

# ASMP Land Use Policy #1

## ***Plan and promote transit-supportive densities along the Transit Priority Network***

### **Use all planning tools to establish transit-supportive densities along Transit Priority Network corridors**

Appropriate land use density is the foundation for efficient public transportation; dense urban areas with multiple uses including employment centers, multifamily homes, and commercial uses make high-quality transit services viable. Transit-oriented development is not just density; it is also a mix of land uses and a public realm with a pedestrian-friendly streetscape and amenities. Environments like these invite more people live close to transit, which allows transit to run more often and connect people to more destinations.

Establishing transit-supportive densities along planned high-capacity transit is essential to its success, and to securing federal transit funding, and should be a top priority. This also aligns with established City goals to add housing near transit, especially housing affordable to Austinites with lower incomes. Certain types of affordable housing also meet Federal Transit Authority funding criteria, so affordable housing investments near the Transit Priority Network should be steered to comply with these standards when possible in order to maximize our chances of receiving Federal funding.

The Project Connect high-capacity transit routes planned in Austin run through different types of built environments, including downtown, commercial centers, already-dense mixed-use neighborhoods, and areas dominated by detached, single-family homes. Transit-supportive densities are measured for routes as a whole. Planning should be flexible to take into account the existing character of neighborhoods and community input to appropriately allocate density within transit corridors, and we must plan to achieve the transit-supportive density appropriate for the planned mode of transit. The full range of planning tools should be used to establish these densities, including zoning reviews, small area plans, density bonuses, affordable housing investments, transit-oriented development zones, and revisions of the land development code, potentially including zoning entitlements and bonuses tied to the distance from transit. The portions of the Transit Priority Network not planned for high-capacity transit should have transit-supportive densities considered in land use planning, but are a lower priority.

Other strategies to encourage this type of development include providing incentives in certain cases or enacting more permissive regulations for developments that go above and beyond base zoning requirements. Direct public investment in and management of redevelopment at major mobility hubs will ensure high levels of community benefits accompany density along the Transit Priority Network. These community benefits should include affordable housing, affordable space for arts, music, legacy and small business uses, and other amenities like green design and childcare. Bicycle facilities, sidewalks, urban trails, and other investments that allow people of all ages and abilities to access transit should also be prioritized along the Transit Priority Network. Finally, people living downtown and near the University of Texas campus already have the lowest rate of drive-alone trips and vehicle miles traveled, and increasing density in Imagine Austin Activity Centers like these is one of the surest ways to lower that rate citywide and facilitate increased transit ridership.

## Transit-Supportive Densities

Population density refers to the amount of people that live, work, or play within a specified geographic area. It is generally measured by people or units per acre. Transit-supportive density is measured as an average density across an entire corridor. This means individual segments and properties may have higher or lower densities, which helps give flexibility in planning. When enough people live, work, or play in an area, it means that public transportation serving the area can be economically, environmentally, and socially efficient.

Different contexts, including whether a place is urban or suburban, whether it is residentially- or commercially-focused, and other differences, may require different densities to be transit-supportive. Transit-supportive densities are also different for different levels of transit service; generally higher levels of service require higher density.

Within the urban and suburban contexts of Austin, Capital Metro uses context-sensitive service guidelines, based on national best practice, that consider elements referred to as the "Six D's" (destinations, distance, design, density, diversity, and demand management) that support cost-effective and useful transit service. Contiguous areas of the following densities are deemed transit-supportive and should be prioritized for fixed route bus service within walking distance ( $\frac{1}{4}$  mile):

Capital Metro Residential densities of 16 people per acre\* or  
Capital Metro Employment densities of 8 people per acre

*\*As the level of service increases to high-capacity transit, densities and other transit-supportive factors should also increase beyond the guidelines shown above.*

The City should advance the "Six D's" referenced above for the various modes of transit that will help ensure adequate ridership and achieve decreases in drive-alone trips. By achieving these transit-supportive densities and other transit supportive practices along the Transit Priority Network and other existing bus lines, Capital Metro can avoid service changes that eliminate or move routes due to lack of ridership and can support future high-capacity transit.