

BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION: 20230502-005

Urban Transportation Commission

Recommendation Number 20230502-005: Project Connect Light Rail Implementation

WHEREAS that the UTC affirms that surface-running light rail is a good option to address the cost estimates for the Project Connect light rail plan, that can be built in a manner that ensures reliability, and that surface-running light rail has many advantages including access for users of all abilities; and

WHEREAS in every city in the United States with light rail has more bus boardings than rail boardings; and

WHEREAS even after the completion of the light rail lines bus ridership in Austin is likely to exceed rail ridership; and

WHEREAS rapid transfers between bus and light rail will be needed to maximize light rail ridership; and

WHEREAS the UTC believes that high ridership on the first segment to be completed will have a significant impact on public support for further system expansion; and

WHEREAS, most residents of Austin fly infrequently, extending the route to the airport limits the first phase's reach into high ridership communities, and the airport is already served by the high-frequency bus route 20; and

WHEREAS Project Connect planning processes in 2019 identified the area around Rutland and Lamar as having high ridership potential for the Orange Line; and

WHEREAS that area has a high proportion of people of color; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the UTC recommends the North Lamar Transit Center to Pleasant Valley option because is it has significantly higher forecast ridership than the other options, connects well with existing bus routes and the Red Line, has the lowest cost per forecast rider, and because following phases could easily extend service from North Lamar Transit Center to higher-ridership areas with great equity impact; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UTC also recommends the 38th to Oltorf to Yellow Jacket option, as it is the second highest forecasted ridership option, has high frequency on the main

spine, builds a desired leg to South Congress, and to a greater extent, avoids right-of-way not controlled by the City of Austin; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UTC also recommends that Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) seek any cost-saving or external funding measures that might enable the best parts of the two recommended plans to influence one another, for example, if the North Lamar to Pleasant Valley option is chosen building the “Y” segment for a leg to South Congress, or for the 38th to Oltorf to Yellow Jacket option is chosen, extending the line on North Lamar, as far past 38th Street as possible, ideally to Crestview Station; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UTC requests that ATP releases the forecast number of bus transfers at each proposed light rail station and that as the design for the stations evolves, ATP provide information about how fast bus/train transfers are forecast to be; and

BE IT RESOLVED that the UTC requests Austin City Council direct Austin Transportation and Public Works Department to create a Project Connect Ordinance 2.0 that will crystallize the street-level changes needed to support a surface running rail system in downtown Austin, and bring this ordinance to City Council within 6 months of the selection of the preferred light rail implementation option. Items to be covered in this ordinance could include, but are not limited to: parking garage entries and exits and curb cuts, street and intersection closures, street space reallocation on both Guadalupe and Lavaca, street directionality changes, signal timing, and pedestrianization of streets.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the UTC requests ATP and CapMetro evaluate options to enhance MetroRapid service on corridors that are potential future light rail expansion routes. These evaluations should include whether "rail ready" Bus Rapid Transit with Dedicated Median Bus Lanes and light rail style platforms can be developed along these corridors to provide a high level of service and quickly transition these areas to light rail when funding is available; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the UTC also recommends that ATP engage the City of Austin, relevant stakeholders, and the public following the selection of a preferred light rail implementation option, in a scoping project for multimodal investments to ensure light rail integrates with and expands Austin's existing and future pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections. In keeping with the Contract with the Voters, ATP should prioritize ROW for pedestrians, cyclists, micro-mobility users, and other transit options over preserving access for private auto traffic; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the UTC also recommends that if any part of the preferred light rail implementation option will require ROW acquisition from TxDOT, ATP should designate and publish an alternative plan in the event that ROW is not granted by TxDOT; and

Date of Approval: May 2, 2023

Record of the vote: 7-0 vote with Commissioner Wayne absent

Attest: Christopher Parks, Staff Liaison