

November 14, 2022

From: Austin Outside  
Re: ATX Walk Bike Roll

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.

We are delighted to see participation by over 4,900 Austinites in the ATX Walk Bike Roll engagement process to date, through the Phase 1 [survey](#) and through the [ambassador program](#). In a second phase of engagement, members of the public made over 3,100 comments on an [interactive map](#) indicating their desires for the updated networks.

In this letter, we offer our own input based on our collective professional experience. Our perspective is both distinct from and complementary to the input offered by survey respondents and 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.

## Project Prioritization

We advocate for the following criteria to be used in prioritizing projects within the urban trails, bikeways and pedestrian crossing networks. This is not an all-inclusive list, but several critical considerations when prioritizing projects.

- **Access to nature:** Prioritize projects that connect to parkland and advance the City's goal of all Austinites living within a ten minute walk to a park<sup>1</sup>. In order to walk to a park, you don't just need it to be close by – you also need a safe place to do so. Connecting people to parks is about having the right infrastructure, not just proximity.
- **Regional connections:** Make regional network connections by working with neighboring cities to connect local trails, bikeways, and sidewalks across city boundaries. As the greater Austin metro area continues to grow, much of that population growth will continue to be in the surrounding areas rather than in Austin itself. The more connected our networks can be across the many cities in the Greater Austin area, the better the network will serve everyone.
- **Addressing network gaps:** We believe it is important to pursue equity by prioritizing new facilities in underserved areas where access is lacking. However, when implemented correctly, bikeways and walkways are not isolated amenities that serve only their immediate neighbors. Our active transportation networks should connect multiple destinations in different parts of town. Achieving equitable access means unlocking access to the entire network. This requires not only making new connections but also bridging gaps in the existing network and bringing existing pathways up to a more accessible standard. We urge you to identify and prioritize these important network gaps.

The attached document called “Austin Outside Member Organization Priorities” illustrates a handful of the projects elevated by our member organizations which exemplify the above criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> *City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department Long Range Plan: Our Parks, Our Future*, p 82

## Sidewalks and Shared Streets

The third round of ATXWBR public engagement proposed replacing portions of the planned sidewalk network with “shared streets”. We are aware of the significant time and expense associated with building sidewalks, and are open to creative approaches that allow the City to accelerate build-out of our pedestrian network.

The Shared Streets approach has tremendous potential. In order to fulfill its potential and meaningfully serve pedestrians, Shared Streets should incorporate the following considerations:

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.<sup>2</sup>*

3. The Shared Streets pilot should track clear, consistent metrics of success in order to determine whether a given Shared Streets configuration is successful enough to be deployed in other instances citywide.

Additionally:

- Consider codifying cheaper in-street walkways as another cost-effective solution to pursue on quiet neighborhood streets (examples include [West Avenue](#) and [Brushy Street](#)).
- Consider enhancing the minimum standards for future sidewalks, as outlined in the “Policy Redesign Recommendations” from the attached *Taylor’s Path* document. Currently, the Transportation Criteria Manual sets a 5 foot minimum width for sidewalks along Level 1 roads, and a 6 foot minimum for Level 2 roads and higher.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Joanna Wolaver, Board President

Austin Outside Board Members:

Melinda Chow, Marianne DeLeon, Ted Siff, Tom Wald, Heyden Walker

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<sup>2</sup> *Impact Speed and a Pedestrian’s Risk of Severe Injury or Death*, Brian C. Tefft, September 2011