



March 20, 2023

From: Austin Outside

Re: ATX Walk Bike Roll draft mobility plans presented to the public during February - March 2023

Austin Outside's mission is to champion outdoor places for all throughout Greater Austin. We are a coalition of 61 member organizations focused on parks, open space, active transportation, and the environment.

In this document, we offer our own input on the draft Urban Trails Plan, Bicycle Plan, and Sidewalks, Crossings, and Shared Streets Plan based on the drafts shared with the public during February-March 2023. This input is based on our collective professional experience. Our perspective is both distinct from and complementary to the input gathered through public surveys and community ambassador reports. We have a big-picture perspective drawn from our work advocating for outdoor spaces and the people who use them – including the tens of thousands of diverse community members collectively served by our organizations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

- **Joanna Wolaver, Board President**

AO Board Members: Drew Carman, Melinda Chow, Marianne DeLeon, Priya Patel, Nina Rinaldi, Ted Siff, Kari Spiegelhalter, Tom Wald

AO Trails & Active Transportation Committee Chairs: Nina Rinaldi & Darron Jurajda

Urban Trails Plan

We appreciated the clarity and organization of the Urban Trails Plan. The GIS maps of the proposed Urban Trail network made it convenient to review.

Implementation Scenarios & Timeline

Tier 1, the highest priority tier for Urban Trails projects, includes 84 miles of trail with a projected completion timeframe of 20 years (p 35). The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) aims for 50% of Austinites to be commuting without a single occupancy vehicle by 2039. This target date for 50/50 modeshare is only 16 years away – what we build in the next 10 years, not the next 20, will determine whether or not we meet it. Given the timeframe for our ASMP goals, policymakers would benefit from clear scenarios showing what resources the City would need to build out our priority trails on a faster timeline. We ask staff to consider including several alternate build-out scenarios and timelines and elaborate on the resources necessary to support each one.

Trail Easements & Trail Width

The Urban Trails Plan should set out a process for increasing the standard width for requested trail easements. The default request should be for trail easements that can comfortably fit dual-track trails at widths that reflect a lifetime of usage projections, e.g. 80 years. This often means a 14' bikeway and a 10' walkway, plus buffer on either side and in between the trails. The cumulative buffer space should be adequate to allow for shade trees. These requirements would necessitate closer to a 50' easement rather than 20'.

Sidewalks, Crossings, and Shared Streets Plan

Shared Streets

We are supportive of and optimistic about the proposal to utilize Shared Streets as a means to rapidly expand our pedestrian network. The Shared Streets approach has tremendous potential to accelerate buildout of our pedestrian network, and we commend staff for their thorough work to identify the streets that are appropriate for a shared street treatment. We also appreciate the need for iterative development and real-time testing of Shared Streets infrastructure. Although that process will be ongoing, we believe it is important that the Sidewalk Plan establish basic safety criteria to determine the success of shared street configurations. This criteria would distinguish Shared Streets' contribution to Austin's pedestrian network from traffic calming efforts, i.e. the City's existing Speed Management program.

In order to fulfill its potential and meaningfully serve pedestrians, the Plan should incorporate the following considerations into the Shared Street Program:

1. In order to succeed, Shared Streets must offer safety benefits to pedestrians that are on par with what sidewalks offer. Sidewalks keep people safe by separating them from car traffic. To achieve a comparable level of safety in a Shared Street context where pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers are expected to encounter one another, car speeds must be slowed to the point where the risk of serious injury is extremely low.
2. The target range for car speeds should draw on evidence about vehicle speed and the risk of severe injury. According to a 2011 study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety,

Results show that the average risk of severe injury for a pedestrian struck by a vehicle reaches 10% at an impact speed of 16 mph, 25% at 23 mph, 50% at 31 mph, 75% at 39 mph, and 90% at 46 mph. The average risk of death for a pedestrian reaches 10% at an impact speed of 23 mph, 25% at 32 mph, 50% at 42 mph, 75% at 50 mph, and 90% at 58 mph.¹

3. The Plan should establish clear, consistent metrics of success in order to determine whether a given Shared Streets configuration provides adequate levels of safety.
4. The neighborhoods where this treatment is planned for should be able to repurpose the areas that are reclaimed from vehicle right-of-way, with vegetation, planters, and other desirable uses.

Safe Crossings

Austin Outside wants to reiterate how important safe crossings are to the network. Roadways with high traffic volumes, moving at high speeds, are significant barriers to people walking, biking, and rolling. We appreciate that this plan focuses on safe crossings and includes strategies such as pedestrian refuge islands, leading pedestrian / bike intervals and specialized signals, pedestrian hybrid beacons, and other strategies to create safe crossings and a connected network.

¹ *Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death*, Brian C. Tefft, September 2011

Design Standards

The life of a sidewalk is approximately 75 years, meaning each new sidewalk will be serving the community for several generations. It's important to get the design right! The Plan should consider enhancing the minimum standards for future sidewalks, as outlined in the "Policy Redesign Recommendations" from the attached *Taylor's Path* document. If/when necessary, the Plan should propose a process for updating the Transportation Criteria Manual as needed to implement upgrades to design standards.

Currently, the Transportation Criteria Manual sets a 5 foot minimum width for sidewalks plus a 7 foot tree zone along Level 1 roads. The width of both zones increases as the level of street increases. Sidewalk width standards should be 6' even on Level 1 roads, especially to allow for social walking, and for two people to pass each other in opposite directions. This 6' minimum should also be reflected in other documents, for situations not covered by the TCM. Sidewalk turns should include tapering to reflect real-world usage. This helps with social walking, running, wheelchair movements, and stroller use.

Bicycle Plan

We are pleased that the Bicycle Plan is on the path to completion. However, the current draft is missing the central elements that typically form the substance of an infrastructure plan. As such, we are not able to offer feedback on its content at this time.

The draft Bicycle Plan should be completed with the following components. It should then be re-released for a phase of community input in order to allow the public to engage with the substantive elements of the draft Plan.

1. **Proposed network map.** According to the draft Plan, “The AAA Bicycle Priority Network updated through this planning effort has grown to over 1,200 miles of protected bicycle lanes, neighborhood bikeways, and shared use paths...” (p. 10). The 2014 AAA Bicycle Priority Network includes 400 projected miles, of which 250 miles have been completed. The [AAA buildout status map](#) is offered in the draft Bicycle Plan as “living network” (p. 64) that will be added to as new bikeway projects are prioritized. We offer that this is not sufficient documentation to back up the ambitious and exciting proposal to add 800 miles to the AAA Bicycle Priority Network.
2. **Buildout scenarios that include cost estimates and timeframe.** The draft Plan offers a cost of \$1 billion to complete the additional 800 miles of proposed AAA bikeway. A placeholder appendix that would presumably include further detail is empty. “Appendix D: Cost Estimate of the AAA Bicycle Priority Network”. Bikeways are essential infrastructure, and this plan should present a transparent methodology for identification of cost and timelines.
3. **Upgraded standards for future segments in the AAA network.** According to Austin’s 2014 Bicycle Plan, “the ‘8-80’ framework is a good test for all ages and abilities where an 8-year-old or an 80-year-old should be able to navigate by bicycle comfortably and safely.” A look at the bicycle facilities included in the [AAA buildout status map](#) shows only select portions of the network where young children or the elderly could reasonably be expected to navigate safely. As the Bicycle Plan is updated, the City should take this opportunity to update its definition of the “All Ages and Abilities” standard to be more consistent and transparent. Standards should allow for context sensitivity while also maintaining clear benchmarks as to which facilities may qualify as AAA.
4. **A process for exploring incremental quality improvements to existing bikeways.** The completed portions of the bikeway network have made tremendous progress by setting aside street space for cyclists – a critical first step in establishing the network. However, the existing network falls short in terms of adequately protecting cyclists in bikeways and at intersections. It’s time to protect the space we have created for people on bikes in order to make our network truly accessible to all ages and abilities. Most of our existing bikeways classified as “protected” in the AAA network are only separated from car traffic with concrete buttons and/or plastic flex posts, both of which are designed to accommodate motor vehicles entering into the bikeway. Until these bikeways are fully protected with a physical barrier such as concrete curb stops or bollards, they should not be considered suitable for all ages and all abilities – particularly when installed on streets where drivers routinely travel 30+ mph. When this critical element is incorporated into the Plan, accompanying metrics should also be added to meaningfully measure our progress towards improving existing bikeways.

Overall: Input Across All Three Plans

Interactive Map Feedback

During the second phase of community engagement, members of the public were invited to pinpoint desired pathways and indicate trouble spots in the active transportation networks on an [interactive map](#). This process garnered over 3,100 comments. This type of crowd-sourced information about transportation networks can be extremely valuable and we commend staff for incorporating this public engagement tactic. Each draft plan should be explicit about how this feedback informed the plans, and how it has influenced project selection/prioritization in particular.

Microconnections

Across all three draft Plans, we would like to see a proactive approach to identifying existing “microconnections” and taking advantage of them to open up new bike/ped routes. By “microconnection”, we mean an informal pathway, usually less than 200 feet in length, that cuts across or between private property to provide connectivity to people on foot and on bike. For example, the City could prioritize acquiring high-traffic microconnections in locations where they are most likely to disappear due to redevelopment or repurposing of adjacent property.

Non-Infrastructure Barriers

While public infrastructure should remain the primary focus of the Walk Bike Roll plans, we recognize that the plans may be a useful setting to highlight certain additional barriers to walking, biking, and rolling. The draft Bicycle Plan has already made an effort towards identifying such obstacles, such as the End of Trip Facilities explored on page 109. Because many of these challenges transcend any particular active transportation mode, we advise staff to consider them holistically and include a unified set of general issues in all three plans. This issue summary could take the form of a simple table like the one below:

Issue Description	Partner Departments/Entities	Potential Solutions
<i>Lack of bike parking at local businesses</i>	<i>Housing & Planning</i>	<i>Revive bike parking retrofit program for local businesses, ...</i>
<i>Loose dogs</i>	<i>Animal Protection</i>	<i>Review education & enforcement protocols</i>
<i>Substandard or unmaintained bike/ped pathways through construction staging</i>	<i>Development Services, Austin Transportation ROW Management Division</i>	<i>...</i>
<i>Example 4...</i>	<i>Example 4...</i>	