

Austin Coalition for Transit Comments on Project Connect Changes

December 2018

info@austintransit.org @austintransit

Introduction

Project Connect is a 33-month, \$3.6 million high capacity transit study by Capital Metro. It's a data-driven process conducted under federal rules that has enjoyed extensive public involvement. On February 12, 2018, Capital Metro released a preliminary Project Connect System Plan¹ with **Light Rail** scenarios on 3 primary corridors:

- **Guadalupe-North Lamar**
- **South Congress**
- **East Riverside**

This draft plan also had **Bus Rapid Transit** scenarios on 5 secondary corridors:

- **Manor/Dean Keeton** (dedicated lane)
- **7th Street/Lake Austin Blvd** (dedicated lane)
- **Highland** (dedicated lane)
- **South Lamar** (dedicated lane)
- **MLK** (rapid bus)

This release had extensive media coverage and was well received among transit advocates, by the Multimodal Community Advisory Committee (MCAC), and by the public.² On March 28, 2018, these high capacity transit corridors were ranked by importance, cost and capacity characteristics.³

On October 1st, Capital Metro CEO Randy Clarke delivered his agency's **Vision for Project Connect** at an Austin Chamber of Commerce meeting. The Vision document replaced **Light Rail** and **Bus Rapid Transit** with a new mode, **Autonomous Rapid Transit**. Despite the re-introduction of **Light Rail** and **Bus Rapid Transit** as allowable modes on October 4th, Mr. Clarke's vision still has reduced or eliminated the level of service on several secondary high capacity corridors, and has departed from the progression of earlier drafts of the Project Connect System Plan in several ways.⁴

City of Austin impacts

- The Vision removes the direct connection between the primary corridors at S. First Street and W. Riverside (Auditorium Shores). N. Lamar-Congress and E. Riverside are

¹ Project Connect Presentation, Feb. 12, 2018 2-18_Final PC_MCAC_PPT_slide33.pdf

² ["Is Austin Getting Another Shot At A Light-Rail Line?"](#) Feb. 13, 2018 Andrew Weber, KUT

³ Project Connect, Mar. 28, 2018 Long-Term_Investments_Briefing_Book_032818_page36.pdf

⁴ Project-Connect-Vision-Plan-102218.pdf

now joined by an east-west future extension on 4th Street. This will add 2-3 transfers for riders traveling between east and west Austin. This will also require 2 bridges to be built which will create a redundancy and competition between the primary corridors.

- The Vision removes the MLK Corridor from the high-capacity transit plan.
- The Vision removes the Cameron-Dessau Corridor from the high-capacity plan.
- The Vision terminates North Lamar Light Rail corridor at the North Lamar Transit Center.
- The Vision removes the Westgate-Manchaca Spur of the South Lamar Corridor from the high-capacity plan.
- The Vision removes the Domain Light Rail spur.
- The Vision segments the current 803 MetroRapid service and terminates it at The Triangle instead of continuing past Seton Medical Center and on to downtown and down South Lamar to Westgate.
- A new Airport Blvd rapid bus route connecting to the Pleasant Valley corridor to the south would terminate at Manor Rd. on the north and not connect directly to West Austin routes.
- The Vision changes the East 7th St/Lake Austin Corridor from dedicated lane bus rapid transit (BRT) to mixed-traffic bus rapid transit (BRT-Lite).
- The Vision terminates South Congress Light Rail corridor project at Stassney.
- The 801 MetroRapid service on South Congress has been terminated at Stassney and is considered a future extension (dashed line) to Southpark Meadows.

Process and mode concerns with the Project Connect Vision

- Vision removes dedicated pathway bus rapid transit (BRT) scenarios in 4 secondary corridors and replaces them with shared, mixed-traffic MetroRapid-style BRT.
- Vision fails to address operational cost-effectiveness, scalability, capacity and return on investment along Austin's most transit-dense corridors.
- Vision replaces a data-driven federal study process that had developed a strong stakeholder consensus with a process that is closed-door and non-transparent.
- Vision recommends unproven and undeveloped Autonomous Rapid Transit (ART), which as a rubber-wheeled mode lacks federal guidance and safety certifications.
- Vision ignores the benefits of a long-term planning approach with a bias toward projects that can be done fast and or that are politically expedient.
- Vision development lacks any public involvement process prior to October 3, 2018.
- Vision expresses a bias toward Autonomous Rapid Transit (ART), which may preempt a full environmental process and predetermine mode outcomes.
- Vision prioritizes the 2014 Highland-East Riverside alignment that was defeated at the polls due to its poor location. It is resurrected against the decision of Austin voters.
- Vision is inconsistent with transit corridors in City of Austin's comprehensive plan.
- Vision fails to acknowledge or implement the centers concept developed in CAPCOG's Envision Central Texas, CAMPO's 2040 Plan, and City of Austin's comprehensive plan.
- Vision introduces approximately 21 "Mobility Hubs," designations without definition or apparent connections—some seem randomly placed and away from transit corridors,
- Vision advances Green Line commuter rail, which ranked poorly in ridership and cost effectiveness in the study.
- Vision removes Downtown Circulator scenarios that were developed by the study.
- Vision removes Enhancement Project scenarios that were developed by the study.