



Press Release

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**Subject**

Light Rail Project Defined for November Ballot

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Yesterday, the Austin City Council received our request to place a \$397.5 million Guadalupe-North Lamar light rail starter line on the 2016 November ballot. This project represents a transformational opportunity for our city and a win-win for leadership and citizens alike.

**Background**

In October 2015, the city-sponsored **MobilityATX** public engagement process recommended a specific light rail project in its findings. That light rail project was based on a data-driven study developed by the firm **Civic Analytics** that analyzed population density in the City of Austin. **Their findings identified Guadalupe-North Lamar and East Riverside as the highest priority corridors for light rail.** It also located two novel termini of residential density and transit dependency in the Rundberg and Dove Springs areas.

The Central Austin Community Development Corporation took that alignment proposal and developed population and employment data on that route. In the months that followed, we briefed boards, commissions, stakeholder groups, the full council, and several council offices individually on the merits of the proposal.

**As a continuation of this work, we are delighted to introduce a light rail starter line for consideration on the 2016 ballot. It is a 5.3-mile Guadalupe-North Lamar minimum operable segment (MOS) and a first phase of a larger system plan.**

**Starter Line Characteristics (MOS)**

Length: 5.3 miles

Northern Terminus: Crestview Station, North Lamar and Airport Blvd

Southern Terminus: Republic Square, Guadalupe and 4th Street

Cost: \$397.5 Million

Weekday Ridership Estimate: 37,400

City Council Districts with Direct Service: 4, 7, and 9

City Council Districts with Red Line Connection: 1 and 6

**This 5.3-mile Guadalupe-North Lamar MOS proposal falls within the same footprint of a light rail alignment that was vetted and approved by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in 2000.** Over the years, this alignment was written into several neighborhood plans by citizens themselves, was adopted into Imagine Austin as comprehensive plan components, and has received sustained support from community organizations serving over 100,000 Austinites. This would be an investment with decades of community consensus behind it.

Construction will follow FTA guidelines, but our proposal recommends that this project not rely on FTA matching funds. Building the initial investment without seeking an FTA full funding grant agreement will shave years off the process. Houston's successful starter line was also quick-start funded with 100% local funds. The \$397M spent on Austin's MOS can be leveraged 1:1 toward future FTA New Starts matching grants for extensions. Houston Metro was successful in doing just this.

East Austin and Northwest Austin will have a rail connection to the Guadalupe-North Lamar MOS from two directions with a Red Line transfer. Combined with the planned doubling of capacity of the Red Line, the northern light rail terminus at Crestview will increase ridership on the system by attracting rail riders to and from areas of East Austin. The southern terminus at Republic Square will connect the most active local bus hub in the city to the rail system to serve a great number of connections in the city's southern service area.

### **Cost Estimating**

We estimated the costs based on known costs of existing light rail systems nationwide. Our colleague Andrew Clements conducted an [order of magnitude study](#) this spring to develop the estimate of this starter line. That study found of the average cost per mile of a phase one light rail system is \$68 million in 2016 dollars. We feel that \$75 million per mile, or a **\$397.5 million total cost, will be an accurate estimate to build the 5.3-mile Guadalupe-Lamar MOS.** Without the signature bridge of the 2014 Project Connect proposal, its tunneling under the Red Line at Hancock Center, and the costs of constructing four large park-and-ride garages, this is a cost-effective first step toward securing a future for real mobility choice in our city.

### **Political Feasibility**

In April 2015, the Zandan poll showed that **66% of Austinites would support a new tax to pay for a surface-running rail project.** Even though the Austin Transportation Department omitted light rail as a question in its preferred capital investments in the recent **Mobility Talks** exercise, responses were extremely strong on public transportation. In June 2013, the Austin Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Austin Alliance commissioned a poll of likely voters on what they would support with new taxes. **That poll placed support for a roads-only ballot measure approach at 19%.**

The voters know what they want, and the people have assumed a leadership role on the issue of transportation planning. There is little doubt in our communities that a strong light rail starter alignment will prevail at the polls in 2016. **We call on City Council and other policymakers to listen to Austinites and to let them choose for themselves in November.**

2016 is a presidential election year, and such elections garner large turnouts. They are precious opportunities for transit referenda and should not be wasted. Municipal governments and transit authorities with successful rail programs don't waste time between elections, they get busy.

When ballot measures fail, there should be no shame for a proactive authority. Other jurisdictions have returned to their voters at the next opportunity with an improved plan. Transit is a fully bipartisan issue, and Austin can do just this.

This is a decision that Austin City Council can undertake with confidence. Over the last 30 years, over \$20 million has been spent studying, planning and even completing preliminary engineering on the Guadalupe-North Lamar light rail alignment. **These efforts have arrived at a singular conclusion: Guadalupe-North Lamar would be a great place to start to build a rail system.**

Post-election polling shows that Austin voters are ready to move forward with rail. Let's trust them as partners in this decision.

### **Only The Beginning - Future Extensions and a System Plan**

If built, the Guadalupe-North Lamar MOS could be the first step in a multi-phase 24.4-mile light rail system that would serve all areas of the city.

*CAUTION: The following data do not correspond to the 5.3-mile Guadalupe-North Lamar MOS, but are intended to provide system location of a potential future build-out.*

### **The MobilityATX/Civic Analytics Alignment**

Length: 14.6 miles

Inclusive of the 5.3-mile Guadalupe-North Lamar MOS

Northern Terminus: North Lamar and Rundberg

Southern Terminus: William Cannon and South Pleasant Valley

Population within 1/2 mile: 136,450

Housing Units within 1/2 mile: 60,285

Employment within 1/2 mile: 171,206

Colorado River Crossing: 1st Street Bridge

City Council Districts with Direct Service: 2, 3, 4, 7, and 9

City Council Districts with Red Line Connection: 1 and 6

### **Future Extensions**

#### **Phase Two - South Lamar**

Length: 5.5 miles

Northern Connection: 1st Street and Riverside Dr

Southern Terminus: South Mopac and 71 interchange area

City Council Districts with Direct Service: 5 and 8

#### **Phase Three - Austin Bergstrom International Airport via Bergstrom Spur**

Length: 4.3 miles

Western Connection: South Pleasant Valley and Todd Lane

Eastern Terminus: ABIA terminal lower level

City Council District with Direct Service: 2

## **East and West Austin**

A Green Line commuter rail project that runs through East Austin is provided for in CAMPO's 2040 plan. This diesel commuter alignment would connect with the light rail system in Downtown Austin.

If the Brackenridge Tract development is approved, a West Austin light rail extension may serve this area via a Lake Austin Blvd and Exposition through a Seaholm. This would allow any development at the site to occur with fewer accompanying cars, less parking at the project, and reduce traffic pressure on the surrounding community. The MUNY golf course was once connected to downtown Austin by a streetcar alignment.

Together, these two extensions would provide critical east-west service and directly serve districts 1, 9 and 10.

## **Who We Are**

The Central Austin CDC has been privileged to serve as a community organizer at a most unique time in our city's history. Over the last four years, we have engaged the public to work on an issue of utmost importance: planning for Austin's first phase investment of light rail. This work has empowered a diverse coalition of communities, non-profit groups, transit professionals, and light rail advocates. A consensus vision has emerged from this grassroots process for a north-south, expandable backbone of light rail service in the Guadalupe-North Lamar Corridor.

## **Resources**

System Map with MOS Proposal 1605-CACDC\_alignment\_rev02.jpg  
Population and Housing Units for MobilityATX/Civic Analytics Proposal  
Population\_and\_Housing-Primary\_Alignment.png  
Employment for MobilityATX/Civic Analytics Proposal Employment-Primary\_Alignment.png  
Excerpt from 2015 Zandan Poll zandan-poll-page from ppt.png  
Excerpt from 2013 DAA-Chamber Polling DAA-Chamber\_roads-only-polling.png  
CACDC presentation to boards and commissions 160512\_CACDC\_Light\_Rail\_Proposal-r.pdf  
CACDC logo CACDC-logotype\_full.png  
CACDC logo CACDC-logotype\_sm\_72.png