

connections

REGIONAL HIGH-CAPACITY TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION

Issue #1
April 2012

Project Connect Community Open Houses: Round 2

We heard what you told us about high-capacity transit in the first round of community open houses and now we're back to share those results and show you some options for an updated high-capacity transit system for our region.

Ask questions and provide valuable feedback at these informal, come-and-go events.

Tuesday, April 24, 5-8 p.m.

Windermere Events Center, 15803 Windermere Drive, Pflugerville, TX

Thursday, April 26, 5-8 p.m.

Cedar Park Recreation Center, Town Center, 1435 Main Street, Cedar Park, TX

Monday, April 30, 5-8 p.m.

Oak Hill United Methodist Church,
Childrens' Building 7815 Hwy. 290 West, Austin, TX

Thursday, May 3, 5-8 p.m.

Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center, 808 Nile St., Austin, TX
Bus Routes # 17 and 300

Tuesday, May 8, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Austin Energy Assembly Room 130, 721 Barton Springs Rd, Austin, TX
Free parking at Palmer Events Center Garage, 900 Barton Springs Rd.
(Say that you're attending the Project Connect Open House)
Buses Routes # 30 and 5

Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications are provided upon request. Please call 512-369-6201 or email TxProjectConnect@gmail.com for more information.

Take part in developing the plan for regional high-capacity transit in central Texas. We heard from you during our first round of open houses and now we need your help and ideas again.



What is High-Capacity Transit?

Project Connect is developing a framework for implementing the high-capacity transit component of the CAMPO 2035 long-range transportation plan. But just what is high-capacity transit?

High-capacity transit moves more people than a car or typical bus, and typically has fewer stops, higher speeds, and more frequent service than local bus service.

High-capacity transit is also designed to be as congestion-proof as possible by virtue of possessing one or both of the following:

- dedicated lanes/right-of-way for at least a portion of its route
- Transit priority e.g., the ability of a transit vehicle to extend a green traffic signal)

Examples of high-capacity transit include regional, commuter and urban rail; bus rapid transit, or highway express lanes that charge tolls for cars, but are free for transit vehicles such as buses or carpools. High-capacity transit can be used to transport between 400 and 2,400 people every 60 minutes during rush hour.

A regional high-capacity transit system will provide Central Texans with a real alternative to sitting in rush hour traffic, improve our economy and protect our quality of life. With your help, Project Connect will work to answer the following questions:

- How will high-capacity transit components in the CAMPO 2035 Regional Transportation Plan work as a system?
- How will our region organize to develop and operate the system?
- How will we pay for the system over the long term?



High-Capacity Transit Options

Regional Rail

Regional Rail service connects different cities and regions, typically using existing railroad lines.

Commuter Rail

Commuter Rail trains operate on railroad tracks that carry riders to and from work in a region.

Urban Rail

Urban Rail is an electrified service that can operate in mixed traffic, in its own lane, or in separate rights-of-way. Urban Rail is a hybrid between Light Rail and Streetcar in terms of technology and service.

Bus Rapid Transit

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) operates in mixed traffic or its own lane. It usually consists of longer buses with more technology in them to speed up your trip.

Transit on Express Lanes

Express, or managed, lanes are highway lanes that are free to registered van pools and transit vehicles, and tolled for all other vehicles. The toll rate changes throughout the day based on how much traffic is on the managed lanes in order to keep the lanes fully used without being too busy.

Project Connect's First Phase of Community Engagement: What We Heard from You

During the first phase of community engagement for Project Connect, we held community open houses in five locations in our region: Anderson High School in north central Austin, Bowie High School in southwest Austin, Austin City Hall, Seton Health Center in Hays County, and the Baca Center in Round Rock. Hundreds of people took the time to attend one of these open houses, a webinar, or one of our smaller group “road shows” to learn more about Project Connect and high-capacity transit plans and opportunities in the region.

During each of these events, we conducted a brief survey to see what people learned as they visited our exhibits or viewed a presentation on Project Connect. We also solicited ideas on mobility challenges or opportunities from open house participants. In addition, people were asked to identify perceived gaps in the CAMPO 2035 Long-Range Transportation Plan's high-capacity transit plan.

Here's what you told us.

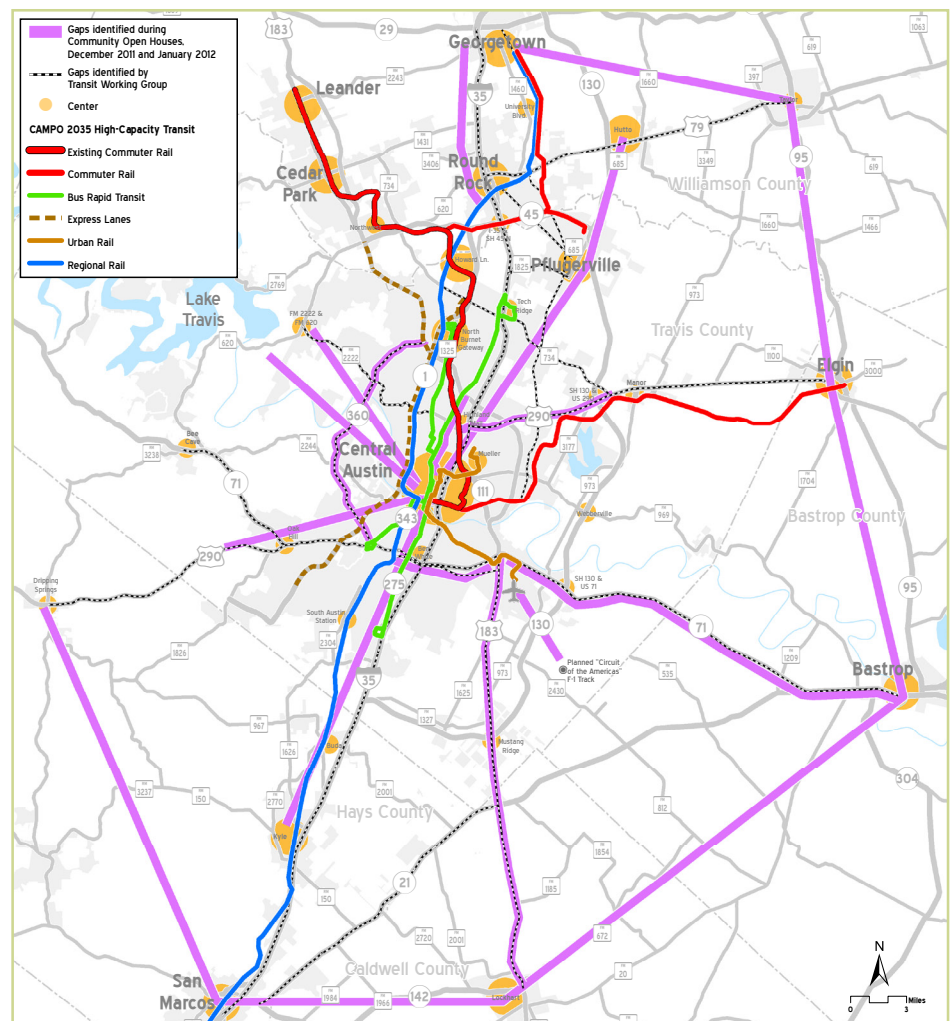
First, about **93%** of the nearly 300 people queried, indicated that they believe that rush hour traffic congestion is a serious problem and must be addressed.

Nearly **91%** responded that, because of the growth in Central Texas and constraints to expanding highways, alternative transportation options

should be explored. About **89%** of those responding also noted that high-capacity transit can be part of the solution for improving mobility in our region.

When asked about challenges and opportunities for addressing regional congestion, people had a variety of comments and suggestions that fell into the following categories.

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Members of the public and the Transit Working Group identified gaps in our region's planned high-capacity transit system.

What We Heard from You *(continued)*

- It would be a good idea to connect land use and transportation, i.e., make it easier for people to travel between home and work or recreation.
- More information is needed on high-capacity transit and more public education on the topic would benefit the regional community.
- It is good to have transportation options. In other words, commuters would like the opportunity to choose ways of moving around the city that include driving in a car as well as using public transportation.
- It would be good to have more high-capacity transit into and within the core of the region (i.e., central Austin) where so many people work and go for entertainment, as well as between the numerous towns and cities that make up our region.
- A consolidation of transportation authorities would benefit the region's residents.
- A network of high-capacity transit and improved roadways (with express lanes) would be of great value to the region.
- To be effective, high-capacity transit needs to have associated infrastructure, i.e., good sidewalks that lead into it, bicycle, pedestrian, and mobility impaired access, and comfortable stops/shelters.
- High-capacity transit should be complemented by bicycle/pedestrian paths/trails and good connections that help people cover the "last mile" to their final destinations.

Finally we asked participants to identify perceived gaps in the high-capacity transit system currently projected for the year 2035. As shown in the preceding map, meeting participants found gaps all over the region.

These gaps fell into the following general categories:

- More east/west transportation opportunities
- More transportation between the suburban areas and the central core of the region
- Enhanced commuter rail coverage and hours
- High-capacity transit from the southwest areas of the region, from the north, and from the east.

TWG Meetings Bring Together Stakeholders from Entire Region

An integral part of Project Connect is the Transit Working Group (TWG), a 17-member group of local elected officials, civic and educational leaders, and other stakeholders with a particular interest in transportation issues. Chaired by Austin mayor, Lee Leffingwell, and organized by the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), the TWG has been meeting in an advisory capacity to Project Connect since last November.

Nearly every two weeks, the TWG is updated on Project Connect's progress and provides input at each stage of the planning process. TWG members are asked many of the same questions as participants in the community open houses and road shows to enable the Project Connect team to get a more complete read on community sentiment about high-capacity transit.

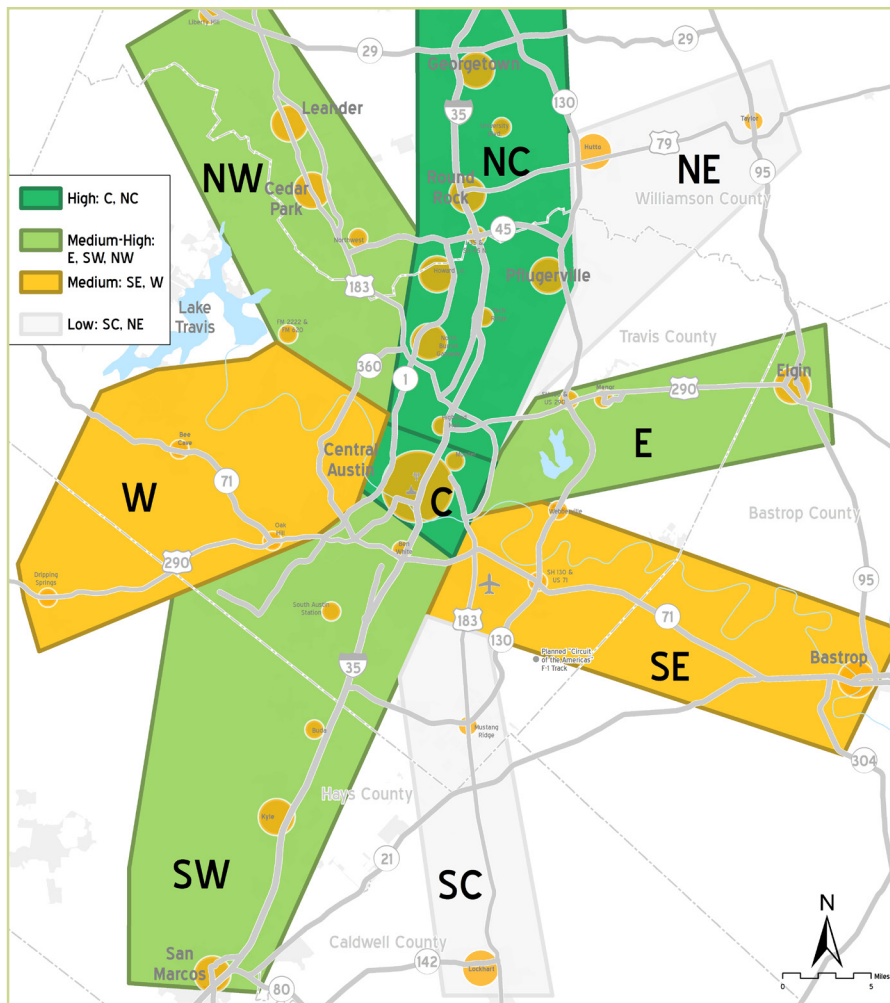
TWG meetings are open to the public and are held on Fridays from 1:30 – 3:30 at City Council Chambers in the Austin City Hall. Meeting agendas for upcoming meetings are posted on the CAMPO's calendar (<http://www.campotexas.org/calendar.php>). Meeting presentations and agendas are posted after each meeting on the Project Connect website (connectcentraltexas.com).

Ranking the High-Capacity Transit Corridors in Our Region

With input from the public and the TWG on gaps in the existing high-capacity transit plan, the Project Connect team looked at the regional transit system as a whole and at then at individual bus and rail projects. The goal was to define the travel corridors and rank them.

The process to define the corridors themselves was fairly straightforward: using major highways and arterials, the team included the feeder and collector roads associated with those major highways and arterials and grouped them. Thus, for example, the South corridor centers on I-35, as does the North Central corridor, and includes the roads that drivers take in order to get to I-35.

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With input from the public and the Transit Working Group, the Project Connect team evaluated and ranked the potential high-capacity corridors; the north central and central corridors came out as the highest priorities.

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Ranking *(continued)*

To rank the corridors, the project team first defined five broad categories: Centers (of employment activity), Congestion, Core (Central Austin), Constraints to expanding existing roadways), and growth (projected population and employment). Then they determined a way to measure how well a corridor met the criteria (as shown in Table I below.)

The Project Connect team then gathered the necessary data to measure each criterion and established a High, Medium, and Low ranking for each criterion. For example, for the criterion of “existing and Projected Congestion in Corridor (2010 and 2035),” the measurement is percentage of highly congested mileage in each corridor. In this case the Central and North Central Corridors scored a “high”

because they have the highest percentages of congestion versus the Northeast and south central corridors that have lower congestion percentages.

The result? A ranking of the corridors based on the number of high, medium, and low scores each corridor received as a result of the evaluation. Higher-ranked corridors had many more high and medium scores than lower ranked corridors.

Table I

Category	Criteria	Description
Centers	Number of CAMPO Centers	The number of CAMPO activity centers (for living and working) located within each corridor
	Transit-supportive Economic Development	Assessment of corridor jurisdictions’ commitment to transit
	Building Permits within existing Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Centers	The number of building permits within existing TOD center boundaries between 2006 and 2010 within each corridor
Congestion	Estimated and projected congestion in corridor (2010 and 2035)	The amount of highly congested highway and arterial mileage divided by total mileage within each corridor for 2010 and 2035
	Total Vehicle Hours Traveled per Mile (2010 and 2035)	Total vehicle hours traveled per mile on highways or major arterials within each corridor in 2010 and 2035
Core	Transportation demand (2010 and 2035)	The number of origin and destination trips within each corridor divided by the number of acres in each corridor
	Trips to core	Total number of trips to the core by corridor in 2010 and 2035 per acre
Constraints	Environmental Suitability	Preliminary quantitative assessment of the environmental sensitivity (natural and built) within each corridor
	Existing Rail ROW	Preliminary qualitative assessment of the existing rail ROW in each corridor
Growth	Existing and Projected Population	Quantitative assessment of total existing and projected (2010 and 2035) population by acre within each corridor
	Existing and Projected Employment	Quantitative assessment of total existing and projected (2010 and 2035) employment by acre within each corridor
	Equity	Preliminary quantitative assessment of EJ populations within each corridor based on 2000 census data

Next Steps

The next steps in the community outreach portion of the Project Connect process are a second round of community open houses (beginning in late April); a stakeholder forum for stakeholders with a particular interest in high-capacity transit; and a series of “road shows” for organizations and groups who have requested a briefing on Project Connect.

The Project Connect team will be using the input from these outreach activities as part of their analysis of various scenarios for high-capacity transit in the region; approaches to organizing and managing high-capacity transit. They will also be looking at potential funding sources and approaches for implementing high-capacity transit in our region.

In June of this year, Project Connect will report out on the results of this planning effort as well as upcoming efforts toward implementing high-capacity transit in central Texas.

Project Connect

Step 1:

- Evaluate high-capacity transit corridors in region. TWG and the public identify “gaps” during TWG meetings and community open houses.
- Project team screens corridors using criteria they have developed. This process results in ranking of corridor priorities.

Step 2:

- System “scenarios” developed and presented for TWG and public review
- Start with CAMPO 2035 projects
- Gaps identified in high- and medium-high-ranked corridors

Step 3: Results:

- Preferred system scenarios developed
- Packages of high-capacity transit projects prepared
- CAMPO Plan updated
- Recommendations for more detailed studies