the accessibility of public transportation and emerging mobility services. Austin is a regional hub for medical services and other resources, so public transportation and emerging mobility services must also expand their reach to include regional users and providers. Partnerships with public and private transportation providers are also necessary to help people access and use the services our community offers. Regardless of jurisdictional boundaries, partnerships can establish essential connections that help overcome gaps in the accessibility of our transportation network.

Visually Accessible Transit Wayfinding

In 2018, the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro) partnered with a private company specializing in beacon technology to pilot a system for accessible wayfinding around 15 bus stops on 2nd Street in downtown Austin. Small, internet-connected devices were attached to bus stops that transmit information to blind and low vision users via a smartphone application. The devices increase GPS location accuracy for the bus stop signs. Audible directions are provided to users by the app to guide them closer to the bus stop, which can help a person better locate where to wait for a bus. This also helps ensure a bus driver doesn't bypass the stop. The beacons can also transmit information about stop closures and detours to users, which is traditionally only provided as a posted sign that does not properly alert visually impaired people to changes in transit routes or schedules.

Policy 3

Ensure sidewalks are safe and accessible for people with mobility impairments

Recognize that children, seniors, and people with mobility impairments face disproportional difficulties when sidewalk infrastructure is not properly provided, operated, and maintained

Sidewalks are a critical system within our transportation network. Almost all trips begin and end with the use of the sidewalk system. Currently, however, about 20% of Austin's sidewalks are functionally acceptable. While people may be able to step around an overgrown bush or step over a curb without a ramp, these obstacles are much greater for seniors, children, and people with mobility impairments.

In accordance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the City of Austin has adopted an ADA Transition Plan. This plan outlines the ways that our community will ensure compliance with the federal mandate that all facilities in the public right of way will be accessible to all. It was released in 2016 along with the Sidewalk Plan and included an inventory of the physical barriers to sidewalk accessibility and a schedule and methods for the removal of these barriers. The plan identified possible funding sources to assist in creating a fully accessible system, and also identified who is responsible for the implementation of the plan.

The ADA Transition Plan notes a variety of steps that needed and must continue to be, taken to ensure an accessible sidewalk system. For example, implementing a proactive vegetative-obstruction reduction system could effectively double the amount of accessible sidewalks in Austin based on 2016 numbers. Working with homeowners and businesses to educate and inform the public about who has responsibility for keeping a sidewalk functional and accessible, as well as clarifying city code about who is responsible for driveway approaches is another tool. Development-focused steps can ensure that new projects for capital improvement, private development or redevelopment, or major utilities, adhere to the Complete Streets Policy to repair and rehabilitate existing sidewalks to ADA standards.



Policy 4

Make all detours safe, accessible, and known to people of all functional abilities

Ensure that all detours are safe and convenient for people with mobility impairments and that changes to the transportation network are communicated in advance

Closures and detours on the transportation network can be a hassle for everyone, but they are necessary. However, unexpected changes to the transportation network may have serious consequences if they are not well-planned or communicated, particularly for people with mobility impairments.

Unexpected transportation network closures, poor communication of route changes, or detours that end at an inaccessible location can put people with mobility needs at risk if they are unable to safely travel where they need to go. When the City of Austin plans to temporarily close a street, for any reason, we must make sure that the closure is adequately planned and communicated for all. These communications may include using tactile, digital, or mobile methods.

Our right of way Mobility Guidelines are rules and regulations that people and companies must follow when implementing closures and detours, in order to make sure that public pathways are still accessible. Enforcing these guidelines in regards to the distance of detours, and clarifying and expanding the distance and methods to advertise the detour, will help create routes that are efficient and safe for people of all functional abilities.



Policy 5

Enforce accessible parking regulations

Enforce violations of rules and regulations for vehicles illegally parked in or occupying accessible parking spaces

Accessible parking is necessary to facilitate the movement and safety of people with mobility impairments. However, it is possible for people to take advantage of and misuse accessible parking spaces, which can force people with mobility impairments to face barriers reaching their destinations. When people illegally take up accessible parking spaces without a parking placard, they take away an essential mobility asset for those who need it most.

City codes and regulations, such as our land development code and the Transportation Criteria Manual, determine our accessible parking requirements. They specify important requirements, such as where accessible parking spaces are required, how many accompany development, and the size of the spaces. Properly developing and adhering to these requirements will help ensure accessible parking spaces are developed for those who need them.

We must be stringent in our enforcement of accessible parking regulations. In addition to traditional enforcement, community enforcement is another strategy to help ensure that our accessible parking spaces are being used properly. This would involve training community members to help maintain accessibility in their neighborhoods by issuing citations for illegal parking in an accessible space. This would also ease the demand on the City of Austin's resources.

National Example: Accessible Parking Enforcement in Houston

The City of Houston's Volunteer Parking Enforcement Program is a mayoral initiative aimed to curb the misuse and abuse of accessible parking violations. It is designed to ensure that accessible spaces are used only by people who need these spaces. Community members who are interested in preserving these spots for their proper use attend a four-hour training. Afterward, these volunteers can write citations for someone parking illegally in accessible spaces anywhere within the city's limits.





Public Interaction

Meaningful and informative interactions with the people and communities of Austin are integral to successfully addressing our mobility needs. Some ways people interact with the City of Austin include submitting service requests for us to supply and manage mobility services, asking for information on how our transportation networks work, and requesting permits to use the transportation right of way. For more direct feedback on transportation network operations, people communicate with the City of Austin through Austin 3-1-1 or input processes on mobility plans and projects.

Achieving our mobility goals requires numerous and ongoing public engagement efforts to best understand and communicate with our community. We must engage the community respectfully, thoughtfully, and consistently if we expect them to attend our meetings, participate in public processes, or consider different transportation options.

Major transportation construction projects, like the 2016 Mobility Bond, have demonstrated that ongoing public engagement is necessary to create transformative change that meets our community's needs. As we move forward, we must listen to and work with the entire Austin community to facilitate this change.

We must ensure that we are hearing from a variety of Austin neighborhoods and communities, especially communities that have historically been underserved. To ensure an inclusive public engagement process, we must use whatever tools we can to hear from a variety of people that is diverse and representative of Austin.

"I really appreciate your involvement in our neighborhood and your help in the meetings we are having."

—Community Member

Indicators and Targets



Increase the amount of mobility project materials and other City transportation information available in the City's target languages



Increase the amount and diversity (digital, analog, and in-person) of mobility-related public engagement activities



Increase the demographic and geographic representativeness of mobility public engagement processes



Increase the satisfaction of participants with the outcomes of mobility engagement



Increase the number and percentage of people reached through mobility education campaigns



Improve the response time for mobility-related customer service requests



Increase the amount of mobility project materials and other City transportation information available at or below an 8th-grade reading level

Policy 1

Provide high-quality customer service, responsiveness, and transparency

Reduce response time in investigating and addressing citizen requests, and make customer service information readily available, accessible, reliable, and usable

In many ways the City of Austin is a customer service organization. All mobility departments' services affect the community in direct and indirect ways, such as engineering studies, traffic signal management, and road closure permits. Public processes are necessary for us to learn about and shape transportation and mobility goals within Austin. To best serve our community, our work must demonstrate respect, responsiveness, and transparency. To ensure quality service to the public, we must answer requests for permits or maintenance in a timely manner and provide clear communications on our work.

All public communications must be comprehensive, thorough and prompt. We must actively listen to, address and document questions and feedback from the community. We must respond to permit submissions and requests for information quickly. Conversations, whether on the phone, electronically, or in-person, must be handled professionally. Notes, presentations, and rosters from meetings should be uploaded and available online soon after the meeting, in a format that is accessible for all. Our webpage should be easy to navigate across different platforms and we should use language that is easily understood. We must also be able to provide paper copies of information when needed or requested, knowing that not everyone uses or has access to a computer. All of these strategies can help improve the quality of our customer service.

Finally, all our actions should be guided by ethics and public trust. We must be forthright with the community in discussing decisions and changes. Transparency helps to keep our community informed and included, which builds trust in our processes, decisions, and actions.

Austin 3-1-1 and Service Requests

Austin 3-1-1 is the primary point of contact between the community and the City of Austin. It began in 2001 for police non-emergency calls to reduce the number of calls to 9-1-1 and has since expanded to include additional City services. Austin 3-1-1 now receives over 1 million calls per year that result in more than 200,000 service requests across City departments. We field many transportation questions and service requests from community members through 3-1-1. It is the best way to alert the City to mobility issues, whether it is a pothole that needs to be filled or a stop sign that needs replacement.

These requests help direct us to problems on the transportation network, but they do not direct prioritization of projects or decide what programs or infrastructure are designed or constructed. Transportation staff address repairs and maintenance issues as quickly as possible, and critical safety and emergency issues are addressed even on nights and weekends. However, requests for new infrastructure often need to meet certain criteria to be evaluated fully for implementation. Many pieces of infrastructure in the City, such as sidewalks and urban trails, are prioritized through criteria to ensure that this infrastructure is built where it is needed most for the transportation network, not simply in the location that receives the most 3-1-1 requests.

Policy 2

Engage community members in transportation decisions

Include interested and affected community members when making decisions in the planning, design, construction, and operation of transportation projects and programs

Planning decisions must be inclusive and public, because they affect how people get around in their daily lives. In many cases our decisions can have an impact on people's safety, financial health, or economic prosperity. Because of this, engaging people in mobility decisions is incredibly important.

Because our planning is community-based, we must engage the many different communities of Austin in our process. We must ask them what issues they face, how they would like their transportation network to operate, and what it should look like. Our knowledge and expertise should be used to guide community decisions throughout these processes, not to make decisions for them.

In particular, we must engage people from communities that have been historically underserved and underrepresented. Public participation in the past has often been limited to people from certain places or people of certain demographic characteristics. This has resulted in transportation policies, programs, and infrastructure that have historically been and continue to be inequitable in access, connectivity, health, and wealth. Our public engagement should strive to engage with people we have not historically spoken with to ensure these community members have the opportunity to make decisions and give input on transportation decisions.

A successful community engagement process includes open lines of communication with people so we can share information on new projects or programs, ask for community feedback, and receive requests and questions from the community in turn. When projects in certain areas are being considered or planned, we must work even harder to ensure that the people most affected by the project have the opportunity to engage with us. Strategies that can help us reach out to people include mailing notices to nearby homes and businesses, knocking on doors to alert people to upcoming meetings, and posting signs around the project area. This outreach process must continue from planning through to construction, and we must be sure to communicate with our community on when a project is completed, to demonstrate how their time and input has brought mobility improvements to their neighborhood.



Policy 3

Make public engagement convenient, accessible, and meaningful

Consider the many different ways, methods, and places to interact with the community, and work to make all community engagement simple, easy, and comprehensible to the community

To successfully and meaningfully engage the Austin community, we must challenge these norms and make community-based, thoughtful decisions about how to engage people. This cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach; we know there is a great diversity of people and thought, even within a single neighborhood. The activities that attract people, how people hear about our events or surveys (through friends, social media, email, their local library), and how they absorb our information (by sight, through discussion, reading a pamphlet) all differ based on personal preferences, culture, language, age, and other unique attributes. These differences require that we work extra hard to engage everyone.

There are many important ways we can improve our engagement and make it as inclusive as possible. To eliminate language barriers, we must translate materials into multiple languages, and provide as many speakers of different languages at meetings as possible, especially in areas where we know certain languages are widely spoken. We must also work to make material accessible to people who are blind or have visual impairments through the use of accessible technology and formats. This includes using colors on maps or in presentations that do not pose difficulties for people who are colorblind, ensuring digital materials are compatible with screen-reading technology, and having print materials available in Braille, for instance.

In all our communications, we need to use words and phrases that are easily understood. We must eliminate or limit jargon and write to a reading level that most people can follow without feeling intimidated or excluded. We must be mindful of the words and phrases we use, and we must take the time to make sure people understand what we are saying. We must co-create and test out our methods and materials ahead of time with various community members to help us determine changes we need to make.

Our events should be held at times and in locations that are convenient for a diverse community of people. Our staff should travel to people whenever possible, rather than have people travel to us. Meetings should be located in areas accessible by different modes of transportation, with accommodations such as accessible sidewalks, nearby bus stops, and bicycle facilities.

Perhaps most importantly, our engagement must be thoughtful and concise to be respectful of people's time. We must take the time to ask the right questions and be mindful that people have many priorities to manage in their lives.

Policy 4

Evaluate interactions with the community

Review and examine public-facing activities to make sure objectives are achieved

We must track and evaluate all interactions with the community, in order to measure progress. The nature of this information is qualitative, which we can use to consider what we learned, who we heard from, and how we acquired this information. Much like measuring the number of transit riders per hour, our evaluations of community interactions provide insight on the people we are reaching, what topics matter, desired outcomes and potential actions to take in future public engagement activities.

Our evaluations of engagement activities must also involve a public process. We can provide feedback forms after an event or meeting to determine what, if anything, should be changed to improve a future event. Should an interpreter be hired for a specific language? Did people have difficulties understanding what we were asking or how we were asking questions? Are we hearing from a representative sampling of people? We must be nimble in our engagement and be able to modify our activities as we learn what does and does not work.

At the conclusion of projects or programs we must also evaluate the entirety of our engagement. What lessons can we learn from this round of community engagement? Interacting with the public and engaging with the Austin community is ongoing and continuous, and these lessons can be shared throughout the entire City of Austin government to help improve standards and practices.

Language Access Planning

It is estimated that 13% of Austin residents speak English less than “very well,” according to the 2016 American Community Survey. If they are only released in English, our official City notices and important community information is much less likely to be received or understood by people with limited English proficiency. In an effort to reach and hear from these underserved multilingual voices, we must be able to communicate in the languages our community uses. We should be able to communicate high-priority information and receive feedback in the following languages commonly spoken in Austin by those with limited English proficiency:

- Arabic
- Hindi
- Burmese
- Korean
- Chinese (traditional and simplified)
- Spanish
- Vietnamese

Achieving better language inclusion must include both the translation of written materials and official communications, and the interpretation of spoken communication in-person and over-the-phone. A Language Access Implementation Plan is currently in development for the City of Austin and will help guide public interaction expectations and strategies for reaching and serving people with limited English proficiency.

Policy 5

Proactively maintain community relationships

Recognize and guarantee that the cultivation and maintenance of community relationships is undertaken by the City of Austin

As a provider of community services and information, we must bear the responsibility to build relationships with communities. Creating successful relationships is a complex and time-consuming commitment that requires energy, dedication, and sensitivity, and many people do not know, are not comfortable with, or do not have the ability to create a relationship with a large institution like the City of Austin. Maintaining community relationships will benefit us and the community as a whole. A close relationship with a community helps to open a dialogue where people can share their opinions, concerns, and desires regarding transportation needs.

We must use all the avenues we have available to identify community leaders and groups, underserved and underrepresented people, small business associations, and all other Austin community members to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in our transportation planning processes. When we approach a community to ask for opinions on a street redesign or ask them what they want to see in their neighborhood, it is often difficult to get many or varied voices. A strong relationship with local, cultural, and social groups, institutions, and businesses will help us spread the word about our work and facilitate the community input we need.

We also must consider the amount of work that goes into the creation and maintenance of these relationships. People provide their time, effort, thoughts, and opinions without compensation in order to make transportation better in Austin. The burdens of time and energy required to start and maintain relationships must be on our shoulders. We should clearly define our relationships with community members and community-based organizations so that they are mutually beneficial and not one-sided.

Once our community relationships are established, a strong and successful relationship requires us to continue putting in the time and energy to maintain that relationship. Attending meetings and events, sending out information in newsletters, and maintaining different methods of communication are just a few elements that help maintain a relationship with the community.



Policy 6

Create shared experiences for the public to engage with mobility options

Employ nontraditional public engagement techniques that emphasize hands-on interactions and personal experience to educate community members and facilitate adoption of travel options

We must go beyond traditional public engagement tools by devising and implementing new ideas, activities, and ways to interact with the public and derive meaningful community feedback. In traditional surveys, we ask our community to commit their free time to answer questions about their opinions, concerns, and desires for their city. Public meetings and surveys can, however, become monotonous, overused tools lacking attractive, hands-on activities. If we depend too much on the same tools, we risk not attracting a broad enough audience to engage with us.

To effectively engage our community or deliver information, we must consider new methods beyond traditional surveys or public meetings. We should attend community events that attract the general public, and not limit ourselves to activities that attract only the most passionate transportation advocates. We should be advertising opportunities for input on social media, in newspapers, on buses, and in other places that people will see or hear about them.

When new mobility options emerge we should give people the opportunity to test out these alternatives to understand how they could be integrated into their daily lives. By providing hands-on opportunities for the public to engage personally with emerging mobility solutions, it encourages future use of these options and gives us more feedback for future improvements. Our engagement activities should be as creative and innovative as our street and neighborhood design.

Transit Adventures with Capital Metro

Capital Metro's Transit Adventure is an innovative and free program that identifies activities around Austin and offers people public transportation directions and free Capital Metro passes to take transit to the event. The program also covers admission to the event. The goal is to increase people's comfort with public transportation and teach people travel skills, such as how to read a public transportation map or load a bicycle onto a bus.

Adventures are comprehensively planned and led by a Capital Metro employee. In addition to providing free transit passes and covering event admission, Capital Metro plans the full travel schedule, and is there with participants before transit arrives, while they are traveling, and when they are returning after the event ends. They help answer any questions that arise and try to make people comfortable using public transportation. In addition to planning Transit Adventures that are open to the public, Capital Metro also works with organizations, offices, and neighborhood groups to plan their own Transit Adventure.