



RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

African American Resource Advisory Commission

Recommendation Number: 20260312-011: Support and funding for Voting Accessibility in the FY 2026-2027 Budget.

Date of Approval:

Description of Recommendation to Council:

Subject: Recommendation on the FY 2027 Budget related to Voting Accessibility

Recommendation To Council:

WHEREAS, civic participation through voting is a foundational element of United States democracy and a critical component of community trust, representation, and collective decision-making; and

WHEREAS, voter turnout data in Travis County indicates that even in high-participation elections, a significant portion of eligible voters do not cast ballots, with participation rates commonly ranging between approximately 50 and 60 percent, signaling persistent barriers to access rather than lack of civic interest; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin and Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro) have previously partnered to offer free public transit on Election Day to reduce transportation barriers for voters; and

WHEREAS, many residents—particularly those working hourly, shift-based, frontline, or service-sector roles—rely on **early voting periods** to participate in elections due to limited schedule flexibility, caregiving responsibilities, disability considerations, and financial constraints; and

WHEREAS, limiting free transit access to a single Election Day does not equitably serve voters who depend on early voting opportunities but may lack reliable or affordable transportation during those periods; and

WHEREAS, extending free public transit to include all city-observed early voting days would meaningfully expand access, reduce cost and time barriers, and provide voters with the flexibility needed to participate in the democratic process; and

WHEREAS, a defining characteristic of Austin is its commitment to community-centered solutions and partnerships with trusted local institutions that strengthen civic life and democratic participation; and

WHEREAS, trusted community institutions such as churches, nonprofit organizations, and neighborhood-based groups often maintain existing transportation resources, including buses and vans, and have established relationships that allow them to support community members in safe, coordinated, and familiar ways; and

WHEREAS, structured, organization-led transportation support on official Election Day can address last-mile and same-day accessibility challenges while providing meaningful opportunities for community partners to engage directly in supporting democratic participation;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City of Austin support and explore a partnership with CapMetro to **extend free public transit access beyond Election Day to include all city-observed early voting periods and official voting hours**, ensuring equitable transportation access for residents who rely on early voting opportunities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this expanded public transit access be designed to reduce financial and time-based barriers for voters with constrained schedules or limited resources, enabling greater flexibility in when and how individuals participate in elections; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City of Austin explore the establishment of an **Election Day Community Transportation Partnership Program** to complement expanded public transit access by coordinating with trusted community-based organizations and faith institutions that operate licensed buses or vans to support same-day voting participation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this community-based transportation program be coordinated through an appropriate function within the City's transportation infrastructure, including a designated transportation liaison or program lead responsible for planning, coordination, compliance, and communication with participating organizations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City consider providing a predetermined stipend or reimbursement to participating organizations to offset operational costs such as fuel, staffing, insurance, and scheduling, recognizing their role as civic partners in expanding access to the ballot; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the community-based transportation support focus on **official Election Day voting**, reinforcing same-day turnout while public transit access addresses broader early voting needs; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this two-tiered transportation approach—pairing expanded public transit during early voting with community-anchored transportation on Election Day—reflect Austin’s commitment to equity, accessibility, and community engagement while strengthening participation in the democratic process.

Motioned By:

Seconded By:

Vote:

For:

Against:

Abstain:

Off the dais:

Absent:

Attest: _____

DRAFT