Coming Home:
The benefits of housing choice for low-wage commuters in Austin, Texas

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UT Austin | Community and regional planning

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So growth moves outward…

- Shift outward in city and region

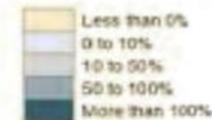**Table 1.** Population Growth in the Austin metropolitan area, 1970-2010

POPULATION	1970	1990	2010
City	251,808	465,622	790,390
Travis County	295,516	576,407	1,024,266
5 county Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)	398,938	846,227	1,716,289
City share of MSA	63%	55%	46%

Source: Ryan Robinson, City Demographer, Department of Planning, COA, January 2014. The 5 counties included in the MSA figures are Travis, Hays, Caldwell, Bastrop and Williamson.

Figure I-5.
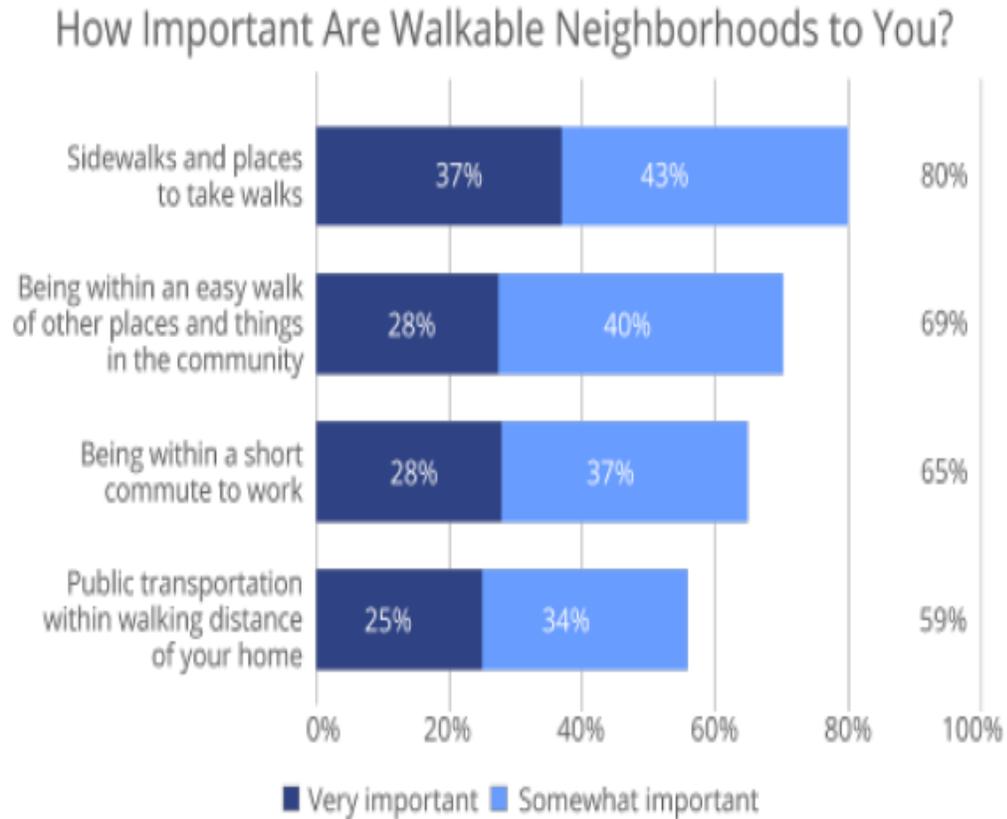**Population Change by ZIP Code, 2000 to 2012**
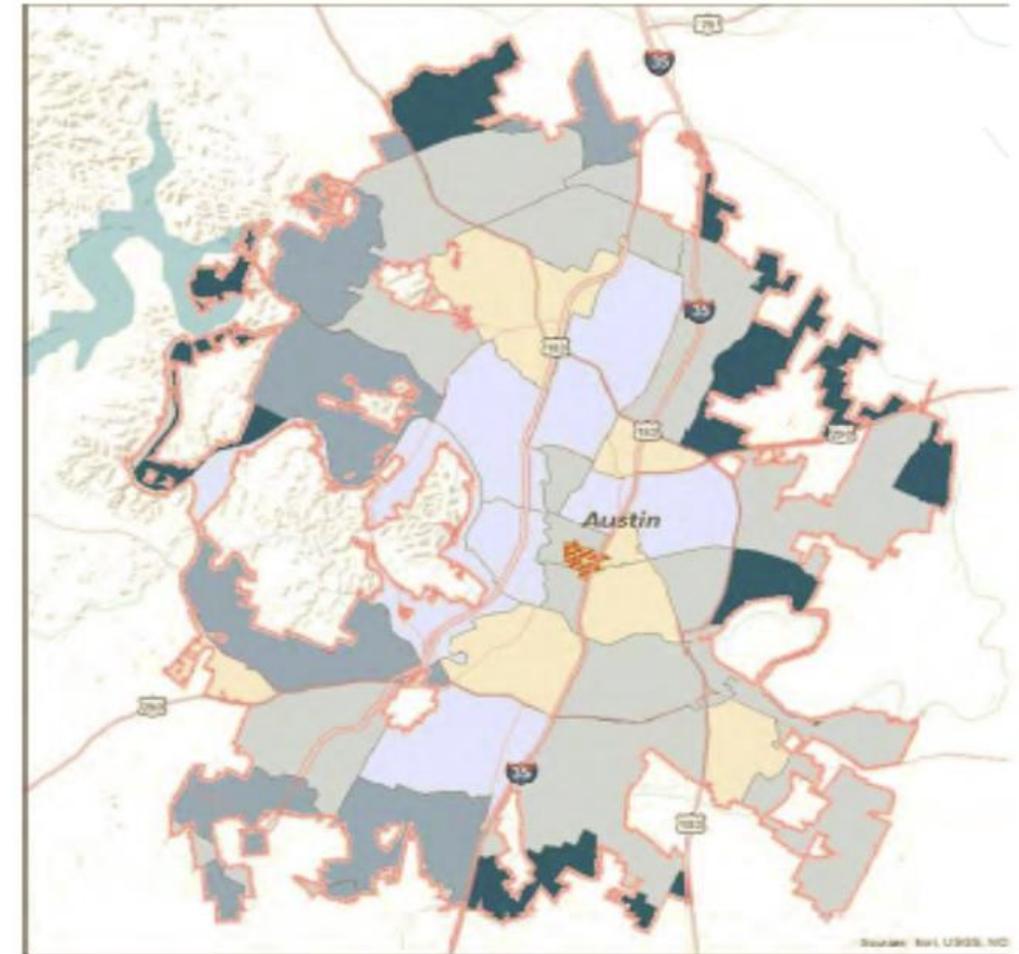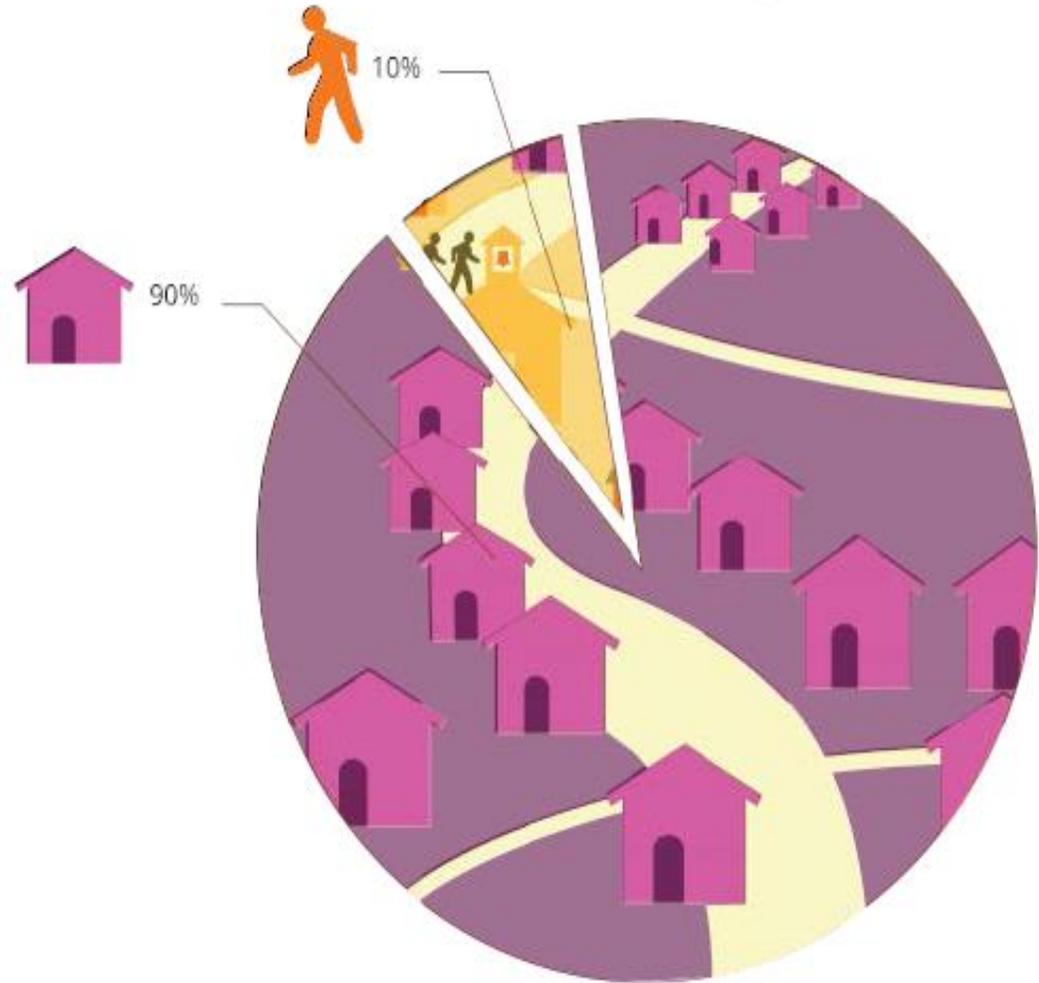

Percent Change in Population
2000 to 2012

Less than 0%
0 to 10%
10 to 50%
50 to 100%
More than 100%

University of Texas
Austin City Boundary

Source: U.S. Census.

But maybe people want to live suburbia?

How Important Are Walkable Neighborhoods to You?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Total
Sidewalks and places to take walks	37%	43%	80%
Being within an easy walk of other places and things in the community	28%	40%	69%
Being within a short commute to work	28%	37%	65%
Public transportation within walking distance of your home	25%	34%	59%

■ Very important ■ Somewhat important

Location of Available U.S. Housing Stock

10%

90%

Is our sprawling pattern of growth a reflection of preferences?

What impact could including affordable choices for low wage workers in *Imagine Austin* centers and corridors have on those households?

On the city overall?

Household composition and income	Tenure	Housing percent of household income	Transportation percent of household income	H + T percent of household income	Miles driven annually
Single, very low income ($11,720) National poverty line 1 person, 1 commuter	Renter	**76%**	**44%**	**115%**	12,528
	Owner	**130%**	**53%**	**183%**	14,966
Single-parent family ($29,823) 50% of median family income 3 people, a commuter	Renter	**40%**	**22%**	**62%**	14,173
	Owner	**57%**	**31%**	**88%**	17,078
Single professional ($80,522) 135 % of median family income 1 person, 1 commuter	Renter	17%	8%	25%	13,726
	Owner	24%	11%	35%	15,809
Retired couple ($47,717) 80% of median family income 2 people, 0 commuters	Renter	29%	7%	36%	1,346
	Owner	42%	13%	55%	3,389
Dual professional family ($86,469) 150% of median family income 4 people, 2 commuters	Renter	18%	12%	30%	22,436
	Owner	25%	15%	40%	25,448
Benchmark/goal		**30%**	**15%**	**45%**	

Table 6.
Trading Off Housing Attributes

PREFERENCE TRADEOFF QUESTION	US	TEXAS
Please select the community where you would prefer to live:		
Smaller house/lot, shorter commute	59%	56%
Larger house/lot, longer commute	39%	42%
Please select the community where you would prefer to live:		
Mix of houses/businesses easy to walk	58%	57%
Houses only, drive to businesses	40%	42%
Please select the community where you would prefer to live:		
Apartment/townhouse, easy walk	38%	35%
Single family house, drive	59%	63%
Source: Table 2.8 in CAPCOG, from NAR 2011.		

Table 4.
Willingness to Live in Smart Growth Communities, US and Texas

	WANT TO LIVE IN SMART GROWTH COMMUNITIES	
Group	US	Texas
All	47%	48%
Age		
18-34	51%	52%
35-54	45%	48%
55-69	47%	39%
70+	56%	40%
Income		
Low income	45%	48%
Mid income	41%	47%
High income	39%	47%
Household type		
Single HH	48%	54%
HH with children	46%	40%
No children in HH	46%	49%
Source: Porter Novelli, reported in CAPCOG, 2012. Percentages indicate sum of respondents who "would somewhat support" through "would definitely support"		

Generational divide in Texas in housing preferences

Survey of low income commuters working in central Austin (2012)

Random sample survey of central city employees with incomes < $60k, commuting at least 10 miles to work

5,300 people met our criteria at UT and the COA

Random sample of 945

Surveyed via campus mail (UT), email (COA)

34.5 percent response rate

Key findings:

Substantial interest in moving closer to work:

- 48 percent of low income workers commuting at least 10 miles to work would move closer to work if they could. Of those not interested, 88 percent listed cost as among their primary reasons for not moving.

Lowest income households most interested in moving

- HH with annual incomes below $60k significantly more likely to be interested in moving, than those with higher incomes.
- 70% of HH with incomes below $40k were interested in moving closer to work.

Key findings, continued:

Generational divide in attitudes:

- 65 of those ages 18-34 were willing to move.

Presence of children not a deterrent to moving

- A majority of households with school age children were interested in moving.

More likely to move if...

Table 9.
Neighborhood Features desired by Movers

WHAT IMPACT WOULD THE FOLLOWING FACTORS HAVE ON YOUR DECISION TO MOVE?	MORE LIKELY TO MOVE
If new neighborhood...	
Included stores and services that you use routinely (banks, grocery stores, pharmacies, neighborhood eateries).	94%
Was in walking distance to public transportation.	80%
(If you have children) Had bike paths or sidewalks safe for children.	77%
Included a good public school.	62%
Note: Includes "more likely" and "much more likely" responses.	

Table 10.
Housing characteristics desired by movers

WHAT IMPACT WOULD THE FOLLOWING FACTORS HAVE ON YOUR DECISION TO MOVE?	MORE LIKELY TO MOVE
If your new neighborhood...	
Allowed you to live in a single family home.	94%
Allowed you to have a private yard.	91%
Had a mix of types of housing.	54%
Included both owners and renters.	50%
Note: Includes "more likely" and "much more likely" responses.	

Household benefits of moving

For those willing to move, we calculated the benefits of moving to the closest *Imagine Austin* center under three scenarios:

Scenario 1: a shorter commute by car

- Average reduction in annual miles driven of 7,736
- Reduces commute costs by $4,370 per year (7.3% of $60k income)

Scenario 2: Commuting by transit

- Net cost savings of $5,631 per year (9.4% of $60k income)

Scenario 3: Transit commute, one less car

- Net cost savings of $9,231 per year (15.4% of $60k income)

Take aways

- Regional demographics show rise in groups that will have more trouble buying homes, will value central locations but also price

- Preference for access but also for SF homes…

- Aging population also needs smaller homes, MF options in central locations.

- Need for high quality public spaces to support family households and to improve neighborhood conditions

- *Can we provide more housing for a wider array of households in central neighborhoods?*

- *Can transit access and rental income help new owners make ends meet?*