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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Betty Baker, Chair  
Zoning and Platting Commission Members

FROM: Mark Walters, Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department  
974-7695

RE: Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan

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### **Description of Backup Information**

Attached you will find back-up information for the draft Austin Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. This information includes:

- **Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan**
- **Austin City Charter, Article X. Planning** (Describes the legal effect of the comprehensive plan and the Planning Commission's responsibilities relating to the plan.)
- **Making Austin: Public Participation in a New Comprehensive Plan** (this plan outlined the multi-faceted approach for soliciting public involvement)
- **Draft Strategic Issues Working Paper** (Synthesized public feedback as to the community's aspirations and the obstacles to be addressed)
- **Imagine Austin Plan Framework Building Blocks** (Provides the broad policy steps to address the aspirations and obstacles identified in the Draft Strategic Issues Working Paper. This document served as the basis for the Policies contained in Chapter Four of the draft plan.)

### **Planning Process**

The process to develop the Austin Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan was divided into four phases—Plan Kickoff, Vision and Plan Framework, Creating the Comprehensive Plan, and Draft Plan Review.

#### **Phase One—Plan Kickoff**

This phase of the process involved both designing and beginning the process to create the comprehensive plan. The significant elements of this phase included the consultants getting to know Austin and meeting with the community. It also included both staff and consultants reviewing existing plans and finalizing the Community Inventory (a document with different types of information and data about Austin and its extraterritorial

jurisdiction [ETJ]. See the following URL for a link to the Community Inventory: <http://www.imagineaustin.net.s134445.gridserver.com/community-inventory>).

It was during this phase that the process to create the comprehensive plan was designed. This included assigning roles and responsibilities for City of Austin staff, the consultant team, and the public. The phase culminated with Kick-Off Party held at the Austin Convention Center on October 12, 2010 which was attended by more than 230 members of the public, plus an additional 40 children from Austin recreation centers.

#### *Phase Two—Vision and Plan Framework*

This phase of the process revolved around a series of public meetings (Community Forum Series [CFS] #1, #2, and #3.) During each of these series of meetings, the public was asked to consider different aspects of Austin and its future.

During CFS #1, the community was asked what they valued most about Austin, what needs to change to make it a better place, and what type of city could it be if the issues facing the community were addressed. This input was synthesized into elements of the Vision Statement.

During CFS #2, participants were asked to comment on the elements of the Vision Statement and engaged in a chip exercise to assign future population and job growth, identified areas to be preserved from development, and indicated the types and locations of future transportation improvements. The results from this exercise were synthesized into four different future growth scenarios:

- **Scenario A**—A widely dispersed development pattern spreading future growth all over Austin and its ETJ.
- **Scenario B**—It directed growth in a crescent shape along US 183 in the north arching to the south and directed most development east of Mopac with a significant amount of development located between IH-35 and SH 130.
- **Scenario C**—A more compact growth pattern directing a significant amount of redevelopment to the central city with dense concentrations of people and jobs located in centers mostly located to the north, east, and south.
- **Scenario D**—The most compact development pattern and directed most of the jobs and people into the central city.

In addition, Comprehensive Planning staff developed a fifth scenario that reflected current development patterns and growth trends. These scenarios were analyzed using a number of sustainability indicators such as land consumed, amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted, development over the Edwards Aquifer, and the relative infrastructure costs associated with each scenario.

During CFS #3, the community was asked to indicate their preferred scenario and was provided the indicator results to assist in the task. The public's preferences resulted in a map capturing significant elements of Scenarios C and D. This Preferred Growth Scenario map later evolved in the Growth Concept Map.

The significant work products of Phase Two were the Plan Framework and Preferred Growth Scenario which served as the basis for the next phase of the process.

### *Phase Three—Creating the Comprehensive Plan*

During this phase of the process, staff reached out to people and groups with interest and expertise in the plan's elements to join topic-specific working groups. Their assignment was to create actions to implement the policy directions created in Phase Two. Over the course of 20 meetings the working groups generated and honed the actions from a beginning number of over 3,000 to a little more than 200. During this phase, with public input, the Preferred Growth Scenario evolved into the Growth Concept Map.

### *Phase Four—Draft Plan Review*

This phase began with a Plan Release Party held at the Carver Museum and Cultural Center on October 1, 2011. More than 600 people attended the event to review the draft plan, rank plan elements, eat from food trailers, and listen to live music.

This phase asked the community to read the plan and comment on what they like and what they did not. During this comment period, staff received almost 2,000 comments. Each of these were reviewed and commented upon by staff and the Council-appointed task force. Many of these comments resulted in changes to the draft plan and are reflected in the adoption draft attached to this memo.

### **Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan Summary**

As part of establishing the scope of for the contract with the lead consultant, Wallace, Roberts, and Todd (WRT), the City Council established three priorities for the plan—public engagement, sustainability, and implementation—which are central to how the plan was developed as well as its content. The comprehensive plan is organized into five chapters:

*Chapter One: The Roadmap and the Road Ahead* describes the need for a comprehensive plan providing a roadmap for Austin to navigate the challenges of the 21st century; core principles for action to achieve a sustainable future; and how we will use those principles to turn the plan into reality. It is useful for those who may not wish to read the plan “cover to cover.”


*Chapter Two: Experiencing Austin: Who Are We Today?* contains information on the current state of Austin and what it means for the city's future, such as how affordable it is to live here, how people are getting around, and how our parks and city services are performing.

*Chapter Three: Imagining Austin: Our Vision of a Complete Community* presents the Imagine Austin vision statement, developed with the input of thousands of residents. It describes the Austin we aspire to be in 2039, the two hundredth anniversary of the city's founding. Our city will be a city of complete communities that is natural and sustainable, prosperous, livable, mobile and interconnected, educated, creative, and that values and respects all Austinites. The vision statement defines the destination that the plan policies, actions, and programs are designed to reach.

*Chapter Four: Shaping Austin: Building the Complete Community* sets a two-part framework for action to realize our vision of a city of complete communities. The growth concept map shows in general terms where new development over the next 30 years

should be located. The building blocks define specific policies to guide decisions on topics ranging from land use and transportation to economy to creativity. The core concepts of Imagine Austin – complete communities and compact, connected centers – are two sides of the same coin. These policies are the foundation of the action ideas and programs contained in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Implementation and Measuring Success addresses how Imagine Austin's vision and framework will be implemented. It identifies eight priority action programs based on hundreds of ideas developed by citizen working groups, provides guidance for decision-making, and defines the ongoing process that will be used to monitor implementation progress.

A photograph of the Austin skyline, featuring several prominent skyscrapers, reflected in the calm waters of a lake. The scene is framed by tree branches in the foreground, and the sky is a clear, bright blue.

# IMAGINE AUSTIN

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Vibrant. Livable. Connected.

Task Force Recommended  
DRAFT February 2012



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# IMAGINE AU

## Chapter One

### The Roadmap and The Road Ahead

describes the need for a comprehensive plan providing a roadmap for Austin to navigate the challenges of the 21st century; core principles for action to achieve a sustainable future; and how we will use those principles to turn the plan into reality. It is useful for those who may not wish to read the plan “cover to cover” resources.

## Chapter Two

### Experiencing Austin: Who Are We Today?

contains information on the current state of Austin and what it means for the city's future, such as how affordable it is to live here, how people are getting around, and how our parks and city services are performing.

## Growth Concept Map

Created through a public scenario-building process, the Growth Concept Map applies the vision to the city's physical development pattern. Chapter 4's Building Blocks set the policies to implement Imagine Austin and are linked back to the vision.

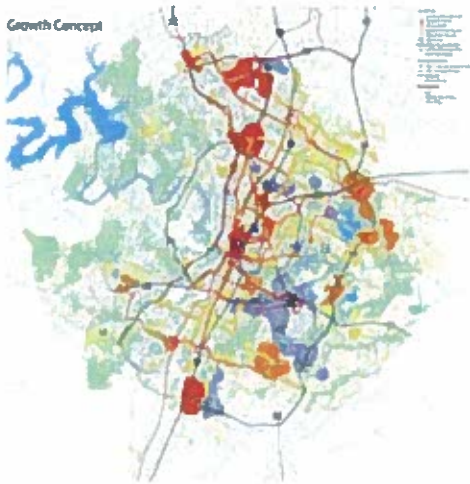
# AUSTIN AT A GLANCE

## Chapter Three

### Imagining Austin: Our Vision Of a Complete Community

presents the Imagine Austin vision statement, developed with the input of thousands of residents. It describes the Austin we aspire to be in 2039, the two hundredth anniversary of the city's founding. Our city will be a "Complete Community" that is natural and sustainable, prosperous, livable, mobile and interconnected, educated, creative, and which values and respects all Austinites. The vision statement defines the destination that the plan policies, actions, and programs are designed to reach.

MOBILE AND INTERCONNECTED  
VALUES AND RESPECTS PEOPLE  
NATURAL AND SUSTAINABLE  
PROSPEROUS  
EDUCATED  
CREATIVE  
LIVABLE



## Chapter Four

### Shaping Austin: Building The Complete Community

The plan's policies organized by building block (e.g., Land Use and Transportation, Economy). This chapter includes key issues, challenges, and best practice ideas from other communities facing similar challenges.

## Chapter Five

### Implementation And Measuring Success

addresses how Imagine Austin's vision and framework will be implemented. It identifies eight priority programs based on hundreds of ideas developed by citizen working groups, provides guidance for decision-making, and defines the ongoing process that will be used to monitor implementation progress.



AUSTIN  
WISHES YOU  
SAFE JOURNEY



## WHAT'S IN THE PLAN: IMAGINE AUSTIN AT A GLANCE

The comprehensive plan is organized into five chapters:

**Chapter One: The Roadmap and the Road Ahead** describes the need for a comprehensive plan providing a roadmap for Austin to navigate the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; core principles for action to achieve a sustainable future; and how we will use those principles to turn the plan into reality. It is useful for those who may not wish to read the plan "cover to cover."

**Chapter Two: Experiencing Austin: Who Are We Today?** contains information on the current state of Austin and what it means for the city's future, such as how affordable it is to live here, how people are getting around, and how our parks and city services are performing.

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**Chapter Four: Shaping Austin: Building the Complete Community** sets a two-part framework for action to realize our vision of a city of complete communities. The growth concept map shows in general terms where new development over the next 30 years should be located. The building blocks define specific policies to guide decisions on topics ranging from land use and transportation to economy to creativity. The core concepts of Imagine Austin – complete communities and compact, connected centers – are two sides of the same coin. These policies are the foundation of the action ideas and programs contained in Chapter Five.

**Chapter Five: Implementation and Measuring Success** addresses how Imagine Austin's vision and framework will be implemented. It identifies eight priority action programs based on hundreds of ideas developed by citizen working groups, provides guidance for decision-making, and defines the ongoing process that will be used to monitor implementation progress.



## THE ROADMAP AND THE ROAD AHEAD

A Comprehensive Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Thinking Big: The Beauty of a Comprehensive Plan

6 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Securing a Sustainable Future

Imagine Austin Core Principles for Action

The Road Ahead





## A Vision for Austin's Future

As it approaches its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Austin is a beacon of sustainability, social equity and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its citizens and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all.

Austin's greatest asset is its people: passionate about our city, committed to its improvement, and determined to see this vision become a reality.

Through the process of comprehensive planning and the preparation, adoption and implementation of a comprehensive plan, the city intends to preserve, promote, protect and improve the public health, safety, comfort, order, appearance, convenience and general welfare; prevent the overcrowding of land and avoid undue concentration or diffusion of population or land uses; facilitate the adequate and efficient provision of transportation, water, wastewater, schools, parks, recreational facilities, housing and other facilities and services; and conserve, develop, utilize and protect natural resources.

Article X. Planning; Charter of the City of Austin, Texas



Image: City of Austin

## THE ROADMAP AND THE ROAD AHEAD

There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.

— Denis Waitley

### A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Austin today is a model of livability, widely acclaimed as one of the top cities in the country. We have a distinctive and appealing vibe, a resilient economy, a growing national profile, good job and business opportunities, a fun and relaxed way of life, a beautiful natural setting for outdoor living and recreation, a thriving arts and live music scene, and a reasonable cost of living for a big city. In fact, we're so attractive that we draw more than one million visitors and many thousands of new residents annually.

Known as a "smart" city, we are also smart enough to not rest on our laurels. Maintaining our enviable economy and quality of life requires continuous adaptation as the world evolves around us. As a fast-growing city whose population is projected to nearly double over the next three decades, we are becoming more urban and diverse each year. Our attractiveness brings a central challenge: accommodate more people, in a considered and sustainable fashion, while preserving what we value, so that we get better not just bigger.

Many of the changes Austin has seen are positive. Growth in recent decades has brought more employers and varied job opportunities; more interesting people with whom to meet and connect; a broader population base to support the visual, performing, media, and interactive arts, as well as our many nonprofits; a revitalized downtown; new transportation options; and greater tolerance and diversity. We have gained public parkland, a wealth of entertainment and dining choices, and many other amenities to enjoy with family and friends.



Image: City of Austin

Austin has a true sense of place and culture. To be from Austin means something to people, conjuring images of Barton Springs, music, food, outdoor recreation, . . . open-mindedness. It's a little grungy, a little hippie, and a little country all rolled into one.

— Imagine Austin Community Forum

Series #1 participant

But other changes are negatives. We now suffer from serious traffic congestion, long commutes on clogged freeways, Central Austin housing that is increasingly unaffordable for individuals and families, a sense of loss about a simpler Austin of the past, and too many low-wage jobs that lag behind Austin's cost of living. Most troubling, at least 20 percent of our children live in poverty, go to bed hungry, go without health insurance and adequate healthcare, and fail to graduate from high school.

The challenge now before us – in shaping the Austin of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – is to energetically leverage our strengths as we grow, while turning around the negatives. The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan provides the roadmap.

The stakes are high. We must embrace the future that we want and work to make it happen.

### THINKING BIG: THE BEAUTY OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

We are not lacking in the dynamic forces needed to create the future. We live immersed in a sea of energy beyond all comprehension.

— Thomas Berry

The distinctive benefit of a comprehensive plan is that it confronts big issues in a big-picture way. Other city plans are more focused – and deal with topics such as parks, solid waste, transportation, water, or smaller geographic areas. But only a comprehensive plan fully considers how the whole community's values, needs, people, and places are inter-related and interdependent. In creating this plan, we identified the defining issues that are central to Austin's future success.

Today, Austin tops numerous state, national, and international "Best Of" lists. This visibility is accelerating our attractiveness and population growth. As we grow and evolve, how can we preserve and amplify the special things we value about Austin? How can we face our more difficult problems, improve the city, and meet our challenges head-on?

## 6 KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Preserving Our Livability

Austin is a great place to live. We have a wealth of natural resources and recreational opportunities, friendly neighborhoods, a robust economy, and a thriving arts scene. As we welcome future generations, how can we best expand and share all of these amenities? How can we preserve our character and history, remembering the many different experiences and cultures that have made Austin what it is today? How will we increase housing and transportation choices for different types of individuals and families throughout Austin? How will we keep Austin healthy, safe, beautiful, and affordable?

### Expanding Transportation Choices

Austin is a big city, so it's time to build a "big-city" transportation system. We need good roads, and we need to move people around the city and the region conveniently and safely, with or without a car. How can we offer more transportation choices? How can we encourage use of transit, bicycles, and walking? How can we build the kind of transportation network we'll need for sustainable growth?

### Tackling the Ethnic Divide

Austinites of color are now the majority, and our city is quickly becoming more diverse. Yet we are still dealing with the legacy of segregation and racism. Poverty and people of color both are concentrated east of the Interstate. Overall, Austinites living east of Interstate 35 are poorer, less healthy, lag academically, and share less equally in Austin's celebrated quality of life. How can we improve their lives while also protecting longtime Eastside residents from displacement? As a city, we want to tackle this divide and close the opportunity gaps. How can we help all Austinites have a voice, material comforts, and a reason to believe in a brighter future?

### Protecting Our Natural Resources

Austinites enjoy an easy connection with nature and have a strong environmental ethos. We get out on our trails and greenways, lakes and rivers, parks and natural lands, and consider them a core part of what makes Austin special. But suburban growth is pushing Austin outward and encroaching upon and consuming these resources. How can we protect our waterways and watersheds, other natural resources and agricultural lands? How can we better connect our community with healthy, natural open spaces? How can we ensure an ample water supply for the Austin of 2050 and beyond?

### Promoting Prosperity for All

Austin is an innovation leader, known for its high-tech industries, colleges and universities; youthful population; attractiveness to creative professionals; support for local independent businesses; and unique music and arts community. We need a strong business climate for large and small businesses. How do we help all Austinites find good jobs in our high-skill economy? How do we ensure that musicians, young families, and hourly workers aren't priced out of Austin? How can we help wage growth catch up to the rising costs of living to close the affordability gap? How can we expand job opportunities and enhance the skills of our labor force?

### Collaborating Regionally

As the biggest city in Central Texas, Austin has a duty to provide regional leadership and invite its regional partners to collaborate on solutions. Issues such as transportation, water resources, development of the region, environmental protection, climate change, and economic prosperity are regional in scale and scope. We need a platform for regional governance and coordinated comprehensive planning for our collective future. How can Austin lead the way to forge a productive regional dialogue and set of agreements?



Image: City of Austin



Image: City of Austin



## Addressing Challenges and Opportunities

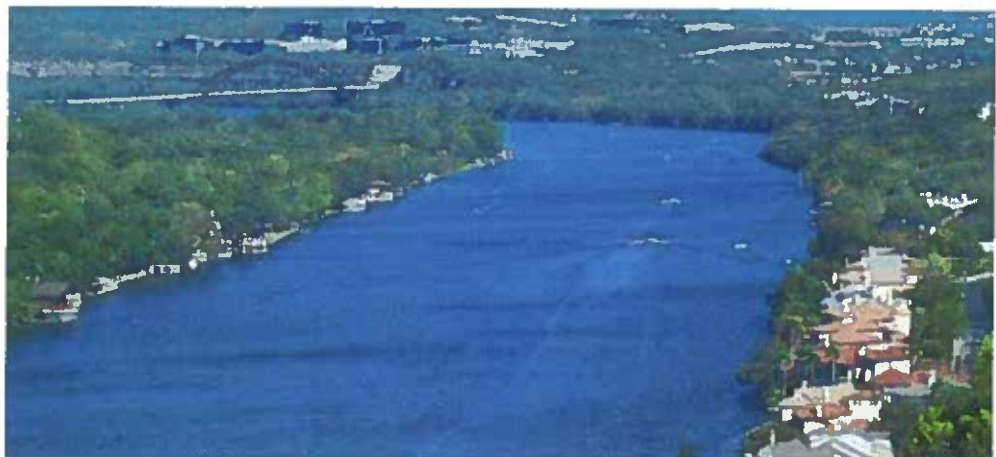
Austin is a big, fast-growing, 21<sup>st</sup> century city. We could sit back and simply let change happen, in ways we may or may not like. Or we can energetically shape our own destiny using this plan as a common playbook. By being unified in vision and proactive about solutions, we can capitalize on our strengths, carry forward our values, and channel growth as a positive force.

Change isn't easy. Actively preparing for change and uncertainty can be tough. However, the potential rewards can outweigh the discomforts. Choosing a different path for our city will require doing things differently. Having imagined a better Austin, it is incumbent upon us to realize our vision.

Image: City of Austin



Image: City of Austin



## SECURING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Right now more than 70 percent of the world population is convinced that something serious has to be done about the dangers facing the planet.... Most of humanity wants to know how to make the change. It's one of those tipping-point times where things can change unbelievably fast.

- Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, coauthors of *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*

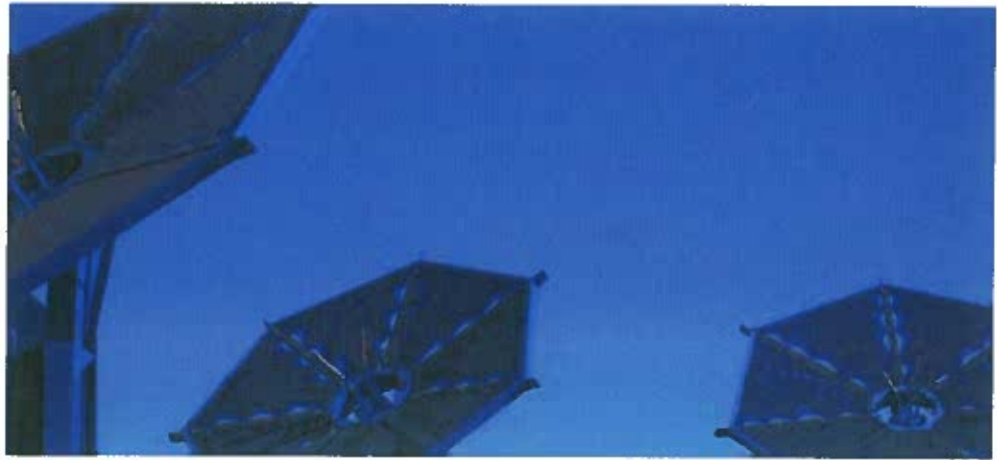
The Austin City Council established "sustainability" as the central policy direction of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan.

Sustainability means considering not only the needs of today, but also whether these needs are being met in ways that conserve resources for future generations. Sustainability means finding a balance among three sets of goals: 1) Prosperity and jobs, 2) conservation and the environment, and 3) community health, equity and cultural vitality. It means taking positive, proactive steps to protect quality of life now, and for future generations."

This comprehensive plan focuses on creating a sustainable city. The way Austin has grown for the last 60 years comes at a troubling price in terms of social segregation and isolation, public health, air and water quality, loss of natural open space and agricultural lands, and climate change. Sprawling, low-density development drives up the public costs for roads, water lines, and other infrastructure that must be continually extended to far-flung new development. Austin simply can't afford to ignore the costs associated with the way we've grown. The patterns of the past decades are neither environmentally nor fiscally sustainable.

Growing in accordance with this plan offers us a way to do it better. It offers us more choices for where and how to live. A compact and connected city reduces the distances that people drive between work, shopping, and home. This reduces stress and frees up precious time for more pleasant and meaningful pursuits.

Image: City of Austin



As we look to the future and follow this comprehensive plan, we have an important opportunity to be more intentional about the next chapters in Austin's growth. The magnitude of our past and projected population growth, in a time of constrained resources and climate change, could amplify existing problems within Austin and Central Texas. Growth can have tremendous benefits for Austin, but not if we repeat our past actions and continue to incur ever-growing environmental, fiscal, and social costs. That's why we need to make some changes.

We all want Austin to prosper, innovate, and lead. Toward that end, we must be wise stewards of our natural world and its resources – the original "infrastructure." This comprehensive plan promotes sustainable and responsible growth and the conservation practices required to protect and enhance Austin's future.



Image Source: City of Austin  
Office of Sustainability



## IMAGINE AUSTIN CORE PRINCIPLES FOR ACTION

We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community.... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.

– Cesar Chavez

Sustainability is the basis of the Imagine Austin vision statement and its hundreds of policies and actions developed through the input of thousands of community members. These policies and actions express six core principles for action to make our "imagined" Austin a reality.

### Grow as a compact, connected city

Austin's long-term sustainability requires a fresh focus on redevelopment and infill within the city's developed areas. Favoring compact growth presents an alternative direction to earlier decades of sprawling, low-density development. More compact growth contains costs by capitalizing on the land and infrastructure already in place. It also enhances human connections, innovation, and urban vibrancy. Creating a more compact and efficient city is critical to our ability to connect people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to homes, jobs, schools, arts and cultural amenities, and other destinations with a more complete transportation system that is affordable to build, operate, and maintain.

### Integrate nature into the city

A beautiful system of outdoor places for recreation and environmental protection will define Austin as a world-class city. We need to develop our creeks, their tributaries and floodplains, Lady Bird Lake, and the Colorado River into a network of connected greenways and waterways. As we grow into a more compact city we will also have an increased need for more, smaller parks and open spaces distributed across these new urban places. By strengthening our "green infrastructure" – parks, the urban forest, urban trails, greenways, rivers, creeks, lakes, gardens, urban agriculture, open spaces, and wildlife habitat and the relationships between them and the rest of the city – Austin can protect the natural environment and enhance recreational opportunities.

### Provide paths to prosperity for all

Austin can harness its strong economy to expand opportunity and social equity for all residents. Developing new economic sectors through partnerships between the business community, city government, and institutions will help employ a diverse workforce and expand opportunities for young and old. To ensure our economic strength, it is critical to preserve Austin's mix of large and small businesses, local entrepreneurs, major employers, clean industries, and education and government jobs. Growing our economic base should provide jobs and career paths for workers of all education and skill levels. Prosperity for all means reducing the number of people living in poverty by providing workforce training and services to help residents attain living-wage jobs. It also means capitalizing on the city's creative industries, cultural heritage, and diverse population to position the city as a national and international center for innovation and knowledge-based industries. We can maintain economic resiliency by staying attuned to global trends and emerging technologies and by preparing our children academically and socially to lead Austin's future.



Image: City of Austin

### **Develop as an affordable and healthy community**

As development and change occurs, we must strive to contain Austin's cost of living, while increasing wages and good jobs. We must provide high public value with tax dollars to deliver quality, affordable amenities that all Austinites can enjoy. An affordable community can only exist if we make sure that the people who work in Austin, at all income levels, can afford to live here. Through incentives and partnerships, the City of Austin can encourage more affordable housing be distributed throughout the city. New mixed-use areas need to have affordably priced housing, be walkable and bikable, and be linked by transit to jobs and other centers, so residents can choose to avoid the costs of car ownership, matching the needs of Austin's increasingly diverse households and wooing families back to the city. Healthy communities depend on easy, safe access to walking, biking, and recreation, healthy and nutritious food, quality healthcare, schools, police, and other community services.

### **Sustainably manage water, energy and other environmental resources**

Sustainability is about considering the needs of present and future generations. As a city, we need to respect our natural constraints, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and conserve water, energy, land, and other natural resources. The City will enact public policies and make choices on the basis of long-term costs and consequences. We will also need to develop relationships with our Central Texas neighbors to address these issues on a regional basis. Austin can reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by promoting community health, encouraging walking, biking, and other daily exercise, and making fresh, local food accessible. We have a responsibility to future generations to go even greener, encourage energy independence, reduce individual, household, and commercial water use, and protect clean air and water. By respecting our natural resources, we can build a sustainable foundation for Austin's enduring prosperity.

### **Think creatively and practice civic creativity**

Austin's spirit of creativity most openly manifests itself in the local music and arts scenes and by those engaged in these and other creative enterprises. However, it also transcends Austin's creative community, to shape our entrepreneurial and business community, technology sectors, and local government to embody a broader, innovative mindset and approach to solving problems. The challenges of a growing population, finite natural and fiscal resources, and a changing climate will require Austinites and their local government to become ever more resilient. Resilience—the ability to adapt to challenges and change—will be a hallmark of successful communities in the 21st century. Innovation has been identified as one of the key attributes of resiliency. Creativity and innovation are essential to realizing the sustainable future envisioned by Imagine Austin. By harnessing the collective energy of our people, the plan and its implementation will address the many issues facing Austin.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

We meet tonight at a crossroads, a point of decision. Shall we expand, be inclusive, find unity and power; or suffer division and impotence.

— Jesse Jackson, author of "Common Ground and Common Sense"

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan provides a platform for moving forward. It clearly defines where we are today and where we want to go. It provides policies and actions for each building block of the plan. It contains a wealth of community-defined priorities for sustainability, livability, mobility, equity, and prosperity. Now, Austinites and their city government must work collaboratively to make the plan bear fruit. Four action steps are required as we move forward:

### Get to work

Austinites are united by their desire to see the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan yield results. We all want to see completed projects that make Austin better. In adopting this plan, the City of Austin is inviting everyone – residents, local companies and business groups, philanthropists and nonprofits, governmental agencies, and others – to partner with it to realize the plan. A collaborative commitment to realizing the plan is essential. The action plan must start strong and be sustained in the years ahead.

### Set priorities

The Austin of our dreams won't be built in a day. This plan contains hundreds of transformational ideas for our future. From them, we must prioritize an achievable handful at a time and successfully execute them. Seeing visible results steadily emerge from this comprehensive plan will be important. Which goals within the plan most merit our immediate attention and can be translated into relatively quick, inspiring wins? How can public-private partnerships advance big, exciting projects that achieve multiple objectives at once?

### Agree to work together

The greatest benefit of a comprehensive plan is that it is a single playbook from which everyone works. We can accomplish far more by pulling in the same direction. The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan sets the stage for a new era defined by advancing common objectives. When challenging issues and choices arise, the plan guides both the municipality and the community in thinking about the good of the whole.

Leadership will be important moving forward. The plan needs leaders – within the community and City government – who are committed to realizing its potential and power, and are skilled at the coalition-building required to move forward together.


### **Commit to action**

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan lays a strong foundation for taking action. Grounded in community values and needs, it has been crafted to positively shape Austin over the next five to 30 years. But its impact will only be as strong as the actions and programs that Austinites undertake to realize it.

The City Charter requires that elected officials and City government use the comprehensive plan as a guide for policies and practices, including budgeting. The City of Austin is already committed to action, as it references this long-term plan to set annual budget, program, and project priorities. But the aspirations of the comprehensive plan are far bigger and deeper than what municipal government can accomplish alone. To fully realize the community benefits it outlines, visionary individuals, groups, agencies, and governments will also need to commit to action. The whole community must sustain the work that enacts the plan, through projects small and large.

Set priorities. Tackle transformational projects. Repeat.

### **Act for the whole**



The comprehensive plan challenges us to look beyond our personal interests and act for the good of the whole. To think of the entire pie, not just our slice. To be good stewards for generations to come. To understand single elements – parks, transportation, water housing – within the context of a larger system. To remember and protect those who lack a voice, money, and power.

When we think long-term and work to make the city as a whole better, everyone stands to benefit.

### **Think big-picture**

Considering Austin as a whole means seeing all of its different pieces and identities and how they all fit together. We must understand Austin on a number of levels: as a collection of distinctive yet interconnected neighborhoods; an educational and technological innovator; a system of homes and jobs that need to be connected by more transportation choices; a government center, an expanding creative hub, and the economic heart of Central Texas.

Comprehensive thinking requires that we consider small areas in the context of how they fit together and how they fit into the whole. Reading this plan in full creates the opportunity to understand what the whole is. As Austin continues to grow, it will take a big-picture view to bring everything together.

### Think holistically

This comprehensive plan is holistic in its consideration of big themes like livability, sustainability, and complete communities. In addition to planning for land use, transportation, and other physical issues, it considers the provision of services, economic development, cultural needs, public health, resource efficiency, and equity. It provides a framework for how the physical, economic, and social pieces of the city and the region interconnect.

### Think of the less fortunate

The faces and voices of Austin are varied and growing more diverse each day. Social and economic gaps are widening between many segments of our population. Austinites are compassionate; we hope to bring everyone along as we move ahead into a bright future. This comprehensive plan provides direction for actions that will benefit not just a fortunate few, but all Austinites.

## Expand the growth-shaping toolkit

### Pair regulatory tools with this plan



This comprehensive plan is a positive tool because it defines what Austinites want and how that can be realized. Redevelopment is a primary tool to advance many of the plan's goals. In that sense, the plan serves as a counterpoint to many governmental regulations, which often focus on prohibiting things we don't want. Updated comprehensive plans typically need to be supported with updated land-use regulations. We can respect property rights while also making it easier to "do the right thing." We will also need land-use regulations that make it easier and more cost effective to do sustainable development and projects that create compact and walkable places.

### Use both zoning and incentives

Zoning is an important tool to guide land use, but it is best used in combination with other tools and a realistic understanding of market forces. New approaches that utilize both zoning and incentives are needed to implement this plan. By offering incentives in the form of grants, loans, infrastructure investments, or innovative regulatory approaches, Austin can encourage good projects that deliver numerous community benefits. These benefits can include affordable housing, great design that beautifies our city and creates lively public places, operational improvements, more transportation options, pocket parks, low-impact development, new jobs, an expanded tax base, and so on. Incentives matter to people who want to improve our community, and they can generate goodwill while helping us reach our goals.

### Look to peer cities

Austin appears on many national and even international "Best Of" lists. In these rankings our closest peers are other resilient, progressive, large cities. All are having similar debates about growth, resource conservation, linking jobs and homes with expanded transportation choices, and preserving community character. We're in a class with the most innovative of our peers. However, Austin is growing much faster than many long-established cities. As we seek to maintain and improve Austin's position as a sustainable, "most livable" city, we can greatly benefit by studying and sharing best practices with peer cities around the nation and the world.

### Focus on urban design

In the past, Austin debates were often simplistically framed as developers versus neighborhoods or the environment. Increasingly, we have a more sophisticated understanding. Sustainability requires redeveloping the central city in "green" ways that advance multiple environmental, economic, and community goals. Well-designed new development can create community amenities and make the city more beautiful. City codes can create certainty and shape projects so they fit sensitively into neighborhood contexts. By establishing high sustainability standards – for locating projects, green building practices, site design and landscaping, and multi-modal transportation corridors – Austin can harness the positive, transformative power of redevelopment.

### Partner up!

The City of Austin will work to advance the strategies in this plan, but it will need many partners to achieve its comprehensive vision. This is especially the case in its extrajurisdictional jurisdiction, where partnering with county governments is critical. Austin has a strong private sector, institutions, and non-profit organizations that share responsibility for shaping Austin's future. These groups have significant resources and relationships, and can do many things City government cannot. Where the right organization does not exist, a new one may need to be created. Implementing this plan will require strong partnerships among government, institutions, businesses, and community groups.



## 4 Measure progress and adapt.

### Be transparent

As required by the City Charter, the City of Austin will review progress on the plan annually and assess the plan at least every five years. It will consider updates based on those reviews. Austinites also need to engage in community "how are we doing?" evaluations. It will be helpful to adopt a set of easily understood tools to measure and report on progress, and to assess the results of policies, programs, and projects. The measures and reporting should be highly visible to promote accountability. Ideally, we can all reference an ongoing community report card to see how we're doing with plan implementation.

### Practice continuous learning

In implementing this comprehensive plan, Austin is embarking upon an exciting and visionary path. By definition, implementation will involve a learning curve. If our "report card" doesn't show the progress we had hoped for, we will need to make adjustments — perhaps to the actions or even to the goals themselves. As circumstances change, we'll need to update the plan accordingly.

A comprehensive plan is a living, evolving document. However, a long-range comprehensive plan typically must be followed for at least five years to see clear results. As adopted, the plan provides a strong framework to guide city actions at all levels. The vision and principles of the plan need to be respected. But over time, the community should expect to revisit and refine individual policies.

Be steadfast, but be flexible.







## EXPERIENCING AUSTIN: WHO ARE WE TODAY?

We Are a Unique Community

Population and Households

Housing and Neighborhoods

Land Use

Transportation

Economy

Environmental Resources

City Facilities and Services

Society And Health

Arts and Culture

Developing a Regional Perspective



## EXPERIENCING AUSTIN: WHO ARE WE TODAY?

Austin is an exemplary city. We are a state and national leader. A city filled with entrepreneurs and innovators. A funky, offbeat destination. A city of compassion and environmental responsibility. A beautiful, accepting community.

We also know that we face real challenges and we have to define and measure our current successes and deficiencies. What are we getting right? Where are we falling short? Through a detailed look at the city as it exists today, we can decide what works and what can be done better. This analysis will identify gaps and lead to questions resulting in new solutions. The Austin of 2012 will be the baseline against which our success in achieving the plan's vision will be measured.

### WE ARE A UNIQUE COMMUNITY

Our progressive spirit, environmental ideals, and innovative character distinguish us from other metropolitan areas in Texas. Many of the City's policy choices show an early understanding of growth and economic issues that many Texas cities only recently have begun to address. This contrast has enhanced Austin's community identity, creating a strong sense of our uniqueness in relation to the rest of the state and the nation.

#### THE AUSTIN SPIRIT

There's a spirit that animates Austin's people and special places. Something both laid back and passionate, that seems built on unlikely pairings, like the State Capitol and the University of Texas, blocks away but worlds apart. Sometimes these happen in brief, beautiful moments, like the coming together of college students and cowboys at Threadgill's Tavern and later at the Armadillo World Headquarters. Sometimes it's a generations-long courtship, the way Austin's most substantial pro-development effort, rural electrification of the 1930s and 1940s, later led to the creation of one of Austin's defining and beloved environmental features, the Highland Lakes, and then to the country's premiere efforts in green energy and green building. Even the land brings together the Hill Country to the west and the Blackland Prairie to the east.

While no city program is ever going to be responsible for this spirit, nurturing it in whatever forms it takes in the future is as important to Austin's success as anything else in this plan.



Image: City of Austin

## Austin's Historical Context

Before it was Austin, the future capital of the State of Texas was a small settlement named Waterloo on a bluff overlooking the Colorado River. In 1839, it became the capital of the Republic of Texas and renamed in honor of the "Father of Texas", Stephen F. Austin. Austin was selected as the capital city due to its steady water supply, hills, pleasant surroundings, and central location within the state. Already the seat of state government, Austin became an educational center in the 1880s with the establishment of the University of Texas. The government and educational sectors became mainstays of the local economy and began attracting people from across the state.

Unfortunately our history also includes a story typical of many American cities: slavery followed by legally-enforced racial inequalities. Past land use planning contributed to the divide within Austin. The city's 1928 "A City Plan for Austin Texas", strongly reinforced racial segregation by designating an official "negro district." This district was created to address the "race segregation problem" by calling for:

"All facilities and conveniences be provided the negroes in this district, as an incentive to draw the negro population to this area. This will eliminate the necessity of duplication of white and black schools, white and black parks, and other duplicate facilities for this area."

Almost 50 years after the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, we still have reminders of our segregated past in our residential patterns and economic landscape.

The city we know today had its beginnings in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Confronted with serious economic and environmental problems, the choices made to address these difficult issues transformed Austin. In the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, Austin experienced a population boom, growing more than 35 percent each decade. However, the city's economy did not grow at the same pace. To address this disparity, Austin's leaders strategized on how to expand the economy. This resulted in new directions that leveraged the city's role as an educational center to attract high-tech employers such as IBM. Our new economic identity was a progressive one, dependent upon innovation and a highly-skilled and educated workforce.

During the early 1970s, an overtaxed electrical grid caused a series of major brownouts. These brownouts, coupled with the rising price of natural gas and the national energy crisis pointed to the need for new electricity sources. To supply the needed electricity, coal-fired energy plants were constructed as an alternative to natural gas. Following a close election in 1973, voters approved the City of Austin's participation in a partnership to construct a new nuclear power plant, the South Texas Nuclear Project. Major cost overruns and project delays, nuclear energy issues generally, and pollution caused by coal-fired power plants proved highly divisive. In 1981, Austin voters authorized the sale of the City's 16 percent share in the project, though no buyers could be found. The issues associated with nuclear energy and the concerns over the pollution and greenhouse gas

emissions of coal-fired plants, colored by Austin's "green" sensibility, led to the development of alternative energy sources and increased energy efficiency programs.

During the 1980s, elements of the city's character began to change further. Multi-family construction experienced a marked increase over previous decades, resulting in a number of sprawling "apartment cities" located throughout the city. Two major high tech research consortium companies, Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation and Sematech opened in Austin. By the early 1990s, the region had about 400 high-tech manufacturers. Throughout that decade, Austin's population grew at phenomenal rates, which led to concerted efforts to protect environmentally sensitive areas from development. These efforts are best exemplified by the passage of the Save Our Springs ordinance and initiation of the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan. Austin's pursuit of economic transformation and its reaction to the local and national energy crisis catalyzed a new civic consciousness. Rapid population growth during the



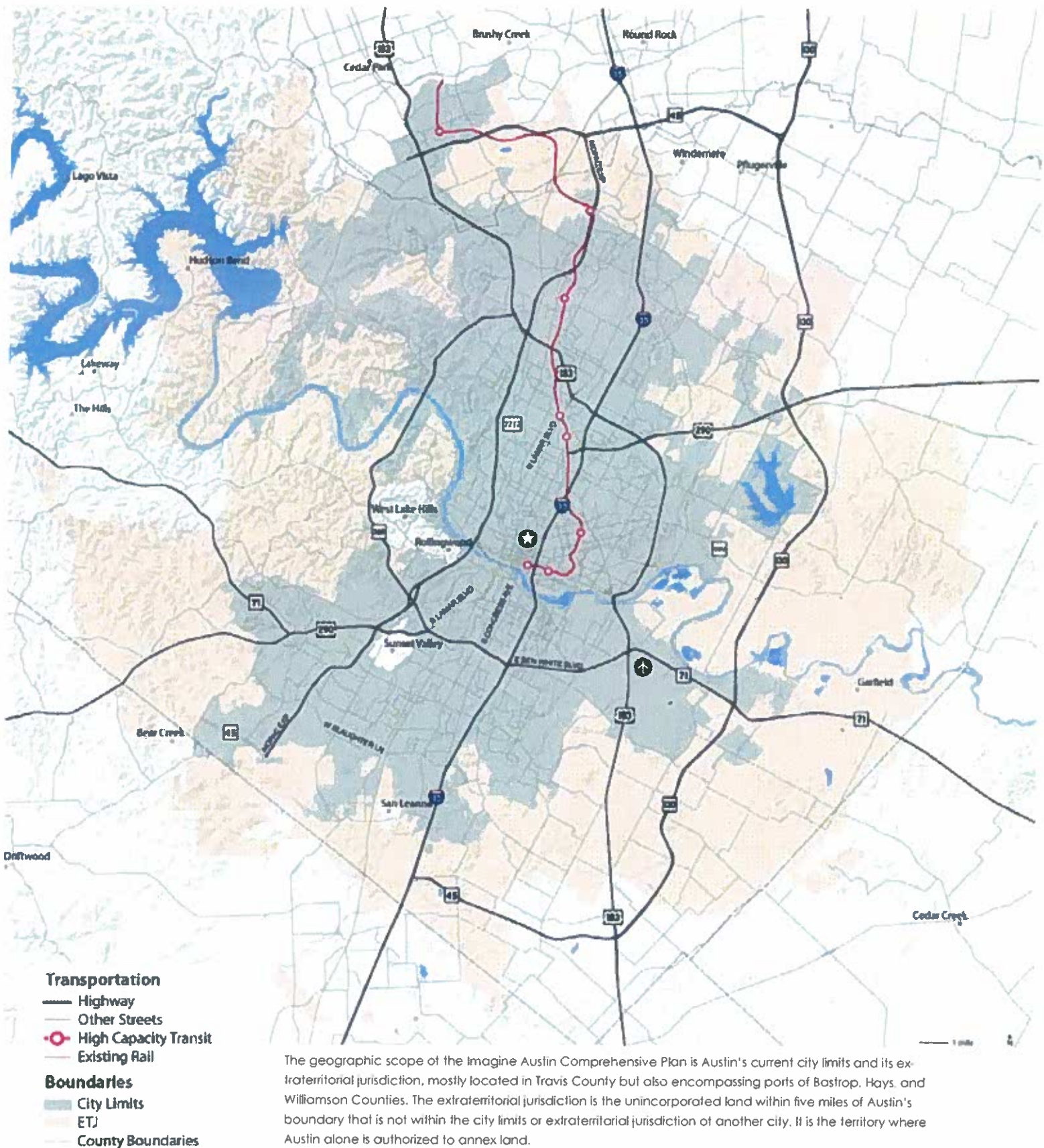
Image: City of Austin



Image: City of Austin



Fig. 2.1 - THE PLANNING AREA IN 2011: CITY AND ETJ BOUNDARIES





1970s also created new transportation and environmental pressures as Austin struggled with the stresses of a growing city. We emerged from the decade with a new environmental focus and economic direction that form the cornerstones of our current sustainability principles. Well before most Texas cities recognized connections between livability and sustainability, we were at the vanguard of the "green" movement.

Celebrating our creativity (by branding Austin as "The Live Music Capital of the World," for example) has attracted talented, artistic, and entrepreneurial individuals, contributing to our eclectic small business community and the growth of the creative and technology sectors. We have confronted difficult issues and taken risks that have set us apart.

Austin is also a place where the funky and offbeat are accepted and celebrated. These qualities attract people from across the country who are looking for a place where they feel comfortable and one that provides opportunities not readily available in most other cities. The spirit of acceptance extends across the spectrum to include people of all faiths, ethnicities and races, sexual orientations, political leanings, and personal interests. The spirit of creativity and acceptance has created a place where people want to be and has set the stage for our current and future economic success.

## POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLDS

**We are a growing city, becoming more diverse, older, and urban.**

### Key Facts/Trends

#### Population

- Austin's population grew by 20 percent between 2000 and 2010, making it the 14<sup>th</sup> most populous city in the US. About two-thirds of this growth is attributable to natural expansion (more births than deaths) and new residents moving into Austin, while about one-third of the new population was added through annexation.
- Austin added an estimated 21,635 people between 2010 and 2011 to reach a total population of 812,025, making it the 14<sup>th</sup> most populous city in the US.
- Austin's share of the Austin-Round Rock region's population has been declining. In 1960, 65 percent of the region's population lived within the Austin city limits. By 2000, this had dropped to 52.5 percent, and by 2010 it dropped to 46 percent.
- Austin's planning area (city limits and the extraterritorial jurisdiction; see Figure 2.1) is projected to add approximately 750,000 more people by 2039.

Change in Population, 1960 - 2010		
Year	Population	Percent Change
1960	186,545	--
1970	253,539	35.9
1980	341,665	34.8
1990	465,622	36.3
2000	656,562	41
2010	790,390	20.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

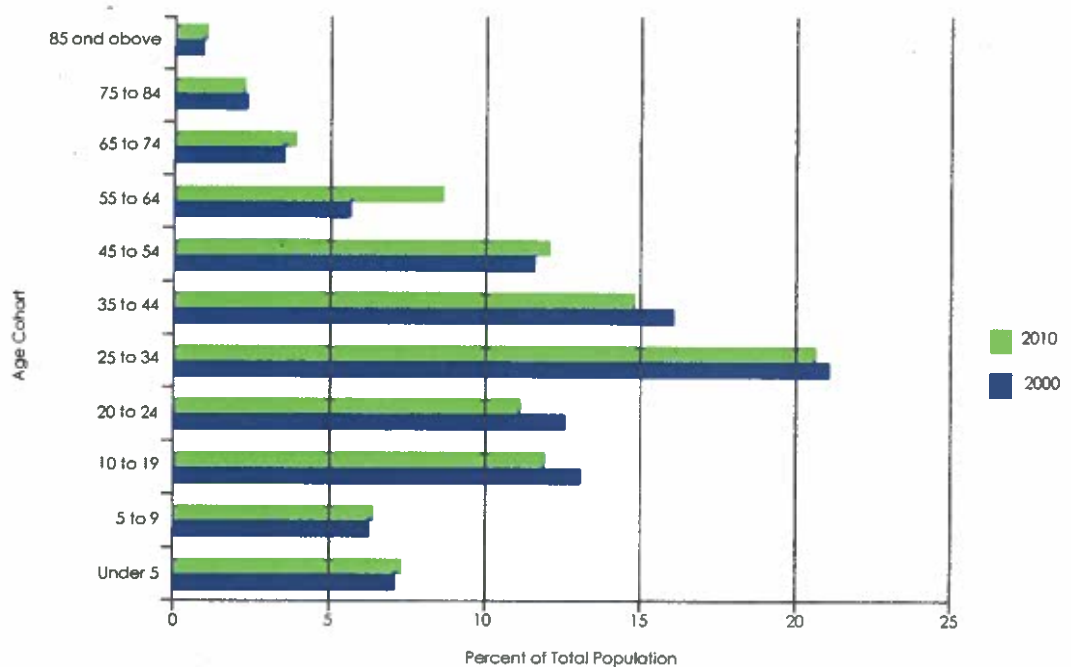
### Households

- Proportionally, Austin has far fewer family households (two or more people residing together who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption) than Texas as a whole, but a similar percentage of married-couples-with-children households. In 2010, only 52 percent of Austin households were family households, and of these, 34 percent were married with children. In comparison, in 2010, 70 percent of Texas households were family households; 34 percent were married with children.
- In 2010, more than 48 percent of Austin households were non-family households. Seventy-one percent of these were single-person households.

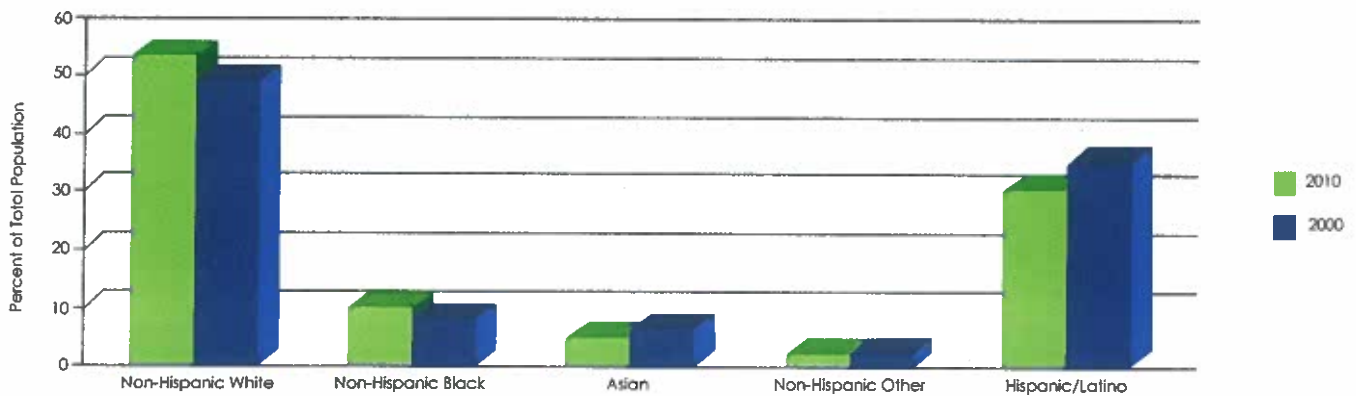
### Age distribution

- Austin is a young city. In 2010, more than 57 percent of the population was under 35 years old, and more than 72 percent was under age 45. The largest age group is 25-34 year olds, which is more than one-fifth of Austin's population.
- The Baby Boomer generation reaching retirement age is having an impact on Austin. The largest rate of growth since 2000 has been in those age groups of 55 and older. In the past decade, Austin saw an 84 percent increase in residents aged 55-59; a 97 percent increase in residents aged 60-64; and a 52 percent increase in residents aged 65-69.
- Significant growth has occurred in other age groups. Austin's youth and senior populations have grown since 2000. In the past decade, Austin has experienced a 23 percent increase in children under age 10; a 26 percent increase in residents aged 80-84; and a 31 percent increase in residents aged 85 and above.

Age Distribution (2000-2010)



**Racial/Ethnic Composition (2000-2010)**



#### **Racial/ethnic composition**

- The racial and ethnic composition of the city has changed over the past decade. In 2010, non-Hispanic whites comprised a smaller proportion of the population than in 2000, 48.7 percent compared with 52.9 percent in 2000.
- The Hispanic population increased, rising from 30.5 percent in 2000 to more than 35 percent in 2010. Eighty-three percent of these residents were of Mexican origin.
- Austin's Asian population also increased, with its share growing from 4.7 percent in 2000 to 6.3 percent in 2010.
- The proportion of African Americans in Austin decreased from 9.8 to 7.7 percent over the past 10 years. This reflects a decline in the total African American population in Austin. Despite this, the region's African-American population grew over the same period.
- Almost 20 percent of Austin residents are foreign-born. More than half come from Mexico and about a quarter from Asia. Of those born in Asia, the majority are from India, followed by Viet Nam, China, and Korea.



Image: City of Austin

#### **Median incomes and Cost of Living**

- Median incomes in Austin are higher than most other Texas cities. In 2009, Austin's median household income was \$50,132 and the median family income was \$62,153; while for the state, the median household income was \$48,259 and the median family income was \$56,607.
- The Austin-Round Rock metro's area cost of living is similar to other regions in Texas. For example in 2011, the Austin region had an estimated cost of living index of 93 (compared to a national average of 100, 96 in Dallas, and 91 in Houston). However when compared to peer metro areas across the country, the cost of living is even more affordable. Comparable regions such as Portland, Oregon (111), Seattle, Washington (120), and San Diego, California (131) had higher index scores indicating a higher cost of living.



Image: City of Austin

### **Poverty**

- In 2011, 21 percent of Austin's residents lived below the poverty line. Almost one-third of all children under age five lived in poverty. Nearly 10 percent of the city's residents over the age of 65 lived in poverty. The 2011 Federal poverty level for a family of four is \$22,350.
- Nearly 83 percent of Austin children under age five living in poverty in 2010 were Hispanic. More than 45 percent of Hispanics under age five live in poverty.
- Twenty-seven percent of the individuals living in poverty in 2010 were foreign-born. Thirty-seven percent of individuals living in poverty resided in households where the household head had not received a high school diploma.
- Additionally, 40 percent of Austin residents earned less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level in 2010.
- The 2011 Point In Time count conducted by the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition identified 2,357 homeless individuals. Of these, 1,681 were single adults; the rest were households including at least one child.

### **Educational attainment**

- Austin's population is well-educated. In 2010, 44 percent of residents aged 25 and older had at least a bachelor's degree, and almost 16 percent had graduate or professional degrees. These rates are much higher than the state as a whole: in 2009, only 27 percent of all Texans aged 25 and over had at least a bachelor's degree, and nine percent had a graduate or professional degree.
- In 2010, 14 percent of Austin residents aged 25 and older did not have a high school diploma.
- If no intervening actions are taken, the percentage of Austinites with post-secondary education levels is expected to decline from 65 percent to 55 percent by 2040. The cost to Austin will be a loss of \$2.4 billion in annual income due to reduced career opportunities and earning capacities.

## What Does It Mean? – Population and Growth

- Population projections show that Austin will almost double in population in 30 years. This will place heavy demands on infrastructure, resources, and services. Some of this growth will occur through annexation of unincorporated areas, but much of the growth will need to be accommodated through development within the city.
- Austin still has strong patterns of racial, ethnic, and income segregation.
- The growing number of older residents, aged 55 and above, has generated greater demand for services, different housing options, and amenities.
- The increase in the number of young children will affect Austin's school districts over the next decade.
- The large number of younger, educated residents such as married couples without children and single-person households, may signal increasing demand for housing other than single-family detached units. Many of these people already live in the urban core, and an increased demand for urban living may be met with redevelopment that includes townhouses, condominiums, and apartments.
- Services to address poverty and limited job skills are needed in Austin.
- Median household and family incomes may be higher than those of the rest of the state, but Austin's high housing and transportation costs may consume greater proportions of household budgets, relative to other Texas cities.

## HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

**We have a variety of neighborhoods but limited housing choices, and our housing costs are rising.**

### Key Facts/Trends

#### Housing units

- In 2010, Austin had an estimated 354,241 housing units. Total housing units increased by 28 percent from 2000 to 2010.
- Single-family detached housing made up about 46 percent of total housing stock in 2010. Between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of single-family detached remained about the same, while the percentage of multi-family housing in 10-19 unit buildings increased and the percentage in 20 or more unit buildings decreased.

Data sources: 2009 American Community Survey, 2010 Census; City of Austin Community Inventory; Kiplinger Cost of Living Index (from Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census, Martin Prosperity Institute); "An Investment in the Future of Central Texas, AARO.



### Home Ownership

- Austin has lower rates of homeownership than Texas: in 2010, 67 percent of Texans owned their own homes while 50 percent of Austinites were homeowners. However, Austin had higher rates of homeownership than Dallas (46 percent) and Houston (49 percent).
- Hispanic and African American households have lower homeownership rates than White and Asian households. In 2010, 53 percent of White households and 41 percent of Asian households were homeowners, but only 34 percent of Hispanic households and 32 percent of African American households owned their homes.
- Seventy percent of Austin's married households own their home, compared with 42 percent of single-person households in 2010. Younger singles under age 35 were much more likely to rent.

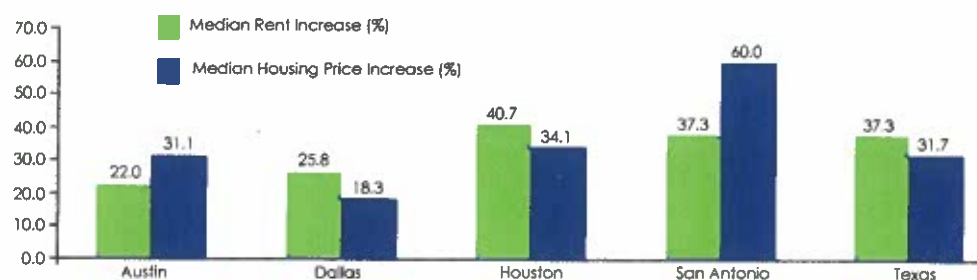
### Housing values/affordability

- Over the last 10 years, median housing costs have risen by 85 percent, while household incomes have grown at a much lower rate. Between 1998 and 2008, the median single-family house price increased by almost 90 percent (\$129,900 to \$240,000) while the percentage of all single-family houses considered affordable declined from 42 to 28 percent. During the same period, Austin's median family income increased by only 36 percent.
- Assessed property values have generally increased in Austin between 1995 and 2010, with declines in 2004 and 2011. Despite a generally declining property tax rate over that period, total taxes paid have risen, substantially in some parts of Austin.

### Rents

- In 2010, Austin's median rent was \$901. This is higher than the 2010 Texas median of \$801 and a 24 percent increase since 2000. Due to tighter capital markets caused by the recent recession, the current supply of apartments has not kept up with demand causing a marked increase in rents that is expected to continue into the middle of this decade.
- Some affordable apartment rental units have been converted to condominium use contributing to a shortage of units in the rental housing market, especially for households with incomes less than \$20,000.

**Increase In Median Rent And Median Housing Prices, 2000-2009**



### ***Housing cost burden***

- Rising housing prices impose higher monthly costs on Austin's households. In 2010, 30 percent of homeowners paid more than 30 percent of their incomes in housing costs and 12 percent paid more than 50 percent.
- Austin's renter population is particularly affected by rising housing costs. In 2010, 53 percent of renter households were paying 30 percent or more of their incomes in rent. Twenty-nine percent were paying 50 percent or more for rent. This is an increase from 2000, when 42 percent of renter households paid more than 30 percent of income in rent and 20 percent paid 50 percent or more for rent.

### ***Neighborhoods***

- Austin's neighborhoods built prior to World War II are characterized by mixed housing and lot sizes, interconnected streets, diverse architectural styles, and compact character. These neighborhoods typically have a school and park within their boundaries.
- Neighborhoods built since the late 1950s are more uniform in size and character and are designed in a fashion that increasingly requires an automobile in order to travel between home, work, shopping, and services.
- There are a growing number of neighborhoods throughout Austin where immigrants, largely from Latin America, are increasingly settling. Language and cultural differences between this growing community and the rest of Austin has led to isolation, which makes it difficult for the City to provide these residents with critical services such as basic infrastructure maintenance, building code enforcement, emergency response, public safety, and health services.
- In the last ten years, neighborhoods in east and south Austin where market values have been historically lower than other Austin neighborhoods have seen new development, reinvestment, and revitalization. This trend has raised the issue of long-time, often less affluent residents being displaced by more affluent residents.
- Some residents are concerned about the real and perceived effects of new development on the character of older, inner-city Austin neighborhoods.
- In 1997, the City of Austin initiated a neighborhood planning program; to date, 48 neighborhood planning areas have completed the process and adopted neighborhood plans (see Appendix x). These plans cover about 16 percent of land area in the planning area and 52 percent of the population in the planning area.

## What Does It Mean? – Housing and Neighborhoods

- Housing costs are rising in many close-in neighborhoods. As a result many long-time residents of Austin, particularly low-income renters, are finding that they no longer can afford to stay.
- As the Austin housing market has become more expensive, the geographic distribution of units affordable to households earning 80 percent or less of the local median family income has changed. Housing options for moderate and low-income households have moved to increasingly distant suburban areas of Austin, which in turn increase transportation expenditures.
- Austin is a majority renter city due, in large part, to the significant numbers of college and university students, recent graduates, and other young people who live here. This demographic bulge, as well as the needs of other Austinites of more modest means, highlights the need for more affordable rental housing. This demographic group has also demonstrated a market preference for more urban amenities and lifestyles.
- Higher housing costs and slower-growing household incomes may prompt many families to rent rather than purchase a home.
- High demand for rental units translates into demand for housing products other than single-family detached homes.
- To accommodate the increasing diversity of Austin area households, more housing options will be needed to address our demographic changes.
- Infill development and redevelopment in centers and along major roadways will be needed to meet the growing demand for higher-density, closer-in affordable housing. Creating harmonious transitions between adjacent neighborhoods is an important component of the development process.
- As the city's housing stock ages, home repair costs will create additional burdens on low to moderate-income residents. Home repair services can help low-income households stay in their homes, mitigating gentrification pressures in historically low-income neighborhoods near the urban core.
- Austin has a growing population of people without homes. Both housing and services are necessary to help these very low income residents transition to stability.

Data sources: 2009 American Community Survey, Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University, City of Austin Community Inventory

## LAND USE

**We continue to rapidly urbanize, largely developing outward on lower-cost land in lower-density suburban patterns.**

### Key Facts/Trends

- Over the last sixty years, the growth dynamic in Austin and the surrounding region has been characterized by increasing population, rapid urbanization of land, and outward expansion. Between 2000 and 2010, Austin's land area grew by more than 19 percent.
- During the past decade there has been a modest trend of infill development and redevelopment in established areas of Austin; however, the pace of urban core development lags far behind new development in suburban areas and beyond.
- In 2010, Austin was more dense (2,653 persons per square mile) than in 2000 (2,477 persons per square mile) but it remains less dense than most major cities in Texas as well as our peer cities across the country.

Average Density in Austin and Comparable Cities (2010)	
City	Density (people per square mile) in 2010
<b>Austin, TX</b>	<b>2,653</b>
Raleigh, NC	2,826
San Antonio, TX	2,880
Dallas, TX	3,517
San Diego, CA	4,020
Portland, OR	4,376
Seattle, WA	7,254
Minneapolis, MN	7,084

Source: Census Data, 2010

Change in Land Area, 1950 - 2011		
Year	Land Area (in sq miles)	Percent Change
1950	37.5	--
1960	55.1	45
1970	80.1	45
1980	123.9	55
1990	225.6	82
2000	257.9	14
2010	307.8	19

Source: City of Austin

- Single-family residential and open space makes up the largest percentage of "developed area" in the city and extraterritorial jurisdiction (see page 35). Not surprisingly, the percentage of acreage classified as undeveloped and large-lot single-family decreased from 2003 to 2010.



Image: City of Austin



Image: City of Austin



Fig. 2.2 - ANNEXATION BY DECADE

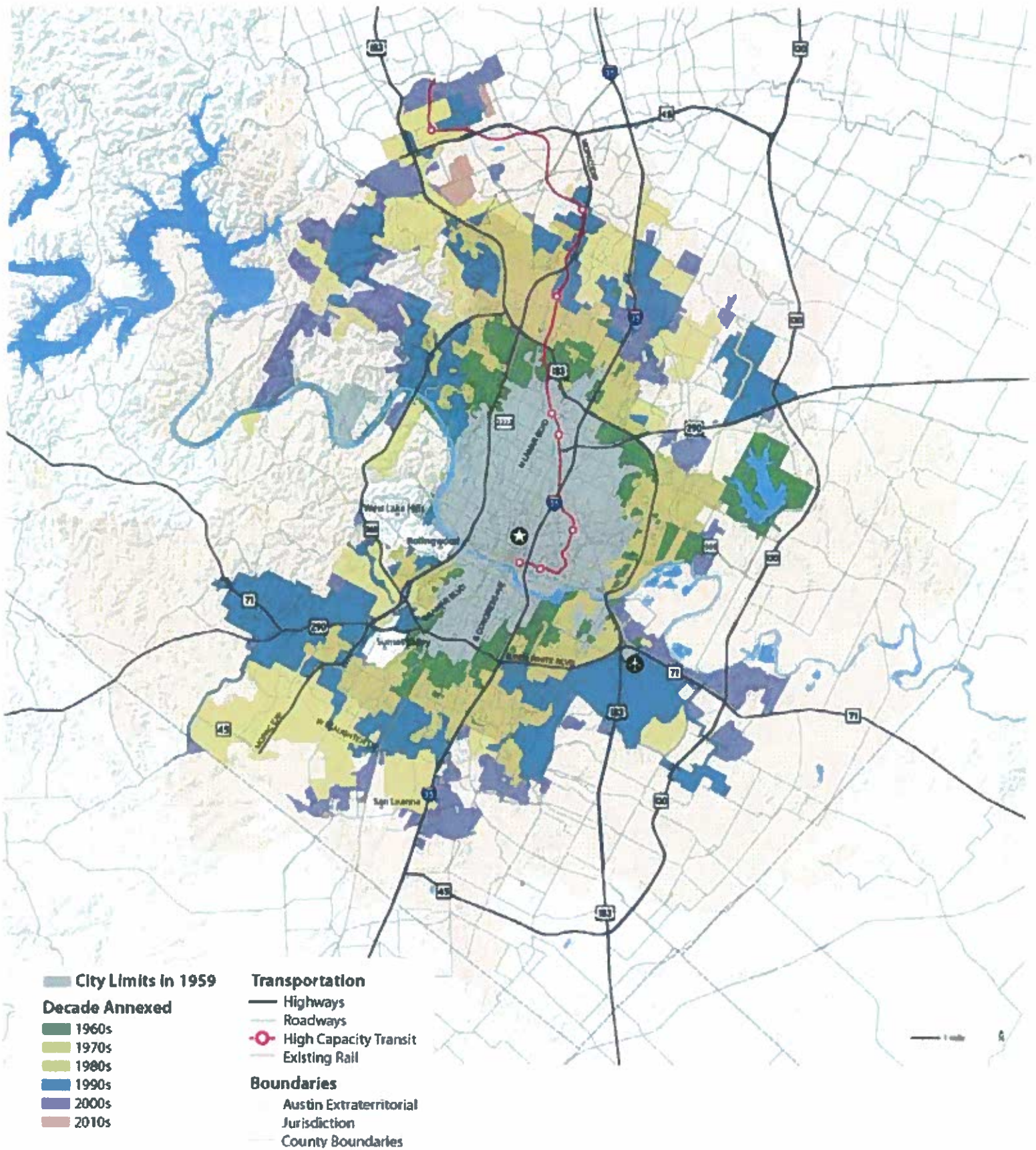
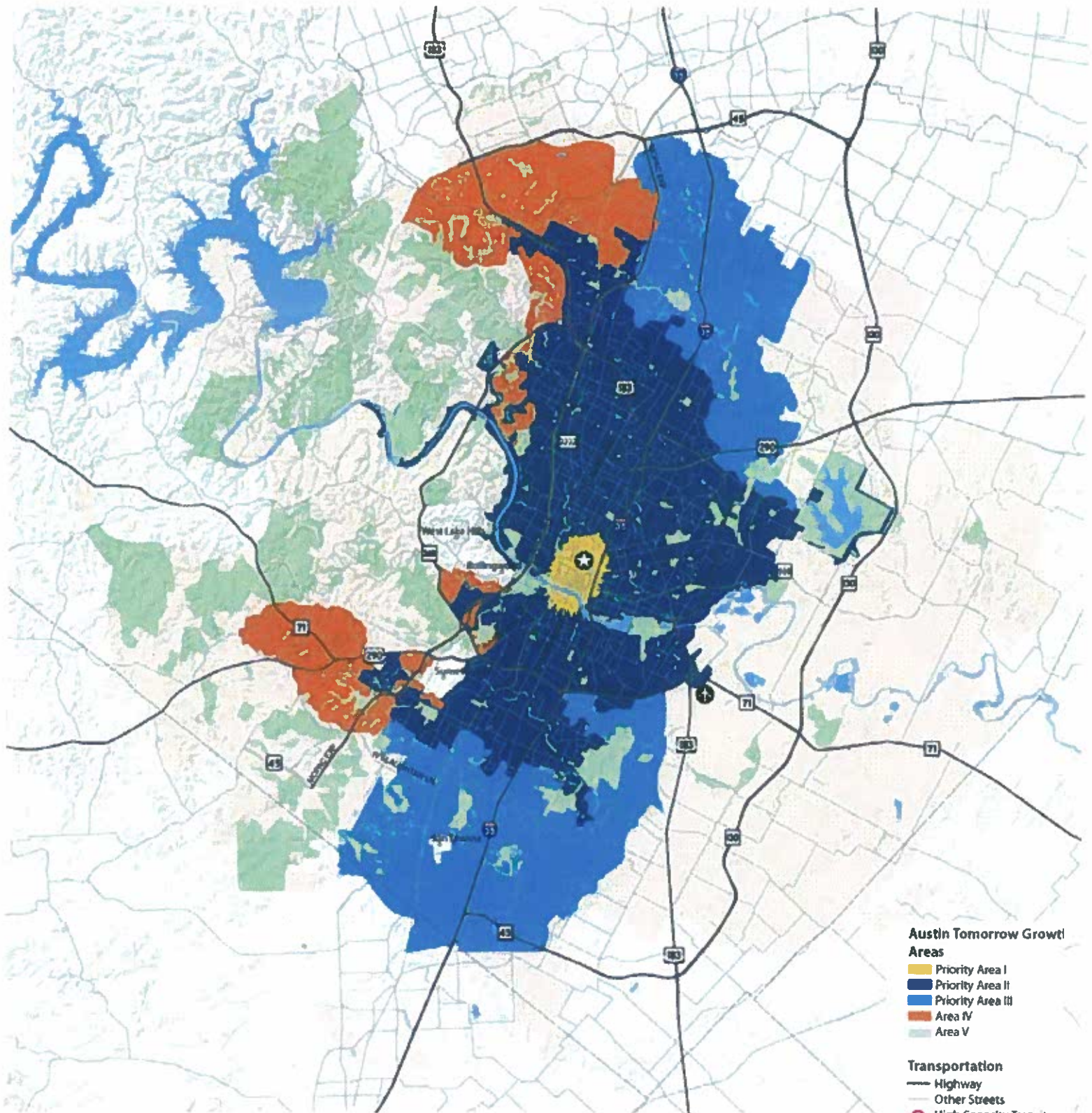




Fig. 2.3 - 1979 AUSTIN TOMORROW COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MAP



The 1979 Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan identified five priority growth areas numbered I through V. Priority Growth Areas I and II were identified as the primary locations for new and redevelopment. Priority Growth Area III was identified as the area for Austin's future expansion needs. Priority Area IV was identified as environmentally sensitive but also where State and local commitments for roads and utilities had been made. Priority Area V was identified as the least suitable location for development.

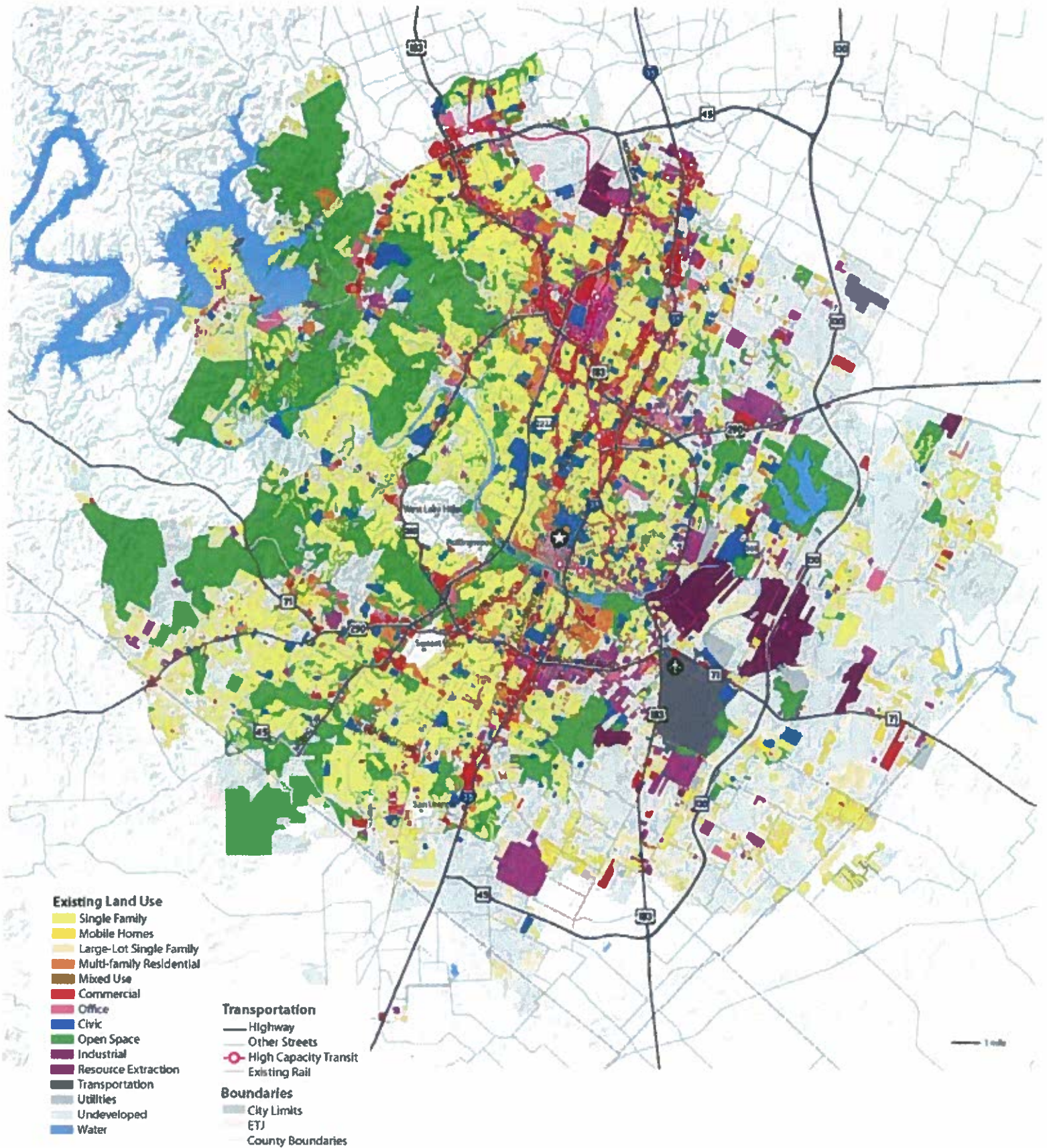
- The percentage of total developed area increased from 53 percent in 2003 to 64 percent in 2010, while the total percentage of undeveloped and large-lot single-family land decreased. Total land area increased as a result of annexation during this period (see Fig 2.2).
- Although 38 percent of Austin's land area is classified as "undeveloped," much of it has environmental constraints, such as floodplains or steep slopes, or is in large-lot single-family use. In 2009, approximately 73,000 acres were undeveloped and had no environmental constraints. However, of this undeveloped acreage, only 1,581 acres were located in urban watersheds. Over 50,000 acres of undeveloped land with no environmental constraints are located in suburban watersheds in the eastern part of the city.

Land Use in Austin and the ETJ (2003 - 2010) - See Figure 2.4					
Use	Acres in 2003	Acres in 2010	Percent Change	Percentage of Total Land Area in 2003	Percentage of Total Land Area in 2010
Single-Family	61,703	69,011	12 %	15 %	17 %
Multi-Family	9,013	10,777	20 %	2 %	3 %
Mobile Homes	6,478	7,000	8 %	2 %	2 %
<b>Residential Subtotal</b>	<b>77,194</b>	<b>86,788</b>	<b>12 %</b>	<b>19 %</b>	<b>22 %</b>
Commercial	8,031	10,317	28 %	2 %	3 %
Office	6,174	6,618	7 %	2 %	2 %
Industrial	9,662	13,624	41 %	2 %	3 %
Mixed-Use	n/a	102	n/a	0 %	0 %
<b>Commercial Subtotal</b>	<b>23,868</b>	<b>30,660</b>	<b>28 %</b>	<b>6 %</b>	<b>8 %</b>
Civic	9,496	10,994	16 %	2 %	3 %
Utilities	6,117	2,766	-55 %	2 %	1 %
Open Space	55,104	69,292	26 %	14 %	17 %
Resource Extraction	5,419	6,687	23 %	1 %	2 %
<b>Institutional/Utility Subtotal</b>	<b>76,136</b>	<b>89,739</b>	<b>18 %</b>	<b>19 %</b>	<b>22 %</b>
Transportation	4,770	5,533	16 %	1 %	1 %
Streets and Roads	32,224	44,254	37 %	8 %	11 %
<b>Transportation Subtotal</b>	<b>36,994</b>	<b>49,788</b>	<b>35 %</b>	<b>9 %</b>	<b>12 %</b>
<b>TOTAL DEVELOPED AREA</b>	<b>214,192</b>	<b>256,975</b>	<b>20 %</b>	<b>53 %</b>	<b>64 %</b>
Undeveloped	145,437	118,679	-18 %	36 %	29 %
Large-Lot Single-Family	31,836	17,782	-44 %	8 %	4 %
<b>TOTAL UNDEVELOPED AREA</b>	<b>177,273</b>	<b>136,462</b>	<b>-23 %</b>	<b>44 %</b>	<b>34 %</b>
Water	10,521	10,137	-4 %	3 %	3 %
<b>TOTAL AREA</b>	<b>401,985</b>	<b>403,574</b>	<b>0.4 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Source: City of Austin. Note that the mixed-use category was added after 2003.



Fig. 2.4 - EXISTING LAND USE (2010)



### **Historic Preservation**

- Austin has designated over 550 local Historic Landmarks. These are properties which have architectural, historical, archaeological, or cultural significance. This designation rewards property owners with a tax exemption in exchange for regulation of the property. Owners must maintain the property's architectural integrity and are required to apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior changes.
- In 2007, Austin amended the land development code to allow Local Historic Districts. These districts include groups of related architecturally and historically significant properties. Property owners within a district must apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness to make exterior changes to these properties. To establish a district, more than 50 percent of the affected property owners must agree. Austin has designated three Local Historic Districts: the Harthan Street Historic District, the Castle Hill Historic District, and the Hyde Park Historic District.
- Austin has 190 properties designated as Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks. This is a state-level designation awarded by the Texas Historical Commission to properties of local, regional, and/or state significance. The designation carries legal protection for the exterior of the historic property, with required review for any proposed exterior alterations. Recorded landmarks are eligible for state preservation grant funds and also qualify owners for technical assistance.
- Austin contains 164 historic properties and 15 historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This is an honorary designation recognizing properties of greater-than-local significance. The City, however, adopted regulations preventing National Register properties from being demolished without an approved permit.
- Austin is home to a number of history-related museums that include the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Republic of Texas Museum, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, the French Legation Museum, and the Austin History Center. Two University of Texas facilities operate as historic research centers: the Harry Ransom Center and the Center for American History.

### **Susceptibility to Change Analysis**

Given the city's population and employment projections for the next three decades, it is clear that Austin's existing land use pattern must change to accommodate this growth in a more sustainable manner. To inform the comprehensive planning process, an analysis was conducted to determine which areas of the city have the greatest likelihood of developing or redeveloping (Figure 2.5). The analysis considered over ten factors and combined them to determine areas more or less likely to change. The analysis factors included owner occupancy, land status, land value, zoning, pending development cases, projected employment growth, road access, availability of other infrastructure, and other indicators of redevelopment potential. In general, the analysis found that:







- Areas most likely to change are concentrated in a north-south axis, particularly from downtown Austin north to Williamson County, between Loop 1 and State Highway 130.
- Areas in the eastern and southern portions of the city and its extraterritorial jurisdiction are moderately susceptible to change.
- Areas in the western portion of the city and its extra-territorial jurisdiction are least susceptible to change.

### What Does It Mean? – Land Use

- Very little undeveloped land is available within the city's urban core. In the absence of policy or regulatory changes, new growth will likely occur in outlying areas where land values are lower.
- Total developed land is increasing. As land values in suburban areas are rising, owners are selling undeveloped or agricultural land as a result of higher property taxes or returns.
- Growth within the city's urban core will involve redevelopment and increases in density.
- As a governmental and educational center, Austin has a large percentage of institutional uses. These uses are not likely to change.
- Austin has an active historic preservation program.
- The city has a substantial amount of agricultural land that may be converted to other uses as land values rise.
- Generally, less intensive land use changes will occur in the western part of the city due to environmental constraints.

Data sources: 2009 American Community Survey, City of Austin Community Inventory, City of Austin GIS

## TRANSPORTATION

**We are experiencing increasing traffic congestion and transportation costs. There is a renewed interest in creating a system incorporating all transportation choices.**

### Key Facts/Trends

#### Transportation Costs

- The average household in the Austin-Round Rock region spends 23.3 percent of income on transportation costs. Austin's transportation expenditure falls within the range of comparable cities such as Dallas (22.6), San Diego (22.9), Portland (23.7), Nashville (25.4), and Seattle (25).

#### Transportation Modes and Travel Time

- In 2009, 73 percent of Austin's working population drove alone to work and 10 percent carpooled. This rate of car usage, however, was less than Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and the state of Texas as a whole. Motorists in Austin who drove alone to work earned approximately 1.2 times Austin's median household income.
- During the same year, five percent of Austin's working population rode a bus to work, one percent bicycled, and 2.3 percent walked. Workers choosing these modes of transportation earned approximately 60 percent of Austin's median household income.
- In 2009, the majority of Austin's workers had commutes of 30 minutes or less, generally shorter than those in Houston, Dallas, or peer cities such as Seattle or San Diego.
- A 2008 Brookings Institution study found that between 2002 and 2006 Austin led the nation's largest metropolitan areas in reducing the number of vehicle miles traveled. During this period, Austin's vehicle miles traveled per capita decreased more than 12 percent. In 2006 the city's vehicle miles traveled per capita (4,974 miles) ranked 77<sup>th</sup> out of 100, which was much less than that of Raleigh (17<sup>th</sup>) Minneapolis (58<sup>th</sup>), and Seattle (64<sup>th</sup>).

**Travel Time to Work, 2009**

Commute Time	Percentage of Workers									
	Austin	Dallas	Houston	San Antonio	State of Texas	Raleigh, NC	San Diego, CA	Portland, OR	Seattle, WA	Minneapolis, MN
Less than 30 minutes	71.8	63.9	61.1	68.9	65.2	74.8	74.0	70.3	63.8	73.2
30-59 minutes	23.8	30.1	31.8	26.8	28.1	21.6	22.5	25.4	30.7	23.1
60 minutes or more	4.4	6.1	7.0	4.3	6.7	3.6	3.5	4.3	5.5	3.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Image: City of Austin



Image: City of Austin

### **Roads/Highways**

- Austin's major highways have shaped growth patterns in the city and its extrajurisdictional jurisdiction. Interstate 35 facilitated Austin's north-south development orientation and also created a physical barrier between east and west Austin. Other freeways and arterials that are part of the highway pattern, such as the Loop 1 (Mopac Expressway), Loop 360, U.S. 290, U.S. 183, and State Highway 71, led to lower density development spreading away from Austin's urban core.
- Older freeways, including Interstate 35 and Loop 1, have reached their capacity.

### **Transit**

- Capital Metro operated 83 bus routes in Fall 2011, including regular, commuter/express, university, and late night buses. Weekday ridership averaged 131,440 boardings.
- Opened in 2010, Capital Metro's MetroRail line (the Red Line) has nine stations and extends from downtown Austin to the City of Leander. Weekday ridership in Fall 2011 was approximately 1,800 boardings.

### **Bicycle/Pedestrian**

- The Bicycle Master Plan recommends 900 miles of bicycle lanes (130 miles currently exist) and 350 miles of multi-use trails (50 miles currently exist). When the plan is fully realized, there will be bicycle lanes on 21.3 percent of Austin's roadways.
- Since adopting the Bicycle Master Plan in 2009, the Bicycle Program has installed about 15 new and improved bicycle lane miles per year.
- The Sidewalk Master Plan indicated that there were approximately 3,500 linear miles of roads without sidewalks. About 10 percent of these gaps in the sidewalk network are along arterials with the remaining 90 percent along collectors or residential streets.

### **Recommended Improvements in Existing Plans**

- The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2035 Regional Transportation Plan recommends \$3.6 billion in regionally funded roadway projects, \$2.9 billion in public transportation projects, and \$444 million in bicycle and pedestrian projects. Projects are prioritized based on funding availability.
- Prompted by the inability of the gas tax to provide sufficient revenue to support expansion of the freeway system, recommended highway improvements in Texas center on toll roads. In the Austin area, these include the northern Loop 1 extension, State Highway 45, State Highway 130, and the U.S. 183A Expressway.
- The Lone Star Rail District proposes a regional commuter rail line paralleling Interstate 35 between San Antonio and Georgetown. An additional commuter rail line (the Green Line) is planned to provide service between downtown Austin and Elgin. In addition, the

City of Austin is exploring the possibility of a rail line serving Central Austin and connecting to other transit systems.

- The Austin-Bergstrom International Airport Master Plan projects passenger activity to double from 2007-2026 (8.7 M-17.5M). There are also future plans for a third runway as traffic increases.

## What Does It Mean? – Transportation

- Transportation infrastructure responds to and shapes growth. Austin's sprawling development away from the urban core is partially the result of transportation decisions that prioritized highway construction. As a result, the city and region has been slow to develop a comprehensive transit system. Limited commuter rail and bus service to suburban areas has stressed the area's highway system, due to few transportation options beyond the car.
- The absence of a strong transit system makes it more difficult for Austin to encourage efficient land use patterns.
- Despite Austinites' limited transportation options, residents and workers are less auto-dependent than those in other major Texas cities.
- In 2005, about 7 percent of households did not have access to a vehicle and 43 percent had one vehicle available. Transportation choices other than an automobile can provide lower-cost options; however, transit route and service limitations and gaps in sidewalk and bicycle networks can increase travel times and reduce access to jobs and services throughout the greater Austin area.
- In the past decade, Austin has worked to change the focus of its transportation policies and its growing transit, bicycle, and sidewalk network.
- The average household in the Austin region spends one-quarter of its income on transportation, contributing to unaffordability in Austin and the region.

Data sources: 2009 American Community Survey; City of Austin Community Inventory; Capital Area Metropolitan Transportation Organization; Capital Metropolitan Transit Authority; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Brookings Institution, "The Road . . . Less Traveled: An Analysis of Vehicle Miles Traveled Trends in the U.S." (2008); CNT Housing and Transportation Affordability Index (2010).

## ECONOMY

**We have a thriving economy, resilient due to its diversity and entrepreneurial spirit; however, we need to prepare our workforce to adapt to emerging employment sectors and technological changes.**

### Key Facts/Trends

#### Labor Force

- Between 1990 and 2010, Austin's labor force grew by more than 50 percent – or more than double the national rate.
- Austin's unemployment rate was 7.4 percent in September 2011, the highest in twenty years. However, this was lower than the Texas rate of 8.5 percent or the US rate of 9.1 percent.
- In 2010, over 72 percent of Austin's population aged 16 and over was in the workforce.
- Among the working adult population, African Americans had the highest unemployment rate of 13.4 percent.
- Unemployment was also related to levels of educational attainment, with those with less than a high school degree or G.E.D. experiencing greater unemployment (13.9 percent) than those completing college (4.6 percent).
- The percentage of Austin's workers with college degrees continues to rise and is far above the rest of the state.
- Almost 20 percent of adults older than 25 have begun but not completed a college education.
- Young professionals aged 25-44 comprises 34 percent of Austin's population. This group is recognized as a vital part of the city's creative sector, which includes art, film and visual media, gaming and digital media, and music, and serves as a strong driver of innovation and a significant consumer of urban amenities.
- The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) projects that Travis County will have over one million jobs by 2035, most of which will be located in Austin. Austin's downtown will still be a regional employment center, but many employers will locate in outlying areas along major highways.

#### Employers/Business Sectors

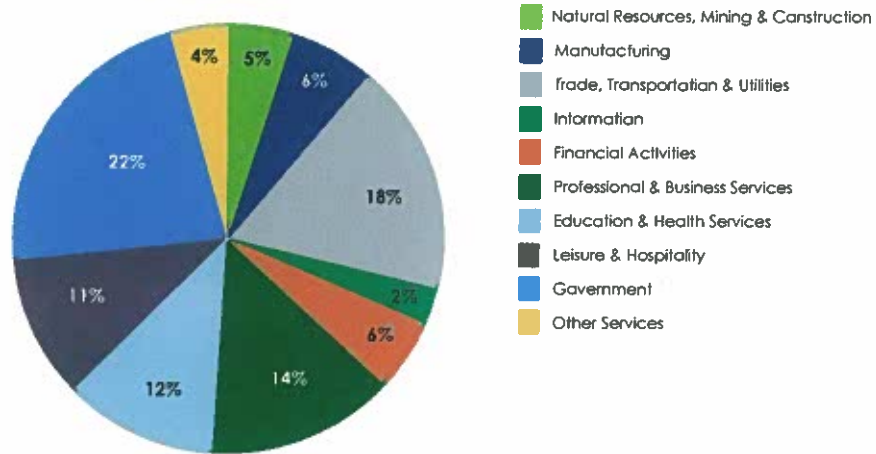
- Gross domestic product in the Austin-Round Rock region grew by 65 percent between 2001 and 2010 (from about \$52 to \$86 billion). Even after adjusting for inflation, the Austin region's gross domestic product rose by 34 percent during this period.
- Business formation growth was strong between 2001 and 2010. The total number of establishments in the Austin region grew by 34 percent.



- The largest employers in the greater Austin area in 2009 include government, universities, and technology, warehouse and distribution, and health care.
- Since 2000, Austin has experienced significant increases in multiple job sectors: health care; professional and management; and arts, entertainment, and food. During the same period, the number of manufacturing jobs decreased by over five percent.
- The State of Texas faces a critical shortage of health care professionals
- The Austin region is consistently regarded as one of the top regions in the nation for small business. Small businesses grew by 1.5 percent between 2007 and 2008 (the most recent period for which statistics are available), at a much higher rate than any other region (no other region had a growth rate higher than 0.6 percent).
- Austin's traditional high-tech base is being forced to move into other sectors. As "offshoring" continues to affect the manufacturing and electronics base, the city is re-focusing on other high-tech industries such as medical and life sciences; clean energy which includes sustainable design and building, smart grid technologies, solar energy; creative industries such as gaming, digital media, film, post-production; data centers; and professional services and corporate headquarters.
- The clean energy sector presents a key growth and job creation opportunity. The city has emerged as a center for clean energy technologies, with a supportive local utility and forward-thinking public policies focused on sustainability.
- The majority of employment growth within Austin over the next twenty years is projected to occur in the eastern part of the city (extending out to State Highway 130).

Selected Major Employers		
Employing 6,000 or more	Employing 2,000-5,999	Employing 1,000-1,999
Austin School District	Advanced Micro Devices (AMD)	3M
City of Austin	Texas State University-San Marcos	ACS State Healthcare
Federal Government	National Instruments	Lower Colorado River Authority
IBM	Austin Community College	Austin American-Statesman
Dell	Travis County	Capital Metro Transportation Authority
State of Texas	AT&T	Emerson Process Management
University of Texas at Austin	Applied Materials	Harte-Hanks Response Management
Seton Healthcare Family	Freescall Semiconductor	Hospira
	St. David's Healthcare Partnership	Girling Healthcare
	Round Rock School District	Cisco Systems
		Apple
Source: City of Austin, Community Inventory		

Employment By Industry in Austin MSA, 2010



### Wages

- Average salaries for Austin workers indicate the existence of high-wage industries in the city. However, Austin's wages do not compete with those of east and west coast metropolitan areas.
- In Travis County, a household with one adult and one child must earn an hourly rate of about \$17.00 in order to pay typical monthly household expenses. Typical hourly wages in food preparation, personal care, farming, construction, production, and transportation and shipping are below this wage.

### Commercial Real Estate Market

- The Austin region added over 12 million square feet of total office space between 2002 and the third quarter of 2011. The construction of new office space slowed significantly in 2009; however, the third quarter of 2011 has seen an uptick, with the net absorption of over 644,000 square feet of office space. Vacancy rates remain high, particularly in suburban office space. In the third quarter of 2011, office space in the Central Business District had a 13.7 percent vacancy rate and suburban office space had a 16.5 percent vacancy rate. For the entire Austin region, vacancy rates in the third quarter of 2011 for Class A office space were 18.6 percent and vacancy rates for Class B office space were 12.7 percent.
- Austin's percentage of the region's office space has dropped as more suburban spaces have been constructed.
- Most of Austin's retail growth since 1960 has occurred outside of the Central Business District, but more has been leased in Central Business District since 2005 than in the last 40 years.

- Austin's share of regional retail sales has been declining over the past decade. In 2002, 63 percent of all retail sales occurred in the city; however, by 2010, this figure had dropped to 54 percent.

## What Does It Mean? – Economy

- Suburban commercial and office development is diminishing Austin's position as the regional economic leader.
- The government, technology, medical, and institutional sectors form the base of Austin's economy.
- Austin's highly-educated workforce makes the city attractive to high-growth companies seeking to relocate or establish operations in the greater Austin area.
- Austin's economy continues to produce professional and skilled service jobs. However, access to these jobs is limited for many minorities and individuals with lower educational attainment.
- Austin's creative sector is key to our continued economic growth.
- There are many factors that make Austin an ideal environment for small business growth: high amounts of venture capital funding, a well-educated and young population, a creative/independent spirit that strongly favors originality and local businesses versus national big-box retail stores.
- Austin's lower wages (relative to other major U.S. cities) creates an impediment to attracting talented workers who perceive that they can secure better pay elsewhere.
- Entrepreneurship and the ability of existing businesses to adapt to new technologies will continue to drive Austin's economy.
- Investment is needed in workforce development programs that address shortages in critical healthcare professions and blue-collar workers.

Data sources: Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University; City of Austin Community Inventory; Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization; Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce; 2009 American Community Survey; The Living Wage Project; Bureau of Economic Analysis; Bureau of Labor Statistics; CoStar Group; Business Journals

## ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

**We are rich in natural resources, but the effects of development and climate change put them at risk.**

### Key Facts/Trends

#### **Biodiversity**

- Austin lies at the boundary of four physical geographic regions: the Edwards Plateau ("Hill Country"); the Rolling Prairie; the Blackland Prairie; and the Colorado River Terraces. The city contains a variety of terrains, soils, habitats, flora, and fauna due to its location within numerous transition zones.
- The region has diverse plant and animal habitats that transition from east to west. The karst landscapes of the Balcones Escarpment and Edwards Plateau are home to many unique, endangered species of birds, salamanders, and invertebrates, some of which are listed as endangered under federal law. Austin is also located beneath the Central Flyway for North American bird migration.

#### **Water Resources**

- Austin is known for its creeks, rivers, lakes, and springs and includes such landmarks as Barton Creek, Barton Springs, Bull Creek, Lady Bird Lake, Lake Austin, and the Colorado River. The area covered by the comprehensive plan, Austin and its extraterritorial jurisdiction, is situated within 76 watersheds within the Colorado River basin, the Brazos River basin, and the Guadalupe River basin. This area encompasses 396,395 acres out of the 983,001 total acres of the 76 area watersheds.
- The Colorado River provides the majority of Austin's water supply. The city has contracts for a "firm" supply of raw water, or water that has not been treated and purified, available even during dry periods or drought to meet demand at least through 2050.
- The Edwards Aquifer, one of the most important and sensitive aquifers in Texas, feeds a number of springs in Austin, including Barton Springs and its pool. Portions of its 500-square mile recharge zone extend on a north-south axis through the western part of the city and underlie approximately 42 percent of the city's land area.
- Austin has a decades-long history of regulations to protect its water supply. Current regulation includes the Drinking Water Protection Zones ordinance (approved in 1997) for watersheds that drain to Lake Travis, Lake Austin, and Barton Springs. Nearly 37 percent of the city's land area is included in one of the three drinking water protection zones.
- Central Texas is often called "Flash Flood Alley" because of its intense storms and hilly topography with numerous creeks and wet-weather streams. During almost every decade over the past 100 years the city has experienced significant flood events.
- Between 1997 and 2006, the amount of impervious surface cover in Austin and its extraterritorial jurisdiction rose from 11 percent to 14 percent of total land area.

- Impervious surfaces are very restricted in the Drinking Water Protection Zone. Development in the Barton Springs portion of the Drinking Water Protection Zone is limited to 15-25 percent surface coverage, and impervious surfaces are limited to 20 percent in the Water Supply Rural watershed. However, there are significant tracts that are "grandfathered" from these requirements. In addition, regulations differ in Austin's urban and suburban watershed zone areas (i.e., impervious surface coverage is regulated by zoning districts in the urban watersheds zone and ranges from 45 percent to 90 percent in the suburban watersheds).
- Climate scientists predict that the Central Texas region could become warmer and drier.

### ***Air Quality***

- Central Texas is in compliance with all federal air quality standards. However, the region is in danger of exceeding ground-level ozone due to stricter federal standards. Air quality programs in Austin have primarily focused on the reduction of ozone levels.
- Ground-level ozone is Central Texas' primary air quality concern. Poor air quality affects our most vulnerable citizens by irritating the respiratory system, reducing lung function, and aggravating asthma.
- Vehicle engines, electric generation units, industrial facilities and many everyday activities create man-made sources of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds, which form ozone when exposed to sunlight. In 2007, most (55 percent) nitrogen oxides result from mobile sources, like cars, trucks, construction equipment, and lawn mowers. Most (78 percent) volatile organic compounds result from fixed area sources, such as industry, home heating, or forest fires. Central Texas is currently in compliance with federal air quality standards for ozone, though these standards may be revised in 2013.

### ***Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions***

- In 2010, the entire community within Travis County (including residents, businesses, and the governments) were responsible for emissions equivalent to 14.9 million tons of carbon dioxide (the standard measure for greenhouse gas emissions). Just over half of these emissions resulted from energy use; another third were the result of transportation; the rest resulted from waste and wastewater treatment. Per person, this was lower than the average Texan (equivalent to 15 tons of carbon dioxide for Travis County, versus 25 tons for Texans overall) and the average U.S. citizen (19 tons).
- In 2007, the City of Austin passed the Austin Climate Protection Plan resolution. Since then, Austin has reduced electricity output by the equivalent of 26,100 homes per year, committed to powering all City municipal operations and buildings with 100 percent Greenchoice power, organized and begun implementing Climate Action plans and teams across all City departments, and continues to focus on collaboration, education, mitigation, and innovation.



- Potential impacts of climate change in Central Texas include increased drought and severe weather events, elevated temperatures, more heat waves, and worsening air pollution.
- Regional cooperation is needed to more completely implement climate change solutions.

#### **Open Space, Green Infrastructure, and Agriculture**

- While much of the planning area is urbanized, some of Central Texas' most fertile soils are located throughout the Blackland Prairie and Colorado River Terrace regions.
- In 2011, within Austin and its extraterritorial jurisdiction, 33 small- and medium-size farms selling in the Austin region cultivated over 87 acres of land.
- Local farming enhances sustainability by increasing our local food supply, addressing the challenge of food deserts in certain areas of the city, and contributing to the local economy. Despite these benefits, the amount of farmland in Travis County decreased by 12 percent from 2002-2007, a loss that is likely attributable to both urbanization and farmland being taken out of production.
- Austin's urban forest—its tree canopy—is vital to water and air quality and helps mitigate the urban heat island effect. In 2006, Austin's tree canopy cover was estimated at 30 percent of its total land area. Areas with the highest coverage were found in the western part of the city near Barton Creek.
- The City of Austin is engaged in several programs to preserve sensitive lands and in 1998 began purchasing land for water quality protection. Austin Water Utility manages about 47,000 acres through the Wildland Conservation Division's Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Program and Water Quality Protection Lands Programs. Management of the wildlands toward a thriving ecosystem contributes to good water quality in our creeks, streams, and underlying aquifers.

Data source: City of Austin  
Community Inventory, USDA Census of  
Agriculture

### **What Does It Mean? – Environmental Resources**

- Water supply and quality will be two of the most critical issues facing Austin as it adds population.
- The City of Austin controls a large portion of the land within area watersheds, which gives it some control over development within these sensitive areas.
- The likelihood of drought and storms adds to the vulnerability of the region's arid climate and reliance on rainwater to recharge the aquifer and to refill the Highland Lakes reservoirs. Higher temperatures may result in an increase in energy use to cool homes and businesses, resulting in more air pollution. Health risks and their related costs could also be associated with these potential impacts.

## CITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

**We have invested in high-quality facilities and services throughout the city; however new development and a changing population are placing pressures on service delivery.**

### Key Facts/Trends

#### **Public Safety and Emergency Services**

- The Austin Police Department has over 1,669 sworn officers, 618 civilian positions, and a Fiscal Year 2010 operating budget of \$250 million. The City's full purpose jurisdiction is divided into four regions and further subdivided into nine sectors.
- The department's community-based approach to law enforcement puts the responsibility for local policing in the hands of region commanders, with centralized functions providing support for operations and investigations.
- The average response time to high-priority calls in 2010 was just under seven minutes.
- In 2010, Austin had one of the lowest violent crime rates of all U.S. cities with populations exceeding 500,000.
- The Austin Fire Department has over 1,000 firefighter and 67 civilian positions operating from 44 fire stations throughout the city and at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.
- The Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services serves the entire county and is jointly funded by the City of Austin and Travis County. It operates under a "third service" public safety model, separate from police and fire.
- Thirty paramedic stations with almost 400 state-licensed paramedics are located throughout Austin and Travis County.

#### **Parks and Preserves**

- Austin has over 35,000 acres of water recreation areas, parks and preserves and exceeds national guidelines for acres of parkland per person.
- Austin's park area has doubled in size over the past two decades, but funding and maintenance has not kept pace with growth. The Parks and Recreation Department's operations and maintenance budget is \$20 per capita which is lower than the national average of \$91 per capita.
- Austin has more than 115 miles of trails, of which 74 miles are hike-and-bike trails.
- An additional 26 parks and preserves are managed by Travis County.
- The Balcones Canyonland Preserve is a 30,428-acre system of endangered species habitat owned and managed by Travis County, the City of Austin, The Nature Conservancy, the Lower Colorado River Authority, and Travis Audubon Society.



Image: City of Austin



Image: City of Austin

Parks and Recreation Facilities in Austin (2011)			
Type of Facility	Number	Type of Facility	Number
District park	13	Greenway	29
Neighborhood park	74	Golf course	6
Pocket park	19	Senior activity center	3
School park	22	Tennis center	4
Metropolitan park	12	Tennis Courts	108
Nature preserve	13	Special park	28
Swimming Pools	47	Athletic Fields	172
Recreation Centers	20	Playscapes	90
Senior Activity Centers	3	Senior Activity Centers	3
Garden Center	1	Nature and Science Center	1
Rental Facilities	2	Art Centers	2
Museums	5	Amphitheaters	6
Hike and Bike Trails	74+ miles	Beach-front Facilities	2
TOTAL FACILITIES			685

- There is a need for more infill parkland within walking distance of homes in many established neighborhoods, particularly in far south, north-central, northeast, and southeast Austin, and a variety of parkland types, including neighborhood parks and wildlife habitat in the southwestern, northern, northeastern, and northwestern parts of the city and extraterritorial jurisdiction.

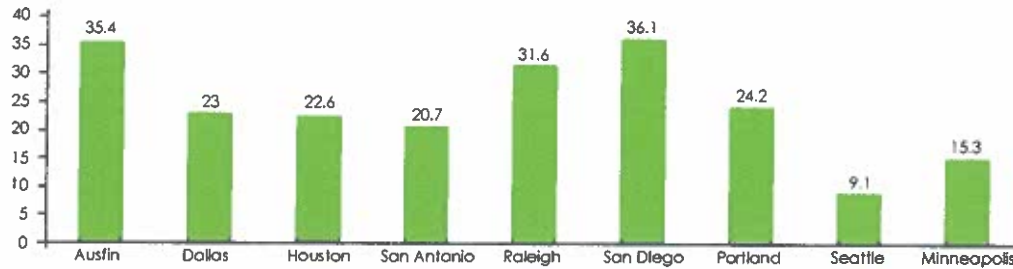
#### Library System

- The Austin Public Library System has 20 branch libraries, the John Henry Faulk Central Library, and the Austin History Center. In 2006, voters approved bonds for a new 250,000 square foot central library that is scheduled to open in 2014.
- Over 3.6 million people used the library system in Fiscal Year 2009-2010, including more than 700,000 computer login users.
- The library system has more than 1.3 million books, audiobooks, LPs, DVDs, CDs, e-books, and graphic novels. In Fiscal Year 2010, the Library Department checked out more than four million items.

#### Potable Water and Drainage

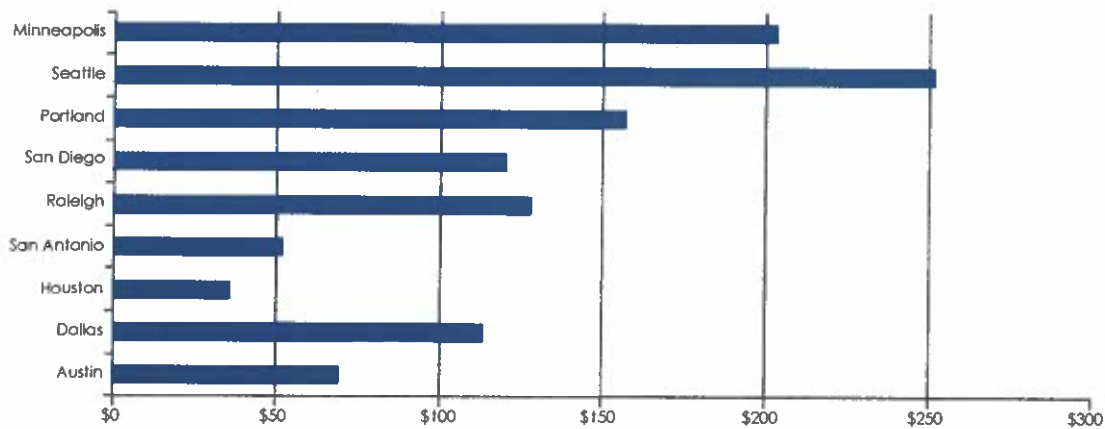
- The Austin Water Utility directly provides treated water to approximately 850,000 people, with wholesale water sales to another 45,000, for a total service population of approximately 895,000.
- Austin Water owns and operates two water treatment plants which draw from Lake Austin with a combined treatment capacity of 285 million gallons per day, 46 pump stations, 38 treated water storage reservoirs, 3,651 miles of water main lines, and 25,300 public fire hydrants.

Park Acreage Per 1,000 Residents, FY2009



Source: The Trust for Public Land

Park And Recreation Spending Per Capita, FY 2008



Source: The Trust for Public Land

- A new water treatment plant and transmission main project is under construction. This plant will draw its supply from Lake Travis.
- Austin's 2011 five-year average water use is 163 gallons per capita per day. City Council has set a goal of 140 gallons per capita per day or less by 2020 through water conservation.
- The City's top water conservation priorities, in order of ten-year estimated savings, include: water restrictions (6.16 million gallons per day), reclaimed water use (5.95 million gallons per day), utility water rates structuring (5.0 million gallons per day), and reducing water losses (4.8 million gallons per day).
- The Watershed Protection Department is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the municipal storm water conveyance utility systems for the city, which includes the area's natural water resources that form elements of the municipal storm water conveyance systems.



### **Wastewater**

- The Austin Water Utility manages approximately 195,000 wastewater service connections, which in 2008 represented service to about 830,000 people.
- Austin Water owns and operates two central wastewater treatment plants: the South Austin Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Walnut Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. These two plants have a combined treatment capacity of 150 million gallons per day.
- In a typical year, three percent of the wastewater received at the city's wastewater treatment plants is treated and reused for non-potable uses. During 2009, Austin Water Utility reclaimed and used almost 2 billion gallons of treated wastewater from its two central wastewater treatment plants and three smaller satellite treatment plants.
- The Austin Clean Water Program was completed in April 2009 and reduced sewer overflows from 13 million gallons in 2002 to less than 301,800 gallons in 2008, and removed 20 miles of sewer lines from creek beds.

### **Solid Waste**

- Austin Resource Recovery is responsible for city-wide litter abatement and collection of discarded materials from approximately 164,000 residential customers, 235,000 anti-litter customers, and 2,600 commercial customers. Most multi-family residences, business, and institutions must contract with private haulers to collect and process discarded materials.
- Austin's residential and workforce populations discard about 1.4 to 1.5 million tons of materials per year. These discarded materials are either disposed of at landfills (about one million tons) or are diverted from the landfills for reuse or recycling. Austin Resource Recovery's customers contribute approximately 25% of these materials each year.
- The City of Austin closed its landfill and is now part of a regional system of four municipal solid waste landfills, two construction and demolition debris landfills, and fifteen transfer and citizen collection stations.
- Austin offers curbside recycling every two weeks to its customers. Nearly 70 percent of Austin residents living in single-family dwellings participate in curbside recycling.
- The primary sources of recyclable and organic resources are curbside recycling (46 percent), collection of yard trimmings and brush (38 percent), and private users of the Austin's materials recovery facility (17 percent). Compostable organics comprise over half of the total material discarded. It is estimated that the value of the materials currently sent to the landfill and lost to the local economy is over \$40 million annually.

## Energy

- Austin Energy serves 388,000 customers and a population of more than 900,000, including several communities outside of Austin's city limits. Austin Energy's 200 largest commercial and industrial customers provide about 34 percent of all revenues. Austin Energy also serves four municipal street and highway programs (powering street and traffic lights, for example) as well as more than 1,500 governments and agencies (including the City of Austin, State of Texas, Travis County, and the Lower Colorado River Authority).

Electricity customers by class		
Customer Class	Number of Customers	Consumption
Residential	345,197	3,908,318,000
Commercial	41,825	4,350,912,000
Industrial	75	1,930,289,000
Street/highway	4	47,230,000
Other government	1,519	1,088,320,000

- As of September 2008, Austin Energy had approximately 2,760 megawatts of generation capacity, including facilities owned or co-owned and power purchased under contract. Purchased power resources include an additional 300 MW of summer-only power purchases through summer 2010. Austin Energy receives base load generation from the South Texas Project (nuclear) and the Fayette Power Project (coal). Austin Energy owns two natural gas-fired generation facilities—the Decker Creek Power Station and the Sand Hill Energy Center—both located in Austin.
- Austin Energy has contracts for the annual energy produced by 439 MW of wind turbines located in West Texas. The utility also receives 12 MW of output from two landfill methane gas projects, one located near Austin and the other in San Antonio.
- From 1982 through 2003, Austin Energy's conservation, efficiency, and load-shifting programs reduced peak demand by 600 MW. Since 2004, the utility has been working on a goal to reduce peak demand by an additional 700 MW by 2020.
- Austin Energy's 2020 energy resources plan calls for maintaining its current generation resources and its current conservation and load-shifting goal of 700 MW by 2020. To meet the remaining gap of approximately 238 MW at its projected load, the utility plans to add 300 MW of natural gas generation by expanding the Sand Hill Energy Center (100 MW of that total is currently under construction) and 912 MW of renewable.
- Austin Energy maintains over 5,000 miles of overhead primary and secondary power lines, 4,000 miles of underground primary and secondary lines, and 48 substations.

### What Does It Mean? – City Facilities and Services

- Continued low-density suburban development can strain the City's public safety budget, as more development on the city's fringes will require additional police and fire stations to ensure adequate response times.
- The per unit costs associated with serving low-density, sprawling development with water and wastewater services are generally greater than those associated with denser, more compact development.
- Creek flooding poses a recurring risk to public safety and property. Localized flooding threatens property across the city due to undersized, deteriorated, clogged, or inadequate storm drain systems.
- The city has an above-average amount of parkland, but funding for maintenance and upgrades has not kept up.
- More attention needs to be paid to creating smaller parks that are in or within walking distance of neighborhoods. The absence of these smaller parks means that many areas of the city are not adequately served by the park system.
- Austin's existing parks and trail system are amenities that should be considered in planning for infill in and redevelopment of urban core areas.
- As the city becomes more compact, there is a greater need to incorporate more urban play spaces for children in parks and other public places.
- Austin is a regional leader in conservation strategies, but it must be proactive in planning for supplying water and other municipal services to its rapidly-growing population.
- More residents and businesses need to be encouraged to recycle to reduce the amount of solid waste sent to landfills.

Data source: City of Austin  
Community Inventory

## SOCIETY AND HEALTH

**Rising housing and transportation costs, school quality, and access to healthcare, food, and social services are major considerations for families and residents living in Austin.**

### Families and Households

- Families make up a slim majority of Austin households (52 percent), compared with 62 percent in the Austin-Round Rock metropolitan area and 67 percent in the nation.
- Households with children declined substantially from 1970 to 1990. Since 1990, the proportion of households with children has held steady (slightly declining from 30.2 percent in 1990 to 29.5 percent in 2009).
- Households with children make up a smaller part of the population in the urban core, compared with the edge of the city and the extra-territorial jurisdiction. A number of factors contribute to this disparity: higher housing costs, fewer quality public schools, walking and biking safety, and access to key amenities such as parks and childcare. See Figure 2-6 for change in households with children from 2000 to 2010.
- Austin's non-Hispanic White population is composed of fewer households with children (20 percent), compared with African-American (36 percent), Asian-American (35 percent), and Hispanic (45 percent) households. However, the total number of White and Hispanic households with children is about the same.

### Education

- Eleven school districts educate Austin-area students, with more than 170 schools within the planning area. Students also attend about 30 charter or alternative schools and more than 30 private schools.
- With more than 80,000 students, the Austin Independent School District is the largest educational provider for students grades K-12.
- All of the school districts in the Austin area have increased their enrollment since 2000.
- In 2009, 71 public schools in the Austin area were rated exemplary. Four, however, were rated academically unacceptable, all located in Austin's east side.
- Two area school districts Austin and Manor, struggle with drop-out rates, with district-wide rates greater than the state average. This is particularly an issue among African American and Hispanic students. The drop-out rate in the Austin Independent School District is 12.6 percent for African-American students and 11.9 percent for Hispanic students, but only 3.5 percent for White (non-Hispanic) students.
- The high rate of teenage pregnancies in Austin and Travis County contributes to significant dropout rate of many area high schools.



- A further challenge for many students from low-income families is the need to change schools when they change residences. A 2010 study by the Austin Independent School District, Travis County, and City of Austin found high rates of student mobility at several schools in the east and northeast part of the school district.
- Colleges and universities are essential to Austin's identity. The city is home to the University of Texas (one of the largest universities in the nation), St. Edwards University, Huston-Tillotson University, Concordia University, and Austin Community College. There are about 100,000 college or university students in Austin.
- In line with other community colleges in Texas, 15 percent of full-time Austin Community College students go on to earn a four-year degree after six years.
- In 2010, over 4,800 educational programs were hosted by the Library Department. This includes free computer classes held at three public libraries.

Independent School Districts	Service Area		Enrollment	
	Total (Sq MI)	Within Austin's ETJ (Sq MI)	Total	At schools within Austin ETJ
Austin	229.8	226.2	81,763	81,686
Bastrop	427.6	3.9	8,538	0
Del Valle	171.2	138.4	9,234	8,618
Dripping Springs	199	3.8	4,023	0
Eanes	33.3	28.4	7,325	3,342
Hays Consolidated	225.5	20.3	13,047	0
Lago Vista	35	3	1,239	0
Lake Travis	117.6	23.2	5,871	695
Leander	198.3	51.6	26,551	4,909
Manor	89.2	57.7	5,828	2,371
Pflugerville	76.6	21.9	20,807	7,901
Round Rock	98.2	41.4	40,448	14,870

#### **Health and Healthcare**

- From 1999 to 2008, the total mortality rate in Travis County was 774 deaths per 100,000 people. African Americans experienced a significantly higher mortality rate (1,002 deaths per 100,000 people), while Hispanics experienced a lower rate (692 deaths per 100,000 people). Though these mortality rates are adjusted for the overall age of the population, the City epidemiologist believes that a generally older African-American population and generally younger Hispanic population continues to contribute to these differences.
- Diabetes, heart disease, and chronic lower respiratory disease result in about 29 percent of deaths in Travis County. These diseases also reduce Austinites' quality of life.

Eight percent of Travis County residents suffer from diabetes, 5 percent from cardiovascular disease, and 7 percent from asthma.

- Hispanics and African Americans experienced higher rates of obesity and diabetes than the general population. Whites and African-Americans experienced higher rates of cardiovascular disease and asthma (with African-Americans experiencing twice the overall asthma rate).
- In 2010, 19 percent of Travis County residents who needed to see a doctor could not at some point because of cost. This rate was higher among Hispanics (24 percent) and African Americans (23 percent). Similarly, while 89 percent of White residents had access to some kind of health care coverage, only 75 percent of African American residents and 61 percent of Hispanic residents did. Less than 20 percent of Austin physicians accept new Medicaid or Medicare patients.
- While Texas continues to have a high rate of teenage pregnancy compared with other states, the incidence of teen pregnancy in Travis County has generally declined since the mid-1990s. Teen pregnancy has a disproportionate effect on communities of color: the birth rate for Hispanic teens is almost ten times higher than that of White non-Hispanic teens; the rate for African American teens is two times greater.
- The Austin region is served by three major hospital systems: Seton Family of Hospitals (based in Austin), St. David's Health Care (based in Austin), and the Scott and White network (northern Central Texas region).
- The Travis County Healthcare District created in 2004, doing business as Central Health, provides publicly funded healthcare services to the county's low-income residents through its Medical Access Program, a health plan with a network of healthcare providers. Benefits are available to families at or below poverty level through a limited provider network. Central Health also pays for discounted care through selected providers for individuals earning up to 200% of poverty level.
- The University Medical Center at Brackenridge also provides hospital-based services when necessary.
- Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas is the only dedicated freestanding pediatric facility in the region.
- The Integrated Care Collaborative, a nonprofit alliance of health care providers in Central Texas, works to improve the healthcare delivery to the poor and people without health insurance and operates and manages the region's electronic health information exchange, the ICare system.

Fig. 2.6 - CHANGE IN POPULATION YOUNGER THAN AGE 18  
(TRAVIS COUNTY, 2000-2010)





Health Insurance Coverage of Austin Residents, 2009		
Group	Insured	Uninsured
Children under 18	84.7%	15.3%
Working-age adults	71.4%	28.6%
Adults 65 and older	96.8%	3.2%
Individuals with a disability	82.3%	17.7%
Source: U.S. Census Bureau		

### **Public Health and Social Services**

- The Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department provides public health, social, and environmental health services for Austin and Travis County and serves nearly one million residents. Working in partnership with the community, Health and Human creates and provides services that improve quality of life, lower morbidity and mortality rates, address social inequities, and prevent both contagious and chronic diseases. The department operates six neighborhood centers that provide social services for low- and moderate-income families. Services include child care programs, homeless assistance, day labor and employment programs, mental health/substance abuse services, programs for at-risk youth, services to seniors and persons with disabilities, and basic needs services.
- In addition, they provide the following services: vital records, emergency preparedness and response, regulatory and environmental health, immunization, women's and children's health, sexually transmitted disease, disease surveillance, and chronic disease prevention services.
- The Travis County Health and Human Services and Veteran's Services Department works to prevent homeless, domestic abuse, and communicable diseases.
- The City of Austin's budget for fiscal year 2011-2012 allocated \$14.1 million dollars for social services funding.
- Austin's Animal Services manages one of the largest animal shelters in Central Texas, caring for more than 23,000 animals each year. In 2011, the City moved its animal shelter to new facility on Levander Loop and achieved "no-kill" city status.
- Austin is home to many not-for profit organizations but has a history of low rates of charitable giving.



## What Does It Mean? – Society and Health

- Families with children are not necessarily staying in Austin. Rising housing costs, school quality, safety, available amenities, and educational costs are concerns for families.
- The two school districts serving the largest area in the extrajurisdiction (Austin ISD and Del Valle ISD) are facing challenges related to population growth, immigration/language needs, poverty, transient families, and sharply reduced funding from the State of Texas.
- Higher educational institutions are a major part of Austin's identity, history, and economy.
- Austin has a very active social service network. The Community Action Network is developing a set of priority indicators for children and youth to measure progress.
- Teenage pregnancies can have profound effects on the mother's future prospects, her family, child, and the broader community. Teen parents are more likely to drop out of school, not attend college, experience unemployment, and earn lower wages. Children of teenage mothers are more at risk for having low-birth weight, prematurity, and infant mortality.
- Design of the physical environment affects public health. Ensuring that new development creates walkable and bikable communities with safe pedestrian facilities and recreation opportunities can promote the health and well-being of Austin's residents and reduce risk factors associated with diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.

Data sources: City of Austin Community Inventory, Create Austin TXP, Inc.'s Economic Impact 2005 Study of Austin, and the Urban Institute's Cultural Vitality in Communities Study.

## ARTS AND CULTURE

**We are a leader in creative and artistic fields, but rising costs of living and working in Austin may affect the long-term viability of the arts community.**

### Key Facts/Trends

#### Arts/Cultural Events

- Austin is nationally renowned for its arts scene and has earned the nickname "The Live Music Capital of the World." The city is home to over 100 live music venues, multiple music festivals, 1,543 music-related businesses, and over 1,900 music acts.
- Austin has historically drawn large numbers of creative individuals fueling a strong experimental drive for a city of Austin's size. It has a growing film industry, a thriving gaming and digital media industry, a new works theater community, and serves as an incubator

for emerging artists and entrepreneurs. Yet there is a concern by mid-career and mature artists that there are not adequate services, facilities or commerce to support them in their artistic endeavors; many move elsewhere as a result.

- There are over 35 museums in the Austin Museum Partnership (a consortium of museums) which includes arts, sciences, history, nature preserves, music, and government museums. The city's numerous museums and galleries include the Mexic-Arte and the Jack S. Blanton Museum. However, Austin does not yet have the iconic museums of other cities of the same size.
- The City of Austin's Park and Recreation Department serves over 650,000 people a year with arts, culture and nature programs at its facilities, including the Elisabet Ney Museum and the Zilker Botanical Gardens.
- In 2006, Austin ranked second in major U.S. cities in terms of the number of non-profit community celebrations, festivals, fairs, and parades per 1,000 persons.
- Austin has been commissioning award-winning public art projects through the Art in Public Places program since 1985; however, many of the projects are not well-known to residents and visitors.
- Theater and dance are significant contributors to Austin's creative economy (over \$330 million in 2005). The city has over 32 theater venues, with many more theater companies and playwrights.

#### ***Economic Impact and Funding***

- The creative sector (including music, film and visual media, not-for-profit performing arts, visual arts, and arts-related tourism) contributed 44,000 permanent jobs, \$48 million in tax revenue, and over \$2.2 billion in annual economic activity in 2004.
- Austin's music festivals are important to the city's economy. The 2011 South by Southwest contributed \$167 million to the local economy; the 2011 Austin City Limits Festival is expected to contribute \$73 million.
- The city's film, television, sports, and animation industries generate approximately \$282 million annually and provides nearly 2,700 jobs.
- In 2006, residents approved a \$31.5 million bond measure to support construction and renovation of seven of the City-owned arts and performance facilities. Yet there continues to be a perceived lack of affordable, accessible and/or appropriately equipped arts spaces.
- Over the last few years, the City of Austin's Hotel Occupancy Tax portion for the non-profit arts and culture groups and sponsored artists projects enabled the City to allocate approximately \$5 million annually to 240 non-profit arts groups.



Image: City of Austin

- Austin has a long history of supporting funding for its cultural facilities. In 2006, residents approved a \$31.5 million bond measure to support construction and renovation of seven of the city-owned cultural facilities.
- The City of Austin allocates approximately \$5 million annually from the Hotel and Occupancy Tax to non-profit arts and cultural groups.

#### **Arts Education Programs**

- The Austin Independent School District, other school districts, and private schools operate arts education programs as an integral part of student learning and development. Nevertheless, students in all areas of the city do not have equal access to arts programming.
- In 2011/2012 the Austin Independent School District, the City of Austin, mindPOP (representing arts and cultural organizations), and the Kennedy Center's "Any Given Child" program have partnered to inventory arts education in K-8th grade in the school district, determine gaps and create a strategic plan.
- In 2010, the History, Art and Nature Division facilities provided 1,841 adult and children classes.
- While arts, film, and music education is strong in area universities and colleges, technology education is somewhat limited.

### **What Does It Mean? – Arts and Creativity**

- Austin's live music and arts scene is a cornerstone of the city's identity.
- Creative industries are an important element of the city's economy and can be leveraged for additional economic growth.
- The arts and creative community struggles with issues of funding, affordable and appropriately sized performance and practice space, housing, health and healthcare, and quality of life issues.
- City and private funding for local arts facilities and programs is critical to the ongoing strength of the arts in Austin.
- Lower-income communities may not have adequate opportunities to participate in Austin's arts programs and events.
- Workforce development programs need to provide job training for technological, arts-related occupations.

Data sources: City of Austin Community Inventory, CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan

## DEVELOPING A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Austin has long been the hub of the Central Texas region. Our Central Business District is the “Downtown of Central Texas.” Although Austin is the principal place where jobs and necessary goods, services, entertainment, and amenities are concentrated, the city’s role as the only regional center has changed as increased suburban development pulled against this identity, reducing the city’s share of employment, services, and housing.

This does not mean that we are losing our central position in the region. As the employment, educational, medical, and retail hub of Central Texas, we attract thousands of commuters, patients, shoppers, and visitors each day. Other communities may be gaining new retail, offices, and housing, but Austin’s unique assets—our educational institutions, government facilities, hospitals and emerging medical districts, the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, downtown, independent businesses, arts and entertainment offerings, and natural amenities—ensure that we will remain the regional leader for the foreseeable future. In many regards, the success and growth of the surrounding suburban communities is directly tied to Austin’s past and continued regional role as the arts, entertainment, and economic center.

At an even larger scale, Austin is part of the dynamic, fast-growing Dallas/Fort Worth-San Antonio-Houston Texas Triangle “mega-region” (see Figure 2.8). We are responsible for working with our neighboring governments, and larger cities like Dallas and San Antonio, to understand the complexity of regional issues, develop coordinated strategies, and ensure that, as a region, we have the capacity to move forward.

## CENTRAL TEXAS REGION IN 2011

### Regional Issues

Being a regional leader means more than having the most people or assets; we must understand that our actions affect nearby communities. Austin’s problems are, by and large, the region’s, and because we are closely connected to our neighbors, our solutions must be mutually beneficial. There are several key issues facing the region that must be tackled in a collaborative manner across municipal boundaries.

### Conversion of agricultural land and fragmented development

Much of the land on Austin’s periphery and in its extra-territorial jurisdiction is agricultural or undeveloped. Development has been happening in these areas as parcels are converted to subdivisions and commercial and office centers, particularly along or near major roadways. The U.S. Census of Agriculture reports that between 2002 to 2007, nine percent of the region’s agricultural land was taken out of production, with the highest rate of loss occurring in Hays and Travis counties. This coincides with an increase in land values throughout the Austin area and a decline in the profitability of small farms. Fragmented, low-density development outside the region’s municipalities is more costly to serve with infrastructure and services, requires residents to depend exclusively on the automobile to travel, and encroaches upon and consumes the region’s open spaces.



### Limited water supply and water systems

Some new development is occurring in outlying areas that have limited or no water systems to support moderate or concentrated growth. Many area communities do not have resources to extend existing infrastructure or do not have contracts for long-term water supply. Some of those that do have contracts are already exceeding their yearly allocations. Limited availability of public water infrastructure reinforces scattered, sprawling development, and new draws on groundwater sources will affect the region's water supply, particularly in times of extended drought.

### Housing-jobs imbalance

Half the working-age populations of all the counties in the region, except Travis, commute to another county for work. Most of this travel moves toward Austin, but increasingly this travel is also between the communities surrounding Austin. Even Austin has seen its share of residents commuting out of the city grow, rising over nine percent between 2002 and 2009. This work-related travel points to a regional mismatch between the location of residences and jobs. Some of this may be attributable to lifestyle preferences, such as personal preferences for small towns or rural living, but it is also the result of rising housing costs throughout the region. Prospective homeowners must "drive until they qualify" to find affordable housing that meets their needs, and many of these affordable units are found in distant subdivisions with limited transportation options.

### Rising costs of housing and transportation

Land values and housing costs are increasing throughout the region. Some of this increase is due to funding delays for new infrastructure (i.e., new residential developments have been approved, but construction must wait until adequate infrastructure can be built to serve them; in the interim, costs rise for existing units because fewer new units are being built). Prices for infill units (new housing built in already developed areas) are increasing for different reasons, most of which relate to limited supply and growing land values in more developed areas and the complexity and regulatory difficulty associated with this type of development. Many Central Texans must live in locations they can afford, no matter how inconvenient this location is to work, shopping, or services. Affordable housing choices for single- or married couples without children, other than single-family houses and sprawling garden-styled apartments, is even more limited.

Transportation costs have been rising steadily over the past decade due to increased gas prices. This has created financial burdens for many households who moved to Austin's periphery to secure affordable housing, but now find themselves farther away from jobs and needed services and able only to travel by car. In a 2010 report, the Capital Area Council of Governments found that more than half of the region's households spent at least 45 percent of their incomes on housing and transportation costs.<sup>1</sup>

### Few regional transportation options

As the region's population struggles with rising costs, the shortcomings of the regional transportation system become even more pronounced. The regional transportation net-

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<sup>1</sup> This figure represents the Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos MSA, which includes Burnet County in addition to Travis, Williamson, Hays, Caldwell, and Bastrop counties.

work is built for cars, and the growing congestion we see is the direct result of increasingly distant growth with few transportation options. Too many people live and work in places where densities are too low to support regular transit service or are outside of a transit agency's service area. In many places served by transit, the routes and the frequency of service are so limited that people do not view it as a viable alternative to driving.

### Regional job growth mostly in lower-wage positions

The Central Texas economy has continued to grow through the current national recession, although growth has slowed in high-tech, higher-skilled sectors. Much of the region's recent job creation has been directly related to its rapid population growth over the past few decades. As Central Texas has welcomed new residents from all parts of the country and the world, demand has increased for service-oriented jobs, such as leisure and hospitality services and business and professional services. These jobs typically require fewer skills, pay lower wages than professional and high-tech jobs, and offer fewer benefits. Households faced with lower-paying jobs and increasing housing and transportation costs are experiencing greater economic stresses. In a 2009 report, the Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project estimated that approximately 40 percent of the region's families live "at the edge of their means" due to the widening gap between household incomes and household expenses.<sup>2</sup>

### Different legal powers to regulate development

Central Texas contains two types of governments with land-use authority: counties and municipalities. The State of Texas allows municipalities to regulate development comprehensively within their corporate boundaries. They can also regulate some development within their extraterritorial jurisdictions to ensure that it meets minimum standards, works in conjunction with infrastructure investments, and minimizes impacts on natural resources. Counties have fewer controls over development, mostly due to the assumption that their jurisdictions will not contain large areas of urbanized land; however, this is increasingly not the case in the counties surrounding larger urban centers. Today, Texas counties have only the ability to regulate subdivisions, on-site sewage systems, floodplain development, and water supply. A few, such as Travis County, have the power to require stormwater management, impose fire codes, and develop standards for water wells to prevent groundwater contamination. Unlike cities, counties do not have the authority to enact building codes, a zoning ordinance, or impact fees. As a large percentage of the region's growth is occurring outside municipal boundaries, the limited power of the counties provides little control over the location, quality, and impacts of development. This has resulted in low-density, piecemeal development throughout the region and makes it difficult for jurisdictions to work together to implement regional growth management strategies.

Finding and implementing solutions to these issues only can be achieved if we adopt a regional perspective. This perspective should be "Austin with our partners." We are the leader of Central Texas and through Imagine Austin and other regional projects we will work with our neighbors to improve the future of the region.



Image: City of Austin



Image: City of Austin

<sup>2</sup> The "region" referenced here includes Travis, Williamson, Hays, Caldwell, Bastrop, and Burnet counties.

Fig. 2.7 - SURROUNDING JURISDICTIONS

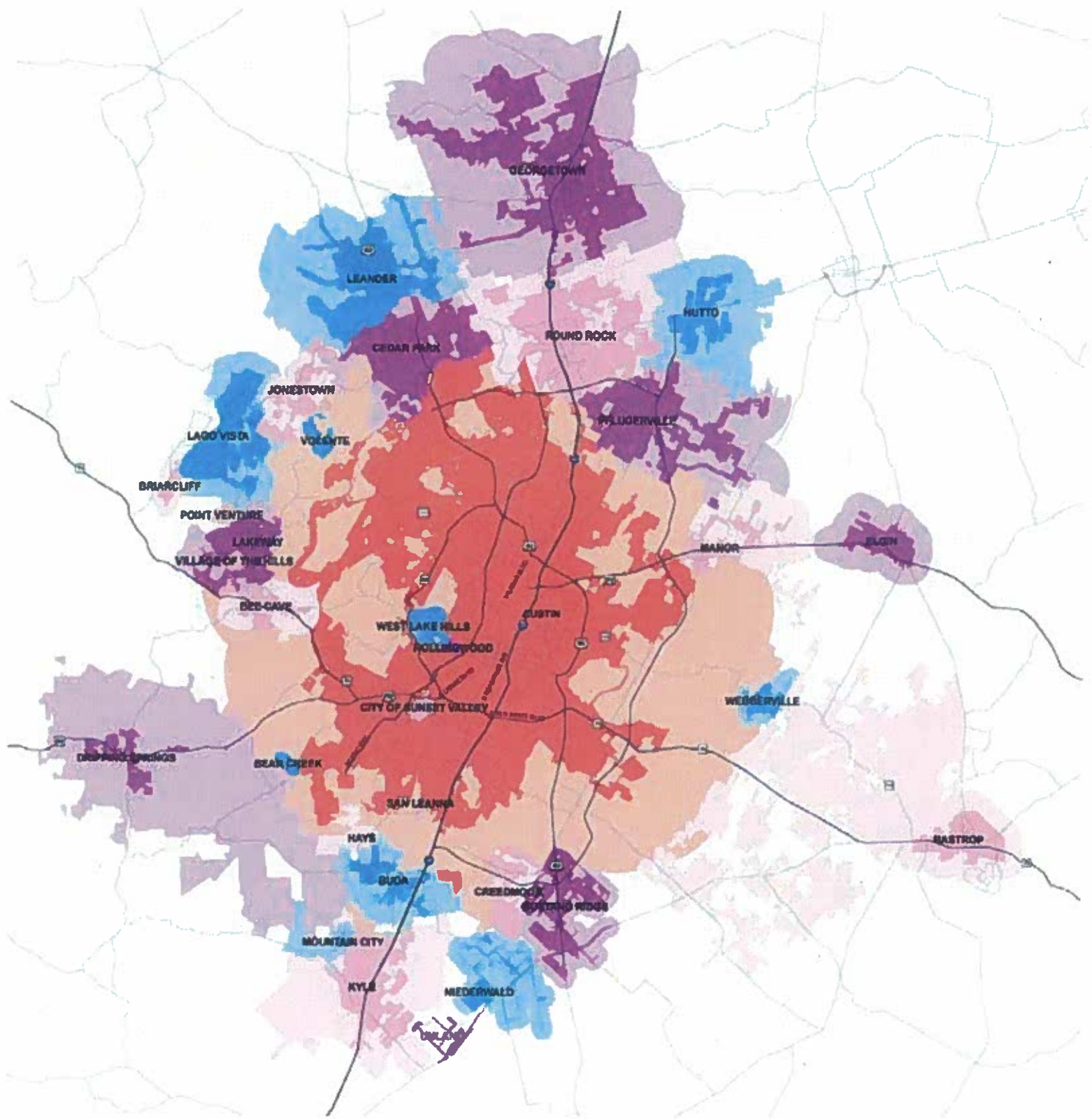
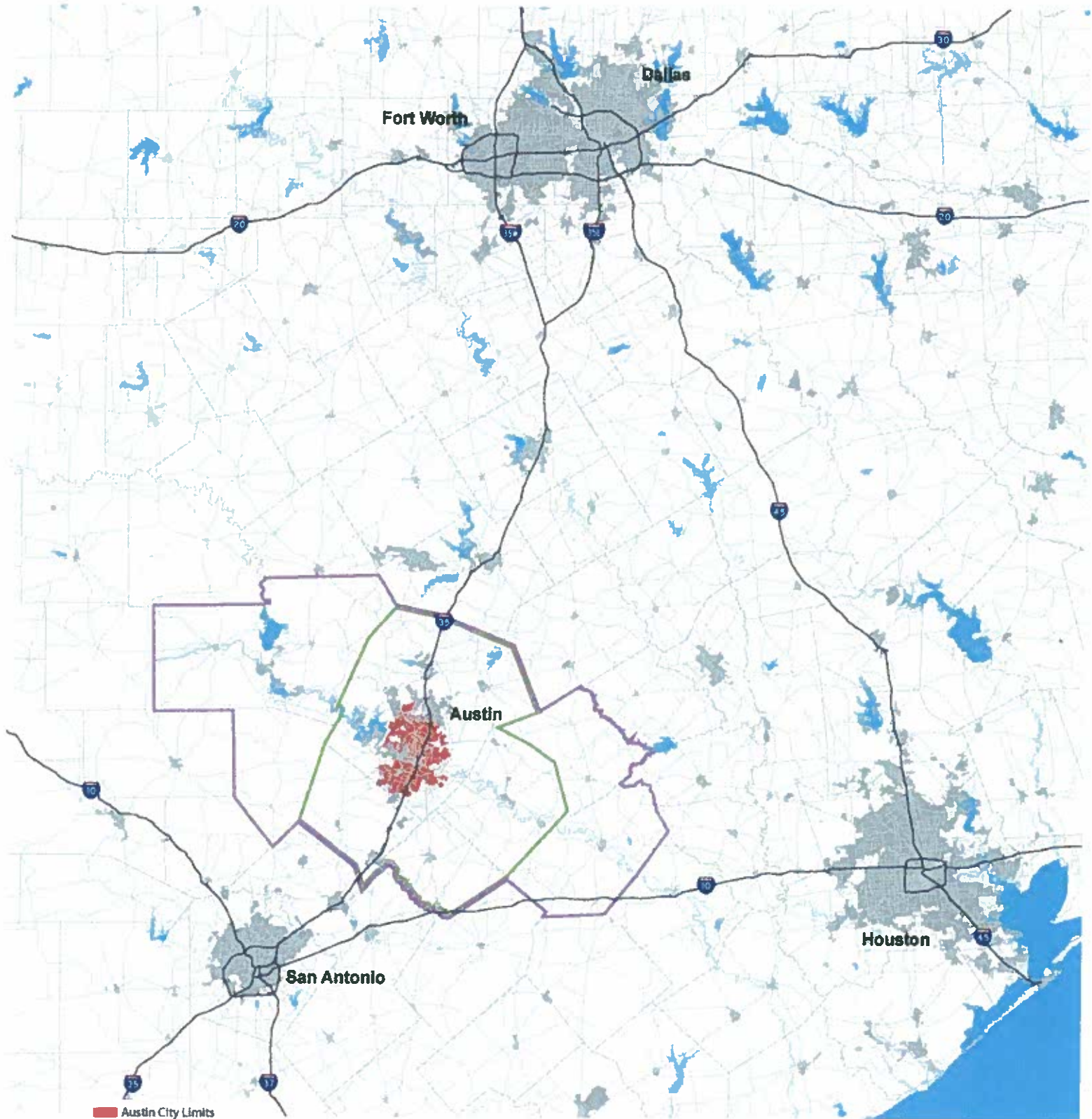




Fig. 2.8 - AUSTIN'S LOCATION WITHIN THE REGION (TEXAS TRIANGLE)



- Austin City Limits
- Census Urbanized Areas
- CAMPO Region
- CAPCOG Region
- County Boundaries
- Interstates
- Major Roadways

The comprehensive plan includes a regional component developed through coordination with surrounding county and municipal jurisdictions, the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization [CAMPO], and the Capital Area Council of Governments [CAPCOG]. For the purposes of the issues identified in this section, the "region" includes Travis, Hays, Caldwell, Williamson, and Bastrop counties, except where noted otherwise. Many of these issues are extensions of those affecting Austin, especially at the edges of our corporate boundary and in the extraterritorial jurisdiction.





# IMAGINING AUSTIN: OUR VISION OF A COMPLETE COMMUNITY

Imagine Austin Vision Statement

We Will Become a City of Complete Communities





## IMAGINING AUSTIN: OUR VISION OF A COMPLETE COMMUNITY

For many years our community vision has been "to be the most livable city in the country." However, defining "livability" is difficult, and a simple statement cannot sum up all that we are or could be. Austin is a big city and growing larger and more complex. When we imagine a future, our vision must be more detailed, comprehensive, and reflect this complexity. We can begin by saying "the most livable," but it's only a first step. Our new community vision must point toward the complete city we want to become.

### IMAGINE AUSTIN VISION STATEMENT

The process to develop a new vision for Austin engaged thousands of residents over a nine-month period beginning with the kickoff of the Imagine Austin planning process in October 2009. Through community forums, social media, surveys, focus groups, small meetings between neighbors and friends, and special events, residents described their ideas for Austin in 2039—our bicentennial.

The Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Task Force, appointed by City Council to help guide and champion the process, worked directly from the public input to develop a draft vision statement. The public reviewed and rated each vision component and the revised vision was further reviewed and recommended by the Planning Commission and endorsed by City Council. More details about these meetings and the entire planning process can be found in Appendix B and online.

The Imagine Austin vision statement embodies our commitment to preserving the best of Austin and changing those things that need to be changed. The vision statement answers the question, "What sort of city do we want Austin to be?" with a series of principles that address the physical and social evolution of the city and the overall well-being of its residents. The importance of Austin's people lies at the heart of the vision statement. It acknowledges that the city is a place for people and that inclusion and community leadership will be critical to realizing our long-term goals.

The importance of Austin's people lies at the heart of the vision statement.



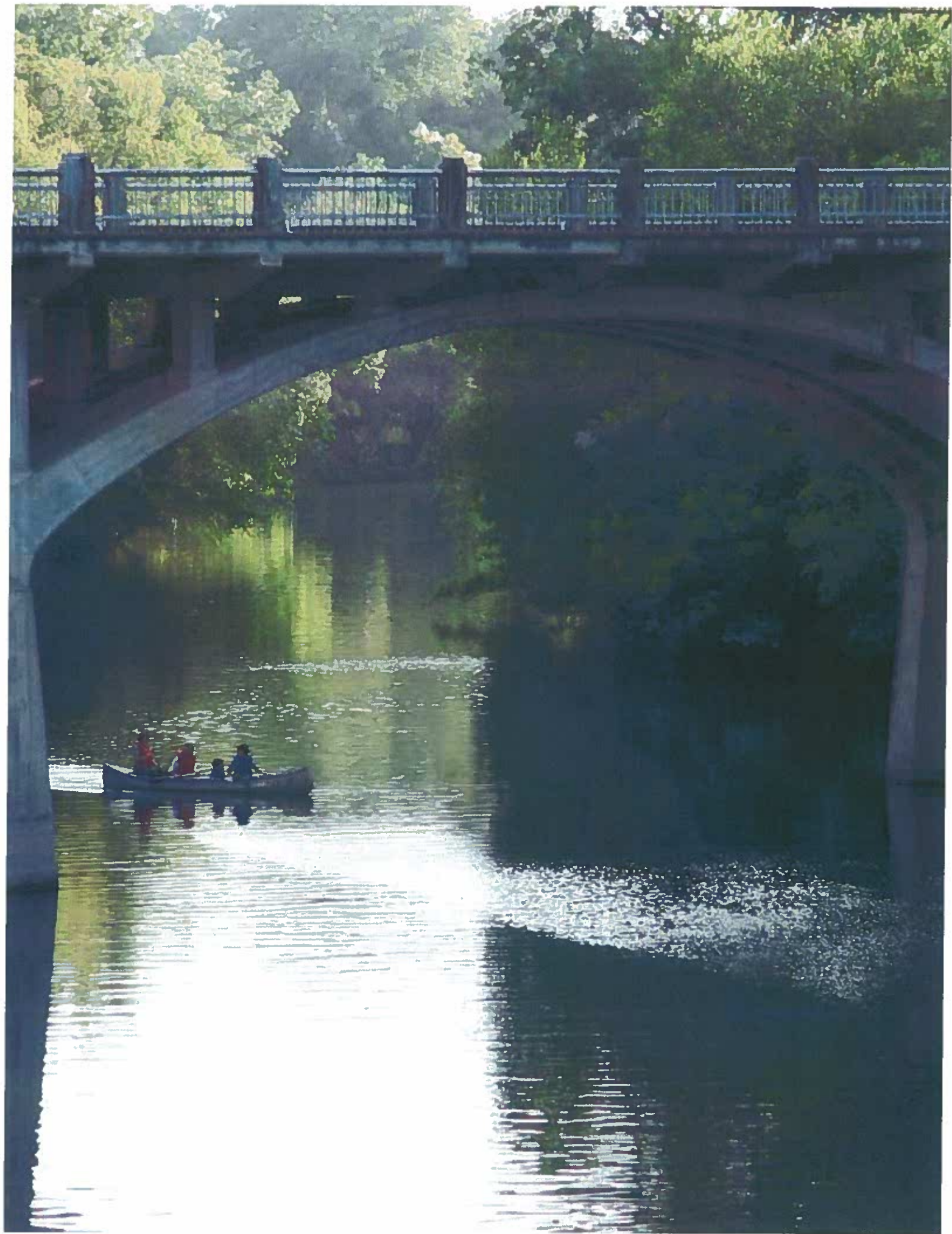
## **A Vision for Austin's Future**

As it approaches its 200th anniversary, Austin is a beacon of sustainability, social equity and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its citizens and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all.

Austin's greatest asset is its people: passionate about our city, committed to its improvement, and determined to see this vision become a reality.







# LIVABLE



## AUSTIN IS LIVABLE:

One of Austin's foundations is its safe, well-maintained, stable, and attractive neighborhoods and places whose character and history are preserved. Economically mixed and diverse neighborhoods across all parts of the city have a range of affordable housing options. All residents have a variety of urban, suburban, and semi-rural lifestyle choices with access to quality schools, libraries, parks and recreation, health and human services, and other outstanding public facilities and services.

- Development occurs in connected and pedestrian-friendly patterns supporting transit and urban lifestyles and reducing sprawl, while protecting and enhancing neighborhoods.
- Downtown offers a safe, vibrant, day and night time urban lifestyle for residents, workers, and visitors.
- Development occurs across the city in a manner friendly to families with children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.
- Austin's unique character and local businesses are recognized as a vital part of our community.
- Clear guidelines support both quality development and preservation that sustain and improve Austin's character and provide certainty for residents and the business community.
- Austin's diverse population is active and healthy, with access to locally-grown, nourishing foods, and affordable healthcare.





# NATURAL

## AUSTIN IS NATURAL AND SUSTAINABLE:



Austin is a green city. We are environmentally aware and ensure the long-term health and quality of our community through responsible resource use as citizens at the local, regional, and global level. Growth and infrastructure systems are well-managed to respect the limitations of our natural resources.

- We enjoy an accessible, well-maintained network of parks throughout our city.
- We protect the beauty of the Colorado River watershed, Hill Country and Blackland Prairie and value our farmland that nurtures local food production.
- Our open spaces and preserves shape city planning, reduce infrastructure costs, and provide us with recreation, clean air and water, local food, cooler temperatures, and biodiversity.
- We conserve water, energy, and other valuable resources.
- Austin is a leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- We use and inspire new technologies that create more sustainable communities while reducing our dependence on environmentally costly practices.

## AUSTIN IS CREATIVE:



Creativity is the engine of Austin's prosperity. Arts, culture, and creativity are essential keys to the city's unique and distinctive identity and are valued as vital contributors to our community's character, quality of life and economy.

- As a community that continues to stimulate innovation, Austin is a magnet that draws and retains talented and creative individuals.
- Our creative efforts reflect, engage with and appeal to the ethnic, gender and age diversity of Austin and to all socioeconomic levels.
- Residents and visitors participate fully in arts and cultural activities because the opportunities are valued, visible, and accessible.
- Our buildings and places reflect the inspirational and creative spirit of who we are as Austinites, through design excellence, public art and beautiful, accessible public spaces.

# CREATIVE



# EDUCATED



## **AUSTIN IS EDUCATED:**

Education is the hope for Austin's future. Austin provides everyone with an equal opportunity for the highest quality of education that allows them to fully develop their potential. Networks of community partnerships support our schools and ensure that our children receive the resources and services they need to thrive and learn.

- Our school campuses provide safe and stable environments enabling future success.
- Neighborhood schools and libraries serve as centers for community collaboration, recreational, and social events, as well as educational and learning opportunities.
- In partnership with private entities and the broader community, institutions of higher education continue to be incubators for innovation in the cultural arts, medicine, industry, business, and technology.
- Every child in Austin has the chance to engage with other cultures, communities, and languages, providing pathways for healthy development, and the critical thinking skills students need as future citizens of Austin and the world.



## **AUSTIN IS MOBILE AND INTERCONNECTED:**

Austin is accessible. Our transportation network provides a wide variety of options that are efficient, reliable, and cost-effective to serve the diverse needs and capabilities of our citizens. Public and private sectors work together to improve our air quality and reduce congestion in a collaborative and creative manner.

- Interconnected development patterns support public transit and a variety of transportation choices, while reducing sprawl, congestion, travel times, and negative impacts on existing neighborhoods.
- Our integrated transportation system is well-maintained, minimizes negative impacts on natural resources, and remains affordable for all users.
- Austin promotes safe bicycle and pedestrian access with well-designed routes that provide connectivity throughout the greater Austin area. These routes are part of our comprehensive regional transportation network.

# MOBILE



## AUSTIN IS PROSPEROUS:

Austin's prosperity exists because of the overall health, vitality, and sustainability of the city as a whole—including the skills, hard work, and qualities of our citizens, the stewardship of our natural resources, and developing conditions that foster both local businesses and large institutions. Development carefully balances the needs of differing land uses with improved transportation to ensure that growth is both fiscally sound and environmentally sustainable.

- Our economy is resilient and responsive to global trends thanks to its diverse and thriving mix of local entrepreneurs, large and small businesses, educational institutions, government, and industry.
- Innovation and creativity are the engines of Austin's economy in the arts, research and development, and technology.
- Our ecology is integrated with our economy—the preservation of the environment and natural resources contribute to our prosperity.
- Equitable opportunities are accessible to all through quality education, training, and good jobs.

## AUSTIN VALUES AND RESPECTS ITS PEOPLE:

Austin is its people. Our city is home to engaged, compassionate, creative, and independent thinking people, where diversity is a source of strength and where we have the opportunity to fully participate and fulfill our potential.



- Austin government is transparent and accountable.
- People across all parts of the city and of all ages and income levels live in safe, stable neighborhoods with a variety of affordable and accessible homes with access to healthy food, economic opportunity, healthcare, education, and transportation.
- We stand together for equal rights for all persons, especially acknowledging those who have been denied full participation in the opportunities offered by our community in the past.
- The history of the people of the Austin area is preserved and protected for future generations.

Each level of our Complete Community . . . will be livable, safe, and affordable; promote physical activity, community engagement, and inclusion; ensure that amenities and services are easily accessible to all; and contribute to Austin's unique community spirit.

## WE WILL BECOME A CITY OF COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

To successfully realize Imagine Austin, all of our residents must benefit from its outcomes. To help fulfill the vision statement, the comprehensive plan points us toward becoming a city of complete communities throughout Austin. Such communities are defined by amenities, transportation, services, and opportunities that fulfill all Austinites' material, social, and economic needs. They achieve these outcomes while protecting our important environmental resources and preserving our identity, culture, and sense of place. A complete community provides access to employment, shopping, learning, open space, recreation, and other amenities and services. Establishing complete communities will require monitoring different services at different scales. Some needs, like parks, should be within or near every neighborhood. Others, like hospitals, will draw from many neighborhoods.

These communities will be for Austinites of all ages. They will provide environments that support children at every stage of their development, young adults beginning their professional lives and families, and seniors aging gracefully in the neighborhoods where they raised their families. These places will be safe and affordable; promote physical activity, community engagement, and inclusion; make amenities and services easily accessible to everybody; and contribute to Austin's unique community spirit.

### LIVABLE

- Healthy & Safe Communities
- Housing Diversity & Affordability
- Access to Community Amenities
- Quality Design / Distinctive Character
- Preservation of Crucial Resources

### NATURAL AND SUSTAINABLE

- Sustainable, Compact, and Walkable Development
- Resource Conservation/Efficiency
- Extensive Green Infrastructure

### CREATIVE

- Vibrant Cultural Events/Programs
- Support for Arts/Cultural Activities

### EDUCATED

- Learning Opportunities for All Ages
- Community Partnerships with Schools
- Relationships with Higher Learning

### PROSPEROUS

- Diverse Business Opportunities
- Technological Innovation
- Education/Skills Development

### MOBILE AND INTERCONNECTED

- Range of Transportation Options
- Multimodal Connectivity
- Accessible Community Centers

### VALUES AND RESPECTS PEOPLE

- Access to Community Services
- Employment & Housing Options
- Community/Civic Engagement
- Responsive/Accountable Government









# SHAPING AUSTIN: BUILDING THE COMPLETE COMMUNITY

A Framework for the Future

Growth Concept Map

Comprehensive Plan Building Blocks

Building Block 1: Land Use and Transportation

Building Block 2: Housing and Neighborhoods

Building Block 3: Economy

Building Block 4: Conservation and Environment

Building Block 5: City Facilities and Services

Building Block 6: Society

Building Block 7: Creativity



## SHAPING AUSTIN: BUILDING THE COMPLETE COMMUNITY

### A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

Achieving the goal of complete communities across Austin requires more than a vision statement. While the vision describes the type of place Austin should become as it approaches its bicentennial; it does not identify the steps to make it happen. The framework for realizing the vision is contained in the growth concept map and building blocks.:

- **Growth Concept Map.** The growth concept map (Figure 4.5) applies the Imagine Austin vision statement to the city's physical development. Generated through a public scenario-building process, it defines how we plan to accommodate new residents, jobs, mixed-use areas, open space, and transportation infrastructure over the next 30 years.
- **Building Blocks.** The Building Blocks contain broad-ranging policies to implement the vision. They cover 14 elements, including 10 required by the Austin City Charter (see Appendix A).

1. Land Use and Transportation
2. Housing and Neighborhoods
3. Economy
4. Conservation and Environment
5. City Facilities and Services
6. Society
7. Creativity

### GROWTH CONCEPT MAP

The vision statement sets forth guidance for the city's growth and development for the next 30 years. The growth concept map (Figure 4.5) applies the vision statement to show how the city should evolve over the next several decades. It is informed by existing development patterns, planned projects, and small-area plans, as well as environmental features (Figure 4.1), and existing and planned transportation network (Figures 4.2 through 4.4).

Developed through an extensive public involvement, the growth concept map illustrates the desired manner to accommodate new residents, jobs, open space, and transportation infrastructure over the next 30 years. During a series of public meetings, more than 450 participants created over 60 maps illustrating where Austin's growth should go over the next three decades. City staff, consultants, and the Citizen's Advisory Task Force reviewed the maps for common patterns, synthesized them into four distinct scenarios, and developed a "trend" scenario map for comparison.



Developed with extensive public involvement, the growth concept map series depicts how Austin should accommodate new residents, jobs, mixed-use developments, open space, and transportation infrastructure over the next 30 years.

The five scenarios were measured using "sustainability indicators" developed from the vision statement. These indicators included such measures as the acres of land developed, greenhouse gas emissions, the cost of public infrastructure, average travel times, and percentage of housing near transit stops for each of the scenarios. Through the next round of public meetings and surveys, the public rated each of the scenarios using the indicator results. Public input was solicited through community events, newspaper surveys, door to door outreach, newsletters, social media, business and organizational meetings, and one-on-one conversations.

A growth scenario was created using public input, planned developments, and existing neighborhood plans to illustrate how Austin should grow through 2039. The scenario was further tested and refined into the growth concept map (Figure 4.5). More detail on the public process used to create the scenarios and growth concept map is included in Appendix B.

The growth concept map series embodies the Imagine Austin vision statement and represents where the city will focus future investments to support activity centers and corridors, and an expanded transportation system. The growth concept map:

- Promotes a compact and connected city
- Promotes infill and redevelopment as opposed to typical low-density "greenfield" development
- Focuses new development in mixed-use corridors and centers accessible by walking, bicycling, and transit as well as by car
- Provides convenient access to jobs and employment centers
- Protects existing open space and natural resources such as creeks, rivers, lakes, and floodplains
- Directs development away from the Southern Edwards Aquifer recharge and contributing zones
- Improves air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Expands the transit network
- Increases transit use
- Reduces vehicle miles traveled
- Reduces per capita water consumption
- Provides parks and open space close to where people live, work, and play

## Growth Concept Map Series

The growth concept map series consists of five maps setting out key environmental features, transportation connections, and growth patterns.

### Figure 4.1 Environmental Resources

Our vision for Austin is a "green" city – a place that is environmentally aware, improves the health of our residents, and protects the region's vast environmental resources. The Environmental Resource map (Figure 4.1) illustrates the existing network of parks, preserves, and other open spaces, as well as environmentally sensitive water resources such as waterways, springs, floodplains, and the recharge/contributing zones of the South Edwards Aquifer. The environmental features illustrated by Figure 4.1, in addition to species habitat, tree canopy, and agricultural resources (Figures 4.8-4.10) are the key features of Austin's green infrastructure network. These diverse elements provide multiple benefits including protection of natural resources and enhanced recreation and transportation options.

Environmentally sensitive features, in addition to existing development patterns and roadways, help to shape and inform the location of the activity centers and corridors illustrated by the growth concept map. By promoting a compact and connected city, Austin seeks to direct development away from sensitive environmental resources, protect existing open space and natural resources, and improve air and water quality.

### Figure 4.2 Bicycle and Pedestrian Networks

To realize Austin's vision, new development and redevelopment must occur in a connected and pedestrian-friendly pattern. Activity centers and corridors illustrated on the growth concept map are pedestrian-friendly, walkable, and bikable areas. By improving bicycle and pedestrian networks, the city can address many of the challenges facing Austin including vehicle congestion, commute times, air quality, transportation costs, lack of connectivity, bicycle safety, and recreational access.

Figure 4.2 illustrates major urban trails that connect activity centers. Urban trails serve recreation and transportation functions, including biking and hiking, and also provide important environmental benefits by creating open space linkages and expanding the city's green infrastructure network. While not included on Figure 4.2, the pedestrian sidewalk network is also essential to accessibility. Austin is continuing to expand the sidewalk network and eliminate gaps to improve walkability throughout Austin.

### Figure 4.3 Transit Networks

To achieve our vision for Austin, the city's activity centers and corridors need to support, and be supported by, an expanded transit network that is efficient, reliable, and cost-effective. The transit network will help to reduce sprawl, decrease congestion and vehicle miles traveled, improve air quality, promote infill and redevelopment, and reduce household transportation costs. Several agencies have been working together to plan and develop rail and high-capacity bus lines that will provide greater transportation op-

## GROWTH CONCEPT MAP SERIES

The growth concept map series and the activity centers and corridors are conceptual and provide direction for future growth; however, they are not parcel-specific, nor do they carry the legal weight of zoning designations or other land use regulations. Per state law, a comprehensive plan shall not constitute zoning regulations or establish zoning district boundaries.

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE DEFINED

The Conservation Fund defines green infrastructure as "strategically planned and managed networks of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces that conserve ecosystem values and functions and provide associated benefits to human populations."

These elements of Austin's green infrastructure network include our parks, the urban forest, urban trails, greenways, rivers, creeks, lakes, gardens, urban agriculture, open spaces, and wildlife habitat – and the relationships between them and the rest of the city.

tions and impact where people and businesses choose to locate. The transit network is designed to improve connectedness and better link centers and corridors. Where final locations have not been determined, transit stops are identified as “proposed.” As more detailed planning occurs, these may move. When this happens, the associated activity center should move as well.

#### **Figure 4.4 Roadway Networks**

While Imagine Austin envisions a long-term shift toward transit, walking, and biking, an expanded and improved roadway network is also important. Figure 4.4 identifies major roadway improvements, from developing a complete arterial network to managed or express lanes on Loop 1 and I-35.

#### **Figure 4.5 Growth Concept Map**

The final map in the growth concept map series ties the previous four together, illustrating how Austin in the future should coordinate transportation features—roads, transit, and urban trails—with activity centers and corridors, in such a way as to reduce degradation of Austin’s environmental resources. This map is followed by detailed definitions of its features.

## Growth Concept Map Definitions

### Activity Centers and Corridors

The growth concept map assembles compact and walkable activity centers and corridors, as well as job centers and coordinates them with future transportation improvements. These centers and corridors allow people to reside, work, shop, access services, people watch, recreate, and hang out without traveling far distances. Within them, the design and scale of buildings and the design and availability of parks and gathering spaces will welcome people of all ages and abilities. They will be walkable, bikable, and connected to one another, the rest of the city, and the region by roads, transit, bicycle routes and lanes, and trails.

Centers are generally focused around one or more major transit stop. The greatest density of people and activity will be located around these stops. Surrounding these dense hubs, centers will feature a mix of retail, offices, open space and parks, public uses and services such as libraries and government offices, and a variety of housing choices. Because of their generally compact nature, it will be a quick trip to travel from one side of a center to the other by foot, bicycle, transit, or automobile. There are three types of activity centers—regional, town, and neighborhood.

While a corridor may feature the same variety of uses as a center, its linear nature spreads uses along a roadway. Walking may be suitable for shorter trips; however, longer ones along a corridor can be made by bicycling, transit, or automobile. Just as there are different types of centers, a corridor's character will depend on factors such as road width, traffic volume, the size and configuration of lots, and existing uses. Along different segments of these corridors, there may be multi-story mixed-use buildings, apartment buildings, shops, public uses, offices, as well as townhouses, rowhouses, duplexes, and single-family houses. Rules for developing within the activity centers and corridors should be carefully designed to achieve their intent. In particular, new development in these areas will need to consider two aspects of Austin's affordability problem: providing market-rate supply and preserving existing, as well as creating new affordable housing.

### Regional Centers

Regional centers are the most urban places in the region. These centers are and will become the retail, cultural, recreational, and entertainment destinations for Central Texas. These are the places where the greatest density of people and jobs and the tallest buildings in the region will be located. Housing in regional centers will mostly consist of low to high-rise apartments, mixed-use buildings, rowhouses, and townhouses. However, other housing types, such as single-family units, may be included depending on the location and character of the center.

The densities, buildings heights, and overall character of a center will depend on its location. The central regional center encompassing Downtown, the University of Texas, the Concordia University redevelopment, and West Campus is the most urban. It includes low to high-rise residential and office buildings; local, state, and federal government office

## TRANSITIONS BETWEEN LAND USES

Creating the compact and connected city envisioned by this plan and illustrated by the growth concept map requires establishing harmonious transitions between different types of land uses such as retail and residential areas or buildings of different heights and scales. New and redevelopment along corridors and at the edges of centers should complement existing development such as adjacent neighborhoods. Creating these transitions requires a broad regulatory approach to address the local context, land uses, accessibility and transportation needs, building setbacks, building heights, and design elements such as landscaping, building massing, lighting, the location of parking, and building orientation. Areas with shallow lots have fewer options for good transitions.



buildings; the Texas State Capitol building; cultural offerings and several entertainment districts; shopping; and single-family neighborhoods. Other, future regional centers, like Robinson Ranch or Southside (at the intersection of toll road State Highway 45 and Interstate 35) will likely have a dense central hub surrounded by well-connected but lower density development.

Regional centers will range in size between approximately 25,000-45,000 people and 5,000-25,000 jobs.

### **Town Centers**

Although less intense than a regional centers, town centers are also where many people will live and work. Town centers will have large and small employers, although fewer than in regional centers. These employers will have regional customer and employee bases, and provide goods and services for the center as well as the surrounding areas. The buildings found in a regional center will range in size from one to three-story houses, duplexes, townhouses, and rowhouses, to low to midrise apartments, mixed-use buildings, and office buildings. These centers will also be important hubs in the transit system.

The Mueller redevelopment in Central Austin is an example of an emerging town center. Presently at Mueller, there are local and regional-serving retail establishments, the Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, and Seton Healthcare Family offices. Upon build-out, Mueller expects to include 4.2 million square feet of retail, offices, medical space, and film production, as well as 10,000 residents.

Town centers will range in size between approximately 10,000-30,000 people and 5,000-20,000 jobs.

### **Neighborhood Centers**

The smallest and least intense of the three mixed-use centers are neighborhood centers. As with the regional and town centers, neighborhood centers are walkable, bikable, and supported by transit. The greatest density of people and activities in neighborhood centers will likely be concentrated on several blocks or around one or two intersections. Unlike the other two centers, these will have a more local focus. Businesses and services—doctors and dentists, shops, branch libraries, dry cleaners, hair salons, coffee shops, restaurants, and other small and local businesses—will generally serve the center and surrounding neighborhoods. People living within this type of center will reside in mixed-use buildings, smaller apartment buildings, townhouses, rowhouses, duplexes, and single-family houses.

Neighborhood centers range in size between approximately 5,000-10,000 people and 2,500-7,500 jobs.

### **Corridors**

Activity corridors have a dual nature. They are the connections that link activity centers and other key destinations to one another and allow people to travel throughout the city and region by bicycle, transit, or automobile. Corridors are also characterized by a variety of activities and types of buildings located along the roadway—shopping, restaurants and cafés, parks, schools, single-family houses and duplexes, apartments, public buildings, houses of worship, mixed-use buildings, and offices. Along many corridors there will be both large and small redevelopment sites. These redevelopment opportunities may be continuous along long stretches of the corridor. They may also be a series of small neighborhood centers, connected by the roadway. Other corridors may have fewer redevelopment opportunities, but have a mixture of uses, and could provide critical transportation connections. As a corridor evolves, sites that do not redevelop may transition from one use to another, such as a service station becoming a restaurant or a large retail space being divided into several storefronts.

### **Job Centers**

Job centers accommodate those businesses not well-suited for residential or environmentally-sensitive areas. These centers take advantage of existing transportation infrastructure such as arterial roadways, freeways, and the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. Job centers will mostly contain office parks, manufacturing, warehouses, logistics, and other businesses with similar demands and operating characteristics. They should nevertheless become more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, in part by better accommodating services for the people who work in these centers. While these many of these centers are currently best served by car, the growth concept map offers transportation choices such as light rail and bus rapid transit to increase commuter options.

### **Open Space Network**

The future open space network contains several elements and includes existing and future open space. The elements include parks, greenways, nature preserves, agricultural land, and environmentally sensitive land. The sensitive lands include floodplains, steep slopes, and those areas with significant environmental features such as sinkholes, caves, or significant wildlife habitat.

### **High Capacity Transit and Transit Stops**

High capacity transit and transit stops include the existing Capital MetroRail red line and stops and planned transit routes and new stops. High capacity transit includes regional rail, commuter rail, urban rail, and bus rapid transit. Regular bus routes are not illustrated on the growth concept map. Where final locations have not been determined, transit stops are identified as “Proposed.” As more detailed planning occurs, these may move. When this happens, the associated activity center should move as well.

### **Highways and Other Streets**

This feature of the growth concept map illustrates the existing roads, planned extensions, new arterial roads, and capacity improvements such as creating additional travel lanes.