



**JOINT SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING
April 26, 2023**

The Joint Sustainability Committee convened in a hybrid meeting via videoconferencing and at PDC.

Chair Diana Wheeler called the Board Meeting to order at 6:08 pm.

Board Members in Attendance in Person: Kaiba White (chair), Haris Qureshi, Heather Houser, Rodrigo Leal, Chris Campbell

Board Members in Attendance Remotely: Diana Wheeler, Melissa Rothrock, Anna Scott, Kelsey Hitchingham, Frances Deviney

Board Members Absent:

City Staff in Attendance:
Rohan Lilauwala

CALL TO ORDER

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

The speakers who registered in advance for public comment have three minutes each to address items on the agenda at this time.

N/A

- 1. Approval of minutes from the March 29, 2023 special called meeting of the Joint Sustainability Committee.**
Qureshi motions to approve, Campbell seconds, all in favor, none opposed.
- 2. Project Connect LRT Options Presentation and Q&A (Discussion and/or Possible Action) – Lisa Storer, Alvin Livingstone, Courtney Chavez, Austin Transit Partnership; Sravya Garledenne – Project Connect Office.**
 - Presentation on light rail component of LRT – one component only

- Cost estimates came up high, so initial system needs to be scaled back to fit funding envelope
- Not seeking feedback on downtown crossings at the moment for surface alignments
 - White: What are pros and cons of crossings?
 - Livingstone: S1st pros-straight line crossing; cons-traffic at Cesar Chavez; Trinity street pros-connection to conv ctr, east downtown; cons-impacts boathouse, still traffic at Cesar Chavez
- Houser: why does 38th/Oltorf/Yellow Jacket offer more flexibility vs North Lamar to Pleasant Valley
 - NL-PV requires protective buys (to preserve extension southward), and/or require a spur put in. 3-legged option has a transfer station
- Intention is to build out full system once funding is available
- Qureshi – elevated option avoids traffic from 8th to S Congress
- Over 12,000-13,000 comments – does not include meetings (70+)
- Qureshi – for partial underground – why not go down South rather than East?
 - Livingstone – money+technical feasibility; highest ridership segments were prioritized (UT, Republic Square, Pleasant Valley); each option also has to extend to a maintenance facility.
 - White: lots of student housing off Riverside
- Qureshi – what’s the status of the capitol view corridor on South Congress?
 - Livingstone: LRV is no different than a bus; wires no different than existing infrastructure, crossing ramp descends to grade before South Congress
- Qureshi – could an airport option stop near there serving surrounding neighborhoods? Look at ridership + jobs + also what’s happening in 10 years: ‘Southside Domain’ at Riverside/Pleasant Valley, compared to relative lack of development at North Lamar. Important to invest to have the most sustainable long-term system – demonstrate savings of avoided traffic from elevated or underground alignments
 - Storer – ridership data based on 2040. Land use plans since modeling completed have not been incorporated, but modeling will be updated soon for 2045.
 - Chavez – Pros and cons for each, but the system is still viable at grade downtown.
- Leal: If decisions around phase 1 options are data-informed, how are you taking community feedback into decisions?
 - Chavez – quant/qualitative analysis of feedback – pull principles of each option, use information in staff recommendation.
- Campbell – GHG reductions are based on ridership, is congestion accounted for?
 - Storer – model does not have post-system traffic analysis. Also working on an embodied carbon assessment – not included in current data, but might in future.
 - White: would this assume low-carbon concrete
 - Livingstone + Storer – working towards it in light of recent council resolution
- Wheeler – how do maintenance costs compare for at grade vs elevated vs underground?
 - Livingstone – working towards getting this information. Price tag includes O&M

- Deviney – would any lines impact existing grocery stores, or bring new grocery stores?
 - Livingstone: Discussions had, but no direct impacts are expected
 - Chavez: some of this can be done post-selection, in concert with anti-displacement efforts.
 - Deviney: potential USDA funding if we can demonstrate increased access to grocery stores for food desert residents
- Scott: was estimate of Vehicle Miles Travelled avoided done, instead of just ridership?
 - Livingstone: origin-destination trips have been looked at, VMT avoided could be looked at
 - Gardellenne – does not directly capture this, but data sources are potential proxies for this
- Scott: Are there examples of other cities that have gone through similar transit building processes?
 - Livingstone: worked on Phoenix LRT with 20 mile starter, 4-5 extensions, generated significant investment downtown
 - Kay: watched LRT transform Phoenix area. City passed transportation tax that funded several additional lines. Big for transportation equity and also economic development – lessons for how LRT can transform a sunbelt city.
- White: any failures?
 - Growing pains around putting them in, 5-6 years of construction
- Houser – skepticism before systems are running, experience creates support. Does going to the airport contribute to a mindset shift compared to other models? How do you get buy in?
 - Kay – airport integration is complex. No bad systems – different implementation approaches. Train your city on how to work with light rail: train drivers (Denver did outreach, Houston didn't and saw many collisions). Invest in access/support/communications for existing businesses on lines, during construction. Not always a transportation project, sometimes a utility moving project.
 - Chavez – construction impacts will be considered as part of implementation
- White: any analysis of noise for elevated?
 - Livingstone – noise/vibration mitigation will be done if elevated is chosen. Environmental impact statement will take place once alignment is chosen
- Chavez – May 2 is the close of this portion of engagement process. Staff recommendation end of May. Final decision made by June (City Council, CapMetro, ATP).
- Campell – have you considered Envision certification
 - Storer – sustainability guidelines being developed for all project connect projects. Third party cert for all projects (LEED, AEGB, SITES, Envision, etc.) + criteria for every project
- Leal: how do you make a phase 2 possible? Is ridership important in this?
 - Livingstone: would need to line up another competitive grant project, need a successful initial system for expansion appetite.
- Qureshi – have we looked at park at ride?

- Livingstone: One near Yellow Jacket, potentially. Other end points have not been analyzed yet.
- Storer: Potential shared parking arrangements would be beneficial
- Houser: no time for JSC recommendation, everyone to make their own at open house

3. City of Tempe case study of regional collaboratives to connect federal funding dollars with local climate projects – Presentation from Braden Kay, City of Tempe, AZ (Discussion and/or Possible Action).

- Huge opportunity to work on regional resilience and climate – ‘Regional Resilience Collaboratives’
- Problem with model – only coordination, no program building or investments
- Health foundation established a pot of funds, they hired a consultant
- Created a regional infrastructure exchange, established cross-sector team, identified 3 needs
 - Govt collaboration and capacity building – set up multi-city grant applications
 - Community partnerships – establish guiding principles for how cities work with CBOs; gave a lot of money to bigger CBOs to fund smaller CBOs to do climate justice work
 - Business engagement – need them on board for any kind of large scale change; demonstrate economic development impact
- Identified target funding opportunities – BRIC, DOT Protect, CPRG (green infrastructure or urban forestry or resilience hub project across jurisdictions), EJ grants
- Need to figure out governance/financing structure that lasts beyond federal grant cycles – create utilities, tax districts, etc to build stuff on the scale needed. E.g. Anapolis MD, Denver climate tax
- Regional plan needs buy in – framed as infrastructure and jobs plan, don’t politicize it
- Questions
 - Qureshi: how do we expand collaboration beyond the 5 counties to even further out. Beyond trails?
Kay: Trails are a gateway drug to facilitate collaboration
 - Rothrock: expand on heat-related death
 - Kay: better collaboration with Public Health + emergency management + social services needed to address these. Energy insecurity is a big issue.
 - Lilauwala: how do you balance going after opportunities with building a foundation? Who’s doing it – staff vs consultants?
Kay: Tempe was doing it, but its going to be spread out now between county public health, Phoenix, MPOs, etc. MPOs can be problematic because of legacy of racism. Other options: Academic institutions, non-profits. Long term backbone hasn’t been identified in Phoenix metro. Working project by project in the hope that momentum dictates necessity for long-term structure.
Pick battles to support further collaboration
 - Leal- how did giving CBOs money for other CBOs work.
Kay: risky, but it worked out. Logical which orgs would enter this. Kansas City utility funds urban heat island mitigation and extreme heat resilience –

pick 2-3 orgs from each city area to administer mini grants. Helps with making it more regional.

4. Creation of JSC working groups to help advance implementation of the Austin Climate Equity Plan (Discussion and/or Possible Action).

5. JSC Officer Elections for the 2023-2024 Term (Discussion and/or Possible Action).

Meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm due to loss of quorum.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Establishment of working groups

Board elections at April Meeting

ADJOURNMENT

The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the American with Disabilities Act. Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications will be provided upon request. Meeting locations are planned with wheelchair access. If requiring Sign Language Interpreters or alternative formats, please give notice at least 2 days (48 hours) before the meeting date. Please call Zach Baumer with the Office of Sustainability at 512-974-2836, for additional information; TTY users route through Relay Texas at 711.

For more information on the Joint Sustainability Committee, please contact Zach Baumer at (zach.baumer@austintexas.gov or 512-974-2836).