

City Council Special Called Meeting Transcript – 6/6/2023

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[1:05:39 PM]

There's in the Austin transit partnership and capital metro. Welcome to city hall and welcome all of you all to the joint partnership meeting between the Austin city council pool the Austin transit partnership board of directors and the capital metro board of directors. Today is June 6th, 2023. We're meeting here at city hall, which is located at 301 west second street in Austin, Texas, and the time is 1:06 P.M. We have all of our council members in attendance, and I will now call the meeting to order of the Austin city council. I'll now recognize the chair of the Austin transit board partnership board of directors to call their meeting to order or our meeting to order. I'm part of that too, so welcome. Thank you. Thank you, mayor. I will now call the meeting to order of the atp board of directors for this joint partnership meeting. The

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date is June 6th, 2023, and we're at city hall, located at 301 west second street, Austin, Texas. And the time is 1:06 P.M. Thank you. I'll now call and invite the chair of the capital metro board of directors, Mr. Travillion, to call their meeting to order. Good afternoon . Soon I will call the meeting to order of the metro board. This joint partnership meeting. The date is June 6th, and we're here at the Austin city hall, located at 301 west second street in Austin, Texas. The time is 1:07 P.M. Board members pool and Stratton are joining us virtually. Thank you both city council members and board members of the two other entities. We have a total of five speakers registered today to speak in public comment. Each speaker will have two minutes to address our Austin city council and the board members of atp and capital metro staff, if you will. Please call our speakers.

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Chair our first speaker is Zenobia Joseph. Is she on the phone? She is on the phone. Welcome, miss Joseph. We're waiting on. Thank you. Members Austin transit partnership. I didn't hear how many minutes. Mayor also capital metro's board. It's two minutes, ma'am. Thank you, mayor. My comments are specifically related to new starts criteria as it relates to the federal transit administration. In January 2023, policy guidelines. I did write to a lady named Elizabeth. They she is actually the federal transit administrator, director of capital project development, Elizabeth day at dot dot gov.

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And (202) !A366-5159 night brought to her attention in a message yesterday that your articles of incorporation specify, as I've said before, that you shall not direct any of your activities to attempting to influence legislation by propaganda or otherwise, and so I have requested that they revoke your 501. C three status and not fund \$5 billion. The 50% that you're looking for the light rail, specifically March 17th, 2021. Then atp director Randy Clark said, quote, atp doesn't exist as an entity from a federal point of view, unquote. Your backup material, the supplemental joint powers agreement, specifies the city and capital metro shall cooperate and support atp and seeking fta eligibility as the applicant and grant recipient. But you sole voters on the atp Independence and equity, which was in fact a falsehood, I would

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just call to your attention specifically that the capital investment grants criteria area requires that the governmental entity not reduce any services. It says you must operate the overall existing and proposed public transportation system without a reduction in existing services and which is called to your attention the November 3rd, 2017 article in the chronicle by jack craver, where you said supporters of the plan, including cap metro itself, acknowledged that every policy has certain casualties. Only small parts of the city would lose access. Notably in north and northeast and so your criteria in the city does not align with the capital investment grant. And I would just ask you to recognize that, as you mentioned, Hyde park in north Austin, that was 1891. There's an Austin history picture of the horse and buggy. I would ask you to do right by African Americans and the people who live in pioneer crossing,

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which was mentioned in commissioner Travillion resolution today. They don't even have pickup service. Ross so I would thank you for allowing me to make my comments. If you have any questions, I'll gladly

answer them at this time. Thank you, miss Joseph. You're welcome. Our next speaker is Julio Gonzalez Altamirano. Daniel are we ready? We are ready. Good afternoon. Ann 38th alter from yellow jacket, including its priority extensions is the right choice for our starter today I want to speak to you about the importance of taking decisive approach to construction cost management so that the position project connect to win the public cost story. As we build it. Let's examine a couple of benchmarks cost per mile at 40% contingency, including the maintenance facility or starter is noticeably above median cost

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per mile for comparable north American surface rail projects. This is the case whether we use the data in my curated benchmark mark sample or whether we use the Eno centers database containing 56 cases for surface rail cost per rider. Our starter is at \$140 million per 1000 average weekday riders. The median for comparables is closer to \$60 million. As we move to build, what can we do to match our benchmarks? The first fix is more riders. Here's what we need to do to split the difference with our cost per rider benchmark for the next decade, we would need to add 360 net residents annually in the watershed of each of the eight relatively low ridership stations highlighted here in the red squares. The second fix is cost management. If we hit 20% contingency for the current cost estimate, total cost goes down from roughly 4.65 billion to 4.2 billion, which means there's room for the 600 million needed for going up at grade to crestview, assuming a 4.8 billion started spending ceiling

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. This is why we need to include crestview in Nepa to take advantage of any savings or new funding to have a chance at 20% contingency. We need to lovingly scrutinize cost centers. For example, the maintenance facility, and continue to support atp laying the long term foundation for cost management. It's counterintuitive, but aggressively staffing up atp in-house for the long haul can help reduce overall project risk and exorbitant professional service expenses. We must select the right project delivery and procurement model, nail down our change order policy and build the atp, such as a version of the city's online checkbook that promotes unit pricing discipline . Ann. Thank you for your time and for your continued support of project connect. Congratulations to you all for this historic day. Thank you. Our next speaker is AZTECA, Sirius. I don't believe they are in

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chambers. Is the next speaker is Maria del Carmen onda. I don't believe they are in speaker in chambers either. And then our final speaker is abbas Azar. Council members, board members. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Azar and I serve as the chair of the project connect community advisory committee. I would just like to add in saying I support all three items on

your agenda today. I'll start off by saying with the light rail conversation Ann what you have in front of you. What I know the bodies are considering is very much in alignment with with what the community advisory committee had recommended. Perhaps the thing that excited us most about this option was that it serves the most people of color out of all options, and

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it really brings into the fold historically marginalized and disinvested communities. And that's a very exciting part of this work because we're truly furthering equitable infrastructure, equitable transit, access and development in our community. And so I'm excited to see the work that we've been able to do here and the work that staff has been able to do. I do want to highlight the community engagement for this. I have to say I've been engaged with the city for nearly a decade now. I have not seen anything like this. It is very exciting to see the work that has been done truly a you know, kudos to all three staff teams and the leadership for all three staff teams. I think the work that we have done is amazing and to see that the way the community has been engaged and their voice has been elevated in the decision making, I do want to highlight that piece here regarding the joint powers agreement work that you have in front of us. Last year and early this year, the csc very much recommended similar work. We are very excited to see that is moving forward. We want to see clear roles and responsibilities and

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really move us towards speedy implementation of what is going to be an exciting time ahead. So we're excited to see that that work is moving forward. And again, I really want to thank all the tri party for that work . And same goes for the bylaw work on the cac. We've been in conversations with staff and I think know what is happening and support that. Lastly I'll just say on a personal note, as a transit user, I think a lot of you know, I don't know how to drive and I've lived a decade in Texas and I've survived somehow. This is a moment Ross and exciting occasion. So thank you all for your work on this and I'm excited for the future for our city. Thank you. Thank you for being here to talk. But on behalf of everybody, thank you very much for what you've done and sharing the cac and all of the members of the cac for the work that they've done on this. We really appreciate you. We should probably also thank him for not driving. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. So I'm now going to

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refer to the items on the respective agendas of the three bodies. The first action item is for the atp board of directors to adopt the Austin light rail implementation plan. As we all know, the Austin transit partnership board passed along a recommendation for the Austin light rail implementation plan to the Austin city council and to the capital metro board of directors. And both of those bodies adopted this

plan last week. Now the atp board will consider officially adopting the implementation plan. And so I'll turn it over to madam chair. Thank you, mayor. And I'll try my best not to call you mayor Adler like I did last time. That. Yeah and again, I think we have his spirit here with us because I know it was during his mayoral ship that project connect passed. So if you're watching mayor Adler receive a hug from us. So I will now like

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to call to action on item number one of the Austin transit partnership agenda. The approval of a resolution adopting the Austin light rail implementation plan Ann. I will now call for a vote by the Austin transit partnership board of directors. May I have a motion and a second to adopt the Austin light rail implementation plan? Move adoption. Move by mayor Watson. Second. The second by board member and commissioner Travillion. Do we have any discussion? No discussion. I did prepare for our remarks for this day because it really has been a long journey to bring us to this point, and I'd like to read the remarks that I prepared. It is really an enthusiastic day to move forward, and I want to thank each of the board's because you beat us to this vote first. First with council, then capital metro board and when

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people ask me, what is your vision for the delivery of project connect? And our hope for the future of transit in Austin? Ann this is what I have said in the past, so I'm going to read it again. But my vision for the delivery of project connect can be described in two main areas pragmatic and aspirational. So from a pragmatic perspective, we at adp envision the delivery of this robust program as a seamless continuation of the work. Great work already underway day. It is a continuation Ann understanding we must deliver a large portfolio within within a complex regulatory framework. I hope we continue to the to use design thinking as an approach that brings together what is desirable from a human perspective, live with what is technologically feasible and economically viable from an aspirational perspective, we envision the implementation of

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this program, delivering the quality of life that everyone deserves in this great city of Austin and our region. I sincerely hope that we all inspire each other to continuously critique our own work through an equity set of values and that each of you will reach out to atp when we need to do a course correction, when we can improve. And it's also so to give us a pat on the back when we need to celebrate. And today is a day of celebration. Ann we must be our strictest critics. First, and we envision everyone joining us in this journey with our voices as and with extraordinary creativity. This transit program will touch the lives in all districts in our city because I believe it's important to remind folks that light rail is

just one portion of the vision Ann and my deepest hope is that it becomes a unifying tool that builds a resilient mobility. Transit ecosystem that we can all be

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proud to bestow, to generations to come. So with that, anybody else has any further comments from the board member? Thank you very much. Such kind words that you had. I'd like the record to reflect an abstention from me for this vote. Thank you. This is just a yeah. So I'm sorry, I'm just the Austin transit partnership. I'm so sorry that's voting right now. No, I caught ahead of myself. I apologize. Thank you very much. The city council has already passed this and the capital metro board of directors and your abstention was recorded at that time. Thank you. Any further comments from my fellow board members, member Garza I just wholeheartedly support this action. Thank you. Any further comments? So with that, I'd like to call for a

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vote. Everyone in favor, please say aye. Aye this motion passes the action item one passes unanimously. Thank you. Thank you, board members. And thank you, madam chair. And thank you for all of the work you've and heart that you've put into this. We're all deeply appreciative of that. If any member of the Austin city council or the capital metro board of directors would like to speak on this item, the way we'll do that is if a member of the board of directors of capital metro wants to speak. Chair Travillion will call that person. And if it's a member of the Austin city council, I will open the item up for discussion. Let me ask first, is there any member of the capital metro board of directors that wishes to be heard? How about the Austin city council? Yes councilmember Fuentes. Thank you. Just since it's a day of celebration, I also wanted to share my

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gratitude to staff who helped make this possible. Pool to the leaders at metro atp and our and city council, our colleagues now, and those who went to the voters during a pandemic and kind of risked it all at a time when things were really uncertain and our community stood behind us and wanting this transfer regional transit system to happen in this city that is a long time overdue. And I just want to say, you know, we all know that project connect is so much more than just busses and trains. It's about connecting our community. It's about addressing affordability. It's about tackling the climate crisis. Ross so I'm excited that we're moving forward. I know that we had to make some hard decisions on and to stay within budget with this first phase of implementation. So certainly there's a lot more work to be done and I certainly will be advocating for increased services and access for south Austin. And I look forward to working with my colleagues on council in that effort. But today, excited to be here with

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you all and to celebrate. Thank you very much. Councilmember mayor pro tem, thank you, mayor. I know there's been a few comments recorded over the past week, really, because there's been a number of bodies that got to have this discussion with our own respective boards. But I know that one of the comments that has stood out to me, the most is just how we wanted to do this 20 years ago. I've heard recommendations as far back as the 70 saying if we want to actually create livable, walkable cities, we're going to have to step up and go big and actually see, you know, get on the map with with with light rail, get get there with metro rapids, get there with our neighborhood circulators and so I've been fortunate as one of the newer metro board members to really dig in deep with all the work that's been happening. But, you know, there's folks in this room I know that are just so eager to get on a train, get on light rail and to really see this this system expand and so I know it seems like a long time coming, but there is a lot of people here all steering in the same direction, trying to make

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this big project happen for the community. And I'm just really excited that we're here today to do that together. Thank you. Mayor pro tem, anyone else? Yes. Councilmember Allison alter very briefly, I wanted to particularly thank our members of the atp board. I had the opportunity to be on the selection committee and we had a lot of people who were very qualified. But you really rose to the top, those of you who are here and those who have served as well on the atp board. And I just want to say thank you. You're putting in hours and hours is above and beyond as volunteers. And also to thank mayor Watson and commissioner Travillion for your role on atp as well as the various leaders. You know, we have all each of us put in work into getting us here today. And it's really been a collective effort and I do agree with the sentiments that this is a celebration. It is a step forward. It is not the only step

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that we need to be taking to move forward, to set forward the transit system that we need in our city. But I'm pleased that we're able to move forward today and that we're doing so with a plan that's clear R that has consensus and that is realistic from a cost perspective for where we are today. Thank you. Thank you, councilmember. Anyone else wishing to be heard? Well then, without objection, we will call for action on item number two for each body's considering action, each of the agendas of the different entities have the same posting language on the following agenda item action. Item number two authorize. Execute Ann of an amendment and supplement to the joint powers agreement between the city capital, metropolitan transportation authority and Austin transit partnership to specify party roles

and responsibilities related to the implementation and financing of project connect. This item offers a supplement to the joint

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powers agreement sometime referred to as the jpa, and it provides modifications related to the now adopted Austin light rail implementation plan. As noted in the posting, these modified versions clarify financing roles as well as provide some specificity and clarity on aspects of project connect. These changes are included in each agenda backup as a supplement to the joint powers agreement. Do we have any discussion of all the all the parties, all the entities before I then go to the Austin city council? The order will go is the Austin city council capital metro board, and then the atp board. In that case, I will call first on the Austin city council to vote and then refer to the items, as I've indicated to each board, do we have a motion to adopt eight action? Item number two motion is made by council member harper-madison, seconded by council member Cordrey. Is

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there any objection to the adoption of the motion? Ann hearing none. The motion is adopted. I'll now turn the meeting over to the capital metro board chairman Travillion. Thank you, mayor. Board members do we have a motion and a second to approve these items? Let's see. I see. Board member vela and then board member bangle with a second. All right. Is there any further discussion, any further discussion? Hearing none, please say aye in favor of voting for the item. I unanimous . Thank you. The atp board chair now has the floor. Thank you. Mayor atp board. Do we have a motion and a second to approve action? Item number two moved by board member Garza, second by mayor Watson. Any discussion, any discussion? I do have I like to say that on this particular

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item, I'm really proud that the clarity is brought forward on some of these elements that have been debated for a while. And I know this is not the last time we're going to be revising the jpa. I do look forward to having more clarity with the laws that would come from this particular amendment or supplement to the jpa and how that will trigger Islas in bilateral agreements. So I do expect to see more clarity or granularity on some of those discussions that that are covered there. But I do want to extend my gratitude to the team for doing this negotiations. I know they were not easy, but I do think this is for the best outcome for the program and I want us to always be mindful that is not about the

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control of who does what portion of the program, but how can we best deliver what's best for our community. Becki in the most pragmatic, affordable way. I want us to be conscientious that this is these changes matter and words matter and how best we can be poised to be the best at delivering a system that people can ride as soon as possible. So with that, is there any further discussion or comment? No. So everyone in favor of this motion, please say aye. Aye. Aye. Action item number two passes unanimously. All three bodies passed. Action item number two. And unanimous way. We'll now go to item number three, action item number three reads. And again, it is posted the same way for all three entities. Approve amendment to the project connect community

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advisory committee's bylaws to allow a member of the cac to continue to serve after the expiration of the member's term for up to six months. If a replacement has not been appointed, the item will allow, as I just said, it's self-explanatory. Members to continue to serve for up to six months unless a replacement is appointed. The current terms for all members expire on June 30th, 2023, and there are no hold over provisions currently in the bylaws. If approved, members may remain through the end of the year until new appointments or reappoint payments are made. I want to reiterate what I said just a minute ago to the chair of the cac and we can't thank enough the cac and I do that wholeheartedly for their service and the support of the project connect program. So thank you again. Is there any other

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discussion by any members of the boards or the city council on this item? Yes, madam chair, I do like to second and recognize as well the heavy lift dedication, devotion, wisdom that has been brought by all the members of the cac. I have attended many meetings, but I do want to say that one recommendation Ann. I do have is to have staggered terms as well so that we don't have a turnover of all the members at once. So I hope to for the board's to consider a staggered terms. Good good suggestion. Any other discussion? All right. I will now call first on the Austin city council to vote on action. Item number three. And then as I've done before, we'll refer the items to the other two boards as members of the city council. Do we have a motion to approve? Move this item. Council member pool moves adoption Ann of the item. Is there a second?

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It's seconded by the mayor pro tem members. Are there. Is there any further discussion? Hearing none. Is there any objection to the motion without objection, item number three passes. I will now turn it over

to chairman Travillion. Thank you, mayor. I got it. Okay thank you, mayor. Board members, do we have a motion and a second to approve these items as a board member? Vela and board member? Harris all right. Is there any further discussion? Ann is there any further discussion? Hearing none, please. All in favor. Let it be known by saying I and let's pay particular attention to board member pool so we can audibly hear her. All right. All in favor. I okay. Ann and of course, that goes with number two. Number two. And number one as well. All right. Thank you. All right. I'll now turn the chair over to the chairwoman, atp board chair. Thank you,

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mayor. And for our last action item of the day, atp board. Do I have a motion and a second to approve action? Item number three, move by member Garza. Second by mayor Watson. Any discussion? No discussion. Ann. So please, everyone in favor, please say aye. Aye action. Item three passes unanimously. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you to all the board members that all three items, the two items passed unanimously, the action items today and then the atp board voted unanimously on item number one. As we come to the end of this, I want to thank all my colleagues that are here today, not just on the Austin city council, but also the capital metro board of directors and the atp board. And as I've said before, our chair, who's put a lot of heart into this Ross personally, I also want to say thank you to the city council for the energy and time and

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leadership that the individual members of the city council have provided on on this. We wouldn't be here today if we didn't have the collective hard work of all of the joint partnership staff. And when I say that, what I mean is the staff of atp, the staff of capital metro and the staff of the city of Austin, it's really been wonderful to watch you all work and get us to this point today. All of us. I mean, we're all partners in this, but having staff is having staff that can get this work done is crucial. And we really appreciate that. But with that, I'll call for closing comments. Chairman Travillion, I just want to thank my colleagues on all of these boards for working together and seeking to truly understand how the community will be impacted. You know, I don't know a city that calls

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itself a great city that does not also have a great transit system as well. And I think as we become one of the top ten cities in the country, we as we recognize that we're one of the fastest growing cities in the country. It is it is necessary that we are connected to each other. You know, I was around 12 years ago when the initiative did not pass, and it did not pass because we did not communicate well across communities. We did not work together and embrace each other. I think that we've shown a great deal

of trust. I think we've shown a great deal of understanding. But I think that we also have to commit, continue to communicate, continue to align ourselves, continue to work together to make sure that all of our communities are brought together and the access for each of us is improved. I think we have a platform to do that. I think that we have the leadership to get that done. I hope that we continue to work

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together and build a city that we all deserve because if we build it together, thank you. Thank you all. Recognize madam chair, for any closing comments. I'll be brief since I already really read my statement, but without having to read from a script and just speaking from the heart. This is really an honor for me to be serving in this capacity as a community member. So my gratitude really is extended to everyone that showed up through this community forums. I love what our communications team has said that each time we go out to the community, we it's an opportunity to continue to build those relationships. It's an opportunity to continue to bring people along. So my ask to everyone that has tuned in is to continue to be involved. And this is going to be a heavy lift. It's going to be dusty pardon our dust. I've said it before and be patient with us as this great generation of programs do not happen overnight . It do not happen in the blink

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of an eye and it takes every single one of us to make them happen. So I hope with each of the constituent that each of you represent from each of your council districts, each one of them is an investor. It's a shareholder in this investment. Let's make sure we treat their ideas, us with the respect and devotion that it needs. And that I want to let the community know that this board and this vision and this program, will be treated with respect. Because it's your heart and earned money and when we're talking affordability, we want to give everyone the opportunity to live in a city without having to depend on a car for survival that is thriving, that's becoming a pedestrian, that is having a walkable, nurturing city. And I do think that we can get there. But it takes a lot of vision and a lot of courage to

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make it happen. So with that, my gratitude is extended to the community, to the staff that put in so much time to make this happen and to each of the previous leaderships that are no longer with us, that helped us get to this point. So thank you . Thank you, madam chair. I'm going to now call on the administer narrative. I'm going to call on the administrative professional staff, and we'll start with interim city manager Garza, board members, council members, mayor, you know, it's rare that professional staff, as well as policy makers get to be in at the beginning of what really is a generational

project for many years to come, for generations to serve. Austinites and in the region forevermore, I mean, for forever, really. And so this is a great opportunity. And we're willing to take the make the effort to work together to make sure that this happens for the benefit of the citizens of this city. And that's a commitment we make as a

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professional staff. And we look forward to working with capital metro, the atp staff, as well as the board members and finally, it's such an honor to be able to have my older brother, Juan Garza here today. Shouldn't have given him the microphone. I knew that. Next, we'll hear from the president, the CEO of capital metro, Dottie Watkins. Thank you, mayor, and thank you. Boards and council. You know, as a lifelong austinite and a decades long transit professional, this is an amazing day in my life and career. I love being able to see what we are able to accomplish together and I think that is my big takeaway is that we got here together here. And I would be remiss if I did not thank Robert good. And Greg canally for their hard work in getting us here together. There was a lot of hand-wringing in the last seven months as we figured out what we were going to do and how we could make this work. But I think it was because we were willing to roll up our sleeves and think about the difficult questions at hand that we were able to come up with a plan that

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our community supports and that we can afford. And that's not every community can do that. And as quickly as we have accomplished that. So thank you to both of you for your support along the way. And looking forward to getting this done. Thank you. I'll now recognize atp executive director Greg canally. Thank you, mayor. Well, this is a great day for Austin. We've been on a journey over this last year to get us to this point. I think it's good to look back and how we got there. And I do also want to commend my friends and colleagues, Dottie and Robert, for where we are today. And all of our teams working together. It's a fantastic day, but also this acknowledgment of where we're going and this idea of building a different Austin. And we get to do that together. And I think the work that we've done has really laid the foundation for that for our community. A big shout out to all of the staffs. But our atp team who have worked tirelessly over these last months to work with with the metro team and the and the city team to get us to the point and then finally to our community

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who I think daddy said rolled up the sleeves. And we have been working with the community and I think we have really laid the seeds for a long, prosperous future as we work together. So a great day. We are ready. And I think the community needs to know that atp is ready, the city is ready, and capmetro is

ready to deliver on this long overdue promise. Great. Thank you. Well, if there is no objection, Ann this meeting of the Austin city council is now adjourned. I'll turn it over to chairman Travillion and then chairwoman. And this meeting of the cabinet, I'm supposed to say that it's what time it is too. It's 1:43. Sorry okay. And this meeting of the capmetro board is also adjourned at 1:43. And with that, the atp board of directors has now adjourned this meeting for the Austin transit partnership and the time is 1:43 P.M. Congratulations everybody.