

# February-March 2016 Public Meeting Summary Report



A TRANSIT PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



Prepared by:



## **ABSTRACT**

This Public Meeting Summary Report includes an overview of the Connections 2025 public meetings, notification, and input received between February 16, 2016 and March 13, 2016. The meetings discussed constitute the first “round” of public outreach for Connections 2025, including general project information, high-level system information, and ways for participants to provide input on Capital Metro strengths, weaknesses, and priorities.

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## Overview

Capital Metro held a series of public open house meetings and webinars between February 16, 2016 and March 13, 2016 in conjunction with the Connections 2025 project. The meetings were advertised via the project website and the Capital Metro website; e-mail; in-person events; flyers and brochures; on-vehicle advertisement; on hold phone messages; at-stop signage and handouts; and traditional and electronic media. Capital Metro also shared meeting information with partner organizations, who in turn communicated with their stakeholders via newsletters and social media.

Approximately 230 people attended the open house meetings in person, and 9 attended via webinar. The Connections 2025 team also engaged over 1,100 people at various “pop-up” events around the region.

Several related meetings/events were held following the public open house meetings, including neighborhood association meetings, a meeting with One Voice Central Texas, and meetings with the Austin Conversation Corps. Input received at these meetings is incorporated into this summary where relevant.

## Meeting Notification

Capital Metro and the Connections 2025 team distributed information about the public open house meetings in several ways. Copies of meeting notification are included in Appendix 1, and printed materials are included in Appendix 2.

**Project website.** Information about the purpose, dates, times, and locations of the open house meetings was posted on [Connections2025.org](http://Connections2025.org) in mid-January. Viewers could choose from a calendar or map view of meeting times and locations. Capital Metro blog posts also advertised the upcoming meetings.

**E-mail.** Two e-mail notifications were distributed to the project mailing list and the Capital Metro general email list in early February. A complete list of meeting times and locations were included in an e-newsletter on Feb. 10, 2016, as well as a reminder email on Feb. 15, 2016 (the day before meetings started).

**In-Person Events.** Capital Metro staff distributed information about Connections 2025 and the open house meetings at stops throughout the Capital Metro network in early February. Printed flyers were posted at the 30



busiest bus stops. Brochures were distributed at several local events. More information on these events is included in Section 3 below under “Additional Meetings”.

**On-Vehicle Advertisement.** Interior bus placards, exterior bus ads, and onboard message centers advertised the Connections 2025 project. Connections 2025 flyers and brochures (which included dates, locations and times of public meetings) were available on buses.

**Traditional Media.** Capital Metro distributed a press release on Feb. 10, 2016 about the upcoming open house meetings, and re-issued it on February 15, 2016 (the day before meetings started). Print ads were placed in the Austin Chronicle, Austin-American Statesman, Ahora Sí, Nokoa, and Villager publications.

**Electronic Media.** The Connections 2025 App provided information about the upcoming open house meetings. Capital Metro distributed also meeting information via social media (Facebook, Twitter), and posted Connections 2025 digital ads in Austin 360 for web and mobile devices, and the Austin Chronicle online.

**Other.** The on-hold messages on Capital Metro customer service lines included information about the upcoming public meetings.

## Meeting Locations and Attendance

Open house meetings were held at several locations across the Central Texas region between February 16, 2016 and March 13, 2016. The following table shows the dates, locations, and participation at each meeting. The team engaged nearly 230 people during the open house meetings.

### Open House Meetings

Date	Location/Time	Engaged
2/16/16	ACC South Austin, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	15
2/17/16	Austin City Hall, 8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	50
2/17/16	Northwest Austin Rec Center, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	10
2/17/16	ACC Riverside, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	3
2/18/16	ACC Pinnacle, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	4
2/18/16	Pleasant Hill Branch Library, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	6
2/18/16	North Austin YMCA, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.	17
2/20/16	Asian-American Resource Center, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.	18
2/20/16	Faith United Methodist Church, 9:00 – 10:30 a.m.	50
2/23/16	Manor City Hall, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.	10
3/1/16	Lago Vista City Hall, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.	2
3/2/16	Pleasant Hill Branch Library (CAMPO meeting), 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.	6
3/8/16	Pleasant Hill Branch Library (District 2 open house), 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.	36
<b>Total</b>		<b>227</b>

Two webinars were held during the week of the public meetings. The webinars included the same informational materials as the open house meetings, and encouraged participants to provide input via structured questions. Below are the dates, times and attendance of each webinar.

**Webinars**

Date	Time	Attendance
2/16/16	6:00 – 7:00 p.m.	5
2/18/16	12:00 – 1:00 p.m.	4

## Additional Meetings

In addition to the open house meetings, Capital Metro also held a meeting with One Voice Central Texas on February 6, 2016, and acted as the February monthly topic for the Leadership Austin Conversation Corps. Input received during these meetings is included in this summary where relevant.

The Connections 2025 team attended two neighborhood association meetings in early March at the following locations. Neighborhood outreach will continue throughout the project process.

**Neighborhood Association Meetings**

Date	Time	Neighborhood Association	Attendance
2/20/16	10:00 – 11:00 a.m.	University Hills	19
3/1/16	6:30 – 8:30 p.m.	North Shoal Creek	24
3/10/16	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.	Southwood	37

To reach people unlikely to attend scheduled public meetings, the team branded an engagement bus and literally hit the streets to reach people where they were—at public gathering places like farmers markets, community events like the Chinese New Year Festival and the Kite Festival, bus stops and train stations. Volunteers from a variety of Connections 2025 departments staffed the bus, distributed information on Connections 2025 and invited people to complete the survey on iPads, smart phones or paper. The table below shows participation at these “pop-up” meetings.

**“Pop-Up” Meetings**

Date	Location/Time	Engaged
2/8/16	Leander Station	50
2/9/16	Lakeline Station	65
2/10/16	Howard Station	23
2/10/16	Bluff Springs	35
2/11/16	North Lamar Transit Center	55
2/11/16	ACC Highland	35
2/14/16	Austin Marathon	30
2/17/16	Republic Square Station	90

2/20-21/16	Chinese New Year	140
2/26/16	Mobile Outreach	51
2/27/16	Republic Square	75
3/1/16	ACC Riverside	50
3/5/16	Riverside T-Mobile	7
3/6/16	Zilker Kite Festival	397
3/7/16	ACC South Austin	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,128</b>

## Meeting Exhibits/Activities

Each open house meeting consisted of seven “station” areas with different purposes and information. Participants were encouraged to move through the meeting in roughly station order. Project team staff were available at each station to answer questions. Copies of exhibits/materials at each station are available in Appendix 3.

**Station 1: Sign In.** Attendees were invited to sign in with their name, organization, and email address if they wished to be added to the Connections 2025 email list. A Connections 2025 team member offered participants a project fact sheet, brochure and comment card; provided information on navigating the meeting; and answered any questions attendees may have had.

**Station 2: About Connections 2025.** This section consisted of two boards showing background information on Connections 2025 as a transit system, including facts on routes, ridership, and a system map.

**Station 3: About Connections 2025.** Five boards provided information on the Connections 2025 project including the problems Connections 2025 intends to address; project goals; an overview of what will be studied; stakeholder engagement; and project schedule.

**Station 4: Transit and Our Region.** This station included three maps showing population/employment densities for 2015; future growth areas; and a visual depiction of ridership volumes across the system.





**Station 5: Transit Priority Game.** At this station, participants were invited to provide input on how they would prioritize potential Capital Metro improvements. Each participant was given five “dollars” to spend among ten categories: frequency, coverage, easy transfers, late night/weekend service, Wi-Fi/technology, direct service, Park & Ride, simplified fares, shelters/benches/lighting, and reliability.



Players could split money evenly between categories, or place multiple dollars into a single category. The intent of the game was to discover how citizens would make choices between competing priorities.

**Station 6: Thinking About Transit.** Following the prioritization game, participants had two additional ways to provide input. A large map of Central Texas including street networks and Capital Metro routes was laid out on a table. Small colored sticky dots corresponded to five categories of trip purposes: home,

work, school, shopping, and recreation/other. Participants were invited to place the sticky dots on the map to indicate areas where they would like to travel on transit.

A large piece of butcher paper was available titled “I Would Ride Transit More Often If...” Sticky notes and markers were available for participants to write their thoughts. Each participant could add as many comments as he/she wished.

**Station 7: Next Steps.** Near the meeting exit, one board thanked participants for attending, invited them to the next round of public meetings, and included project website information and additional ways to participate.

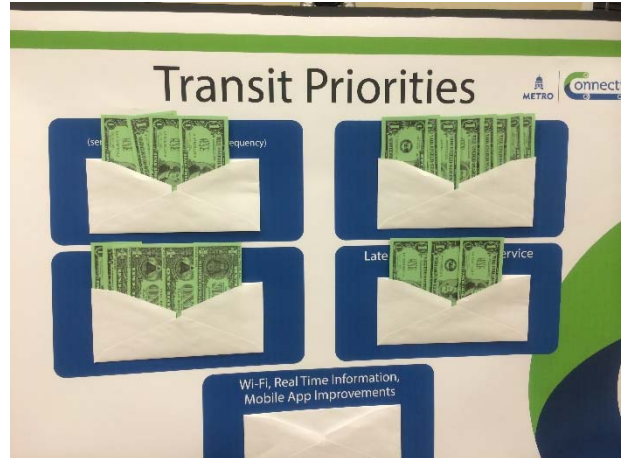


# Stakeholder Input

This section summarizes input the project team received during the open house meetings.

## Transit Priority Game

As described above, this activity asked participants to distribute five “dollars” between ten potential improvement categories: frequency, coverage, easy transfers, late night/weekend service, Wi-Fi/technology, direct service, Park & Ride, simplified fares, shelters/benches/lighting, and reliability. The following tables show how participants at each meeting rated the options.



Category	ACC South 2/16/16	City Hall 2/17/16	ACC Riverside 2/17/16	NW Austin Rec Center 2/17/16	ACC Pinnacle 2/18/16
Frequency	13	39	4	7	8
Coverage	4	22	1	6	3
Easy Transfers	2	3	2	4	4
Late Night/Weekend Service	3	10	1	3	2
Wi-Fi/Technology	0	10	0	0	1
Direct Service	2	5	3	5	3
Park & Ride	6	11	0	9	4
Simplified Fares	4	10	0	4	0
Shelters, Benches, Lighting	3	12	2	2	1
Reliability	8	28	2	5	4

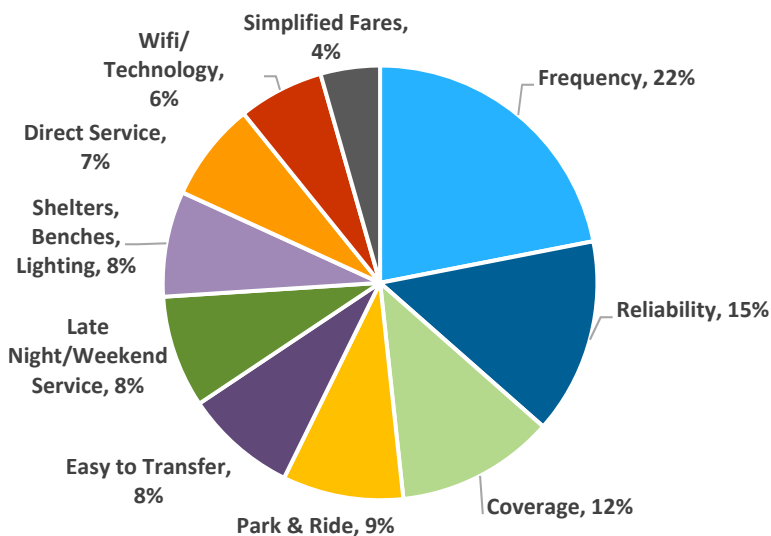
Category	Pleasant Hill Library	N Austin YMCA	AARC	Faith United Methodist	One Voice Central TX
Frequency	3	17	5	30	8
Coverage	2	11	7	13	3
Easy Transfers	0	8	3	20	5
Late Night/Weekend Service	3	5	2	16	6
Wi-Fi/Technology	2	5	1	15	5
Direct Service	0	7	3	14	3
Park & Ride	0	6	1	17	1
Simplified Fares	0	3	0	5	1
Shelters, Benches, Lighting	1	12	1	10	4
Reliability	4	12	2	18	6

**Final Results**

Category	Total
Frequency	<b>134</b>
Reliability	<b>89</b>
Coverage	<b>72</b>
Park & Ride	<b>55</b>
Easy Transfers	<b>51</b>
Late Night/Weekend Service	<b>51</b>
Shelters, Benches, Lighting	<b>48</b>
Direct Service	<b>45</b>
Wi-Fi/Technology	<b>39</b>
Simplified Fares	<b>27</b>

Frequency, reliability, and coverage were the top three priorities, accounting for nearly 50 percent of total funds spent. The following pie chart shows a breakdown of prioritization among all meetings.

### Transit Priorities from February Open Houses



## Where Would You Ride?

In this exercise, participants were invited to place color-coded dots onto a large map of Central Texas to represent where they would like to travel on transit. The differently-colored dots represented home, work, school, shopping, and recreation/other trips. A map compilation of these dots is included in Appendix 4.

Most of the dots were placed in locations currently served by Capital Metro (with the greatest concentration of dots appearing downtown), with some individual areas off of the network. In a few areas, multiple participants placed dots in areas not currently served by Capital Metro. These areas included:

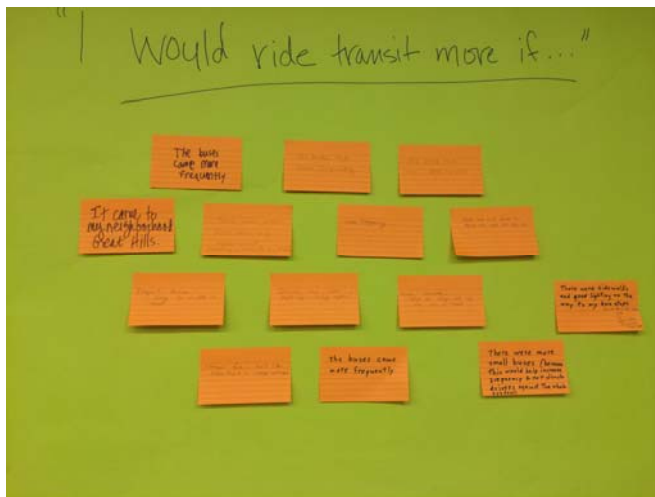
- **Sunset Valley (US 290/Brodie Lane).** This area contains multiple shopping centers and several big-box stores. The city of Sunset Valley does not currently participate in Capital Metro service funding agreements.
- **Circle C area along Escarpment Blvd.** While Route 111 operates express trips in this area, no all-day service is available.
- **Barton Hills.** Several home and shopping stickers were placed in the area west of S. Lamar. Capital Metro Route 29 used to operate in this area.



## I Would Ride Transit More Often If...

A large piece of butcher paper titled “I Would Ride Transit More Often If...” allowed participants to voice their individual comments on service improvements. Participants wrote their thoughts on post-it notes (as many as they wished) and attached them to the paper. Individual comments are included in Appendix 4.

Comments varied considerably, including service-related suggestions such as greater frequency or speed, to customer convenience issues such as bus shelters or better customer information. Some participants recommended institutional or funding-related changes such as better coordination with land use or a funding mechanism which does not allow individual communities to opt out.

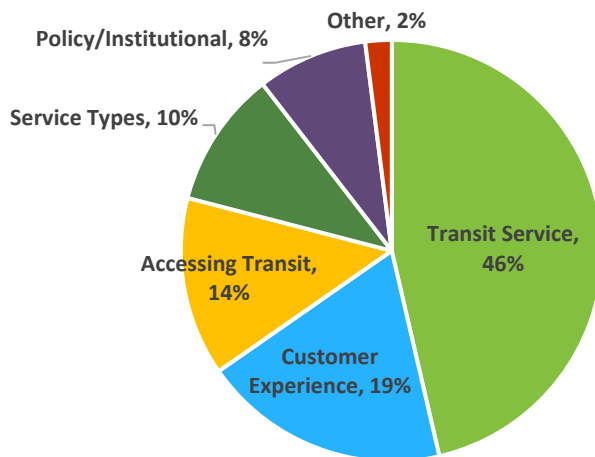


Following the meetings, the comments were categorized in terms of the types of issues they referenced, including main and sub-categories. The six main categories are:

- Transit service
- Customer experience
- Accessing transit
- Service types
- Policy/institutional
- Other

The chart below shows a breakdown of comments amongst the various categories. Transit service included the largest share of comments, at nearly 50 percent. Some comments applied to multiple categories.

I Would Ride Transit More Often If...



The table below shows the number of comments within each sub-category. Some comments applied to multiple categories.

**I Would Ride Transit More Often If...**

<b>Comment Category</b>	<b>Number of Comments</b>
<b>Transit service</b>	
Frequency	28
Coverage	25
Transit design	23
Route-specific suggestion	21
Speed	17
Service span (days/times)	15
Transfers	13
Reliability	5
Schedules	2
<b>Customer Experience</b>	
Stop/station amenities	15
Technology	11
Comfort/convenience	9
Vehicles	7
Customer information	6
Customer service	3
Safety	3
<b>Accessing Transit</b>	
Accessibility/infrastructure	11
Park & Ride	11
Stop/station placement	7
Bikes	5
<b>Service Types</b>	
Rail	18
Circulators	6
Express buses	1
Vanpools	1
<b>Policy/Institutional</b>	
Fare policy	15
Coordination with land use	2
Funding	2
Markets	2
<b>Other</b>	5

The prevalence of certain comments is interesting when compared with the transit prioritization exercise. Both activities confirm that bus service frequency and coverage are top priorities for local citizens. Reliability, however, which scored highly in the prioritization exercise, was less commonly-mentioned among the comments; participants were more likely to reference frequency, convenient transfers, speed, or other attributes related to reliability.

## Austin Conversation Corps

The Austin Conversation Corps, a program to engage citizens throughout Austin in locally-based conversations about civic topics, held meetings throughout February 2016 focusing on transit and parking issues. Specifically, participants responded to questions such as “What makes it difficult or easy to access the areas of town you want to go? What would encourage you to use transit service more often? What can be done to improve the downtown parking experience?”

Meetings were held in various locations throughout Austin, and feedback varied by location. Some of the key topics heard at the meeting regarding transit included:

- Expansion of options to get around town
- Education of Connections 2025 services and alternatives to personal vehicle
- Bus efficiency and reliability
- Integration of transportation options - facilitation of payment and access between transit modes
- Safety concerns for all involved - mass and personal transit users, cyclists, and pedestrians
- Technological solutions for parking and transit issues

A report regarding specific feedback discussed at the February 2016 Conversation Corps meetings is included in the appendix.

## Conclusions

Across all meetings, transit frequency and reliability were top priorities for local citizens. The riding and non-riding public is looking for convenient service they can use without consulting a schedule, and wants to depend on transit to get them to their destination on time. Frequency and reliability are closely related – if a route on 30- or 60-minute headways is off-schedule (or if the rider misses the bus), it is more difficult to depend on a consistent arrival time compared with a route where the next bus arrives in 10 minutes or less.

Transit service coverage was also prominently mentioned among both the priorities and the “I would ride transit more often if...” comments. Many people mentioned they would use transit more if it was available in their neighborhoods, or if it conveniently served certain destinations. Several comments stated transit worked well for downtown trips, but was less convenient for other areas. Coverage is related to another highly-ranked priority, Park & Ride availability. If Park & Ride lots are available, transit does not need to inefficiently serve individual



neighborhoods to allow walk access – riders can take their cars to more centrally-located transfer points.

Many participants mentioned the need for expanded rail service in Central Texas. Several also mentioned dedicated lanes, which serve a similar purpose to rail in terms of providing transit pathways unaffected by automobile congestion.

Several participants addressed fare policy in their “I would ride transit more often if...” comments – most commonly recommending removing the surcharge for MetroRapid routes and advocating one pass that would cover both local and MetroRapid services. In the transit priority exercise, however, “Simplified Fares” received the lowest score, suggesting that participants did not feel it was as important as other priorities (or did not fully understand the meaning of simplified fares).

## Differences by Location

On the whole, there were few clear differences in priorities or comments between different locations throughout Central Texas, suggesting general broad agreement on key issues. A few differences to mention include:

- While frequency was the highest-ranked priority among the meetings, participants at the Northwest Austin Rec Center and the Asian-American Resource Center were more likely to rank coverage as more than or almost as important as frequency. Northwest Austin Rec Center attendees ranked Park & Ride availability as the highest priority.
- Participants at ACC South were more likely to reference customer experience or policy/institutional issues in their “I would ride transit more often if...” comments. Alternatively, Northwest Austin Rec Center and North Austin YMCA participants referenced mostly transit service issues.
- Participants at Austin City Hall, ACC Pinnacle, and Faith United Methodist Church indicated they would like to make shopping trips in Sunset Valley where there is no current Capital Metro service.



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