



**For Immediate Release: June 7, 2016**

**Subject**

Light Rail Progress Since the November 2014 Election

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Cities across the US rely on rail mass transit to effectively carry large numbers of people through their densest corridors quickly, cleanly, cost effectively, and without their cars. Austin is decades behind its peer cities due to a combination of factors including poor planning, political stagnation, and a failure of leadership. Things may be beginning to change.

A presidential election occurs this November. It's sure to produce a large turnout, and it may be the last and best opportunity to approve a rail project for at least the next 4 years. The deadline for Austin City Council to act on a ballot measure proposal falls in mid-August, but Council needs citizen input now.

In November 2014, the \$1 billion roads and rail plan with the Project Connect's Highland-East Riverside route was overwhelmingly rejected by the voters. There have been several developments in the last 18 months in planning and policy toward building a rail mass transit system and signs political resolve is emerging to fix this plan:

- CAMPO, Austin's regional transportation planning body, adopted a \$498M high capacity transit project for Central Austin in its long range plan.
- A Zandan citywide poll measured public support for an increase in taxes to build a new rail project at 66%, a 23-point swing from the election. Plan quality and keeping rail and roads funding separate are important factors in that support.
- Travis County passed a legislative agenda that includes light rail as a priority, and Judge Sarah Eckhardt issued a challenge to the community to support building rail.
- Council Member Pool called for a return to planning rail on Guadalupe-North Lamar.
- Council Members Kitchen and Garza voted to advance a new rail study for Central Austin as Capital Metro board members.
- Council Member Casar released a statement supporting light rail for consideration on the ballot in 2016.
- Council Member Zimmerman called for all modes to be included on the November 2016 ballot, including rail, and to let the voters decide.

- The Urban Transportation Commission voted unanimously to recommend rail options on the November 2016 ballot.
- The Zoning and Platting Commission endorsed the consideration of rail for the November 2016 ballot.
- The Planning Commission unanimously endorsed bike, sidewalk, and high capacity transit improvements for the November 2016 ballot.

Last week, The Central Austin CDC completed work on a proposal for a light rail system plan and a starter line that could be considered for full funding this November. Please see the attached map and press release below.

This proposal was created entirely by volunteers, community members, transit advocates and professionals who have donated years of their time and energy to keep the city moving forward on rail mass transit. The starter line is based on several prior studies and falls entirely within an alignment that the FTA approved in 2000. This proposal is a product of extensive community input.

In the days ahead, we encourage the citizens of Austin to consider all transportation bond proposals, and to let the mayor and council members know their preference.

### **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

Press Release: Light Rail Project Defined for November Ballot

160602\_Light\_Rail\_Project\_for\_Nov\_Ballot.pdf

CACDC presentation to boards and commissions 160512\_CACDC\_Light\_Rail\_Proposal-r.pdf

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