

Palm Beach TPA and CapMetro

# Peer Exchange

## Summary Report

April 12 - 14, 2023





## Purpose

The Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency (TPA) gathered a delegation of leaders from Palm Beach County to participate in a Peer Exchange in Austin, TX with the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro). The Peer Exchange focused on the region's success in funding a transit plan to implement premium transit and mobility services, as well as the challenges faced with affordable housing and rapid population growth in the region. This Peer Exchange was a follow up to a transportation capacity building program CapMetro participated in at the TPA in January 2020. The TPA delegation consisted of elected officials, staff and leaders from Palm Beach County, Municipalities, Palm Tran, Tri-Rail, the TPA and the economic development community.

## Background

The Austin Metropolitan Area population grew over 21% to about two million people between 2010 and 2020. The region is experiencing a need to improve existing transit service and to reduce congestion based on the growth of this decade. The population is projected to double to four million by 2040.

In 2020 and on the third attempt for a transit focused surtax, residents passed a \$7.1 billion investment to increase transit operations and services. This created new service, adding to existing light rail (LRT), bus and rapid bus, ADA transit and bike share.

Learn more at:  
[ProjectConnect.com](https://ProjectConnect.com)

**2.2 Million**

Austin Metro  
Population

**\$7.1 Billion**

Transportation Surtax  
Passed in 2020

**21%**

Population Increase  
in 10 Years



## Investing the Future: Intro to Project Connect

### Create a plan with something in it for everyone.

The 2020 "Project Connect" referendum was successful due to its early efforts to create a plan that included the community's vision for the future, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP). The ASMP envisioned transportation and transit improvements for everyone, including high-capacity transit routes, mobility on-demand zones, express buses, and congestion relief for drivers. The Project Connect program included free transportation services for seniors, school aged children, veterans and a housing and transit displacement fund for vulnerable populations.

### Build a diverse stakeholder base, including the business community.

ASMP and Project Connect included a wide audience in developing and promoting the vision from the outset. The business community, commuters, environmentalists, and transportation advocates were engaged to help build a broader base of support. These communities led a coalition to build support and ensure a consistent and cohesive message.

### Safety first.

A key message of the Project Connect referendum was the safety of transit users at stations, stops and onboard transit vehicles. CapMetro deployed transit security to create a safe environment for users at all of its facilities. Additionally, Project Connect delivered on safety improvements for roadways where the authority had the ability to make them when implementing transit projects.

### Choose election years carefully.

Austin and CapMetro attempted to pass a transit referendum in 2000 and in 2014. After these close attempts failed, the community decided a regional vision plan must be developed and a new group formed to lead the passage of a referendum. In 2014, CapMetro relaunched an effort through Project Connect to build a new coalition and set of projects for the region with a target of 2020. The focus on that year's presidential election generated a larger electorate to draw from than previous referendums.

## Looking Ahead: Project Connect Implementation

### Celebrate the small wins, plan them often.

CapMetro and community partners led Project Connect through a challenging time in 2020 as the COVID-19 Epidemic created large uncertainties for transit service providers. The community persisted through these challenges by celebrating every small win, and creatively timing service efficiencies with events to celebrate transit improvements. A fixed route service with less than 10 daily customers had service adjustments and was complemented with a mobility on-demand "feeder service", now serving over 100 customers per day.

### Keep your options open.

Transit options for implementation should be kept open in case market shifts occur during the time of many early investments. This has been the case for many roadway and transit projects during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Create an independent oversight authority.

The successful Project Connect resulted in a need for a major body to oversee various governmental actions to deliver on the promises of the referendum. CapMetro and the City of Austin created the Austin Transit Partnership to serve this function and provide implementation of Project Connect on behalf of the voters.

## Building Community: Housing and Transit

### Create an equitable transit-oriented development policy plan.

The City of Austin was especially concerned with the historic inequities and ongoing gentrification occurring in the metro area. In light of this concern, a displacement fund was created and based out of a new tool developed with Federal Transit Authority funds to measure and mitigate impacts to communities. Project Connect's implementation and transit services in the region are complemented by Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies. TDM requires more efficient use of limited transportation resources. For example, at various scales, incentivizing and requiring development to operate or support transit services and programs such as employer paid transit passes. Governments can also provide similar strategies as they typically are generally high trip generators to major employment centers.



# Transit Coalition Building

## Build a base of both in-person and online supporters.

A strong transit advocate presence both online and in person created a platform to dispel misinformation organically. These supporters typically understand the value of transit and can help be a springboard for new ideas, respond to negative messaging and become volunteers for the effort.

## Know the business needs of the community.

Project Connect was supported by a Political Action Committee that raised \$1.5 million. The campaign was supported by over 60 unique organizations. Many of the supporters were businesses with employees who could not get to work on time due to congested roadways. These supporters, in the form of major employers, chambers of commerce and educational campuses were critical to fundraising and legitimacy of the effort.

# The Roles of Agencies in Education

## Give ongoing, transparent and story-driven education.

The use of social media to provide key information about Project Connect helped shape a positive and forward thinking narrative. Paid media was often used to highlight components of the plan alongside community benefits and show milestone progress. This provided transparency and accountability of the agency to build proactive public support.

## Analyze media campaign outcomes.

Utilize data analytics from media campaigns to understand pitfalls of communication strategies around transit and inspire future story ideas. Testing ideas within the base of supporters and champions is also an effective strategy to stay on mission and brand for a campaign.

## Data collection first, strong messages later.

Data collection was a continual effort in the campaign. Community leaders were initially polled to gauge interest in a transit referendum and identify key community touch points like housing. Later in the campaign, data was also collected through face to face surveys, a “transit storefront,” focus groups and social media. This helped create refined, catered talking points for champions to use in the community. The talking points also helped to quell concerns about becoming a “Big City” with “Big City Transit” and if the time was right.



## Host messaging and issues management trainings.

The Project Connect campaign provided training to champions on how to manage issues, discover what talking points were being used by opposing campaigns and share ideas for staying ahead of the curve. This also included discussions with elected officials and community leaders to continue building the base of champions.



## Field Trips

# Summary

The TPA peer exchange delegation and CapMetro Staff embarked on two separate transit tours to see the high quality and high-capacity existing transit, ride an electric bus and light rail vehicle, and see the TOD that has been developing along the major corridors. The key takeaways are:



## Keep the facilities and fleet fresh.

All CapMetro stops and vehicles are kept tidy and in working order. This helps promote a sense of cleanliness and a welcoming environment for riders. Electric buses are being incorporated into the fleet to reduce transit-based emissions on major corridors and create a similar service to existing buses.



## Provide connections to multimodal facilities.

Walking is the most common form of accessing transit. Providing first and last mile connections for people walking and bicycling is paramount to providing access to transit and growing the rider base. Other supportive elements include bicycle and scooter on-board policies for transit vehicles, park and ride connections and bike share to extend service areas at stations and stops.



## Always look for ways to upgrade service.

The light rail (LRT) service is being updated to include new, relocated and updated stations. This Project Connect project placed transit investments into areas to generate greater transit users and to get people to where they need and want to go via transit.



## Utilize TOD and TDM.

The areas surrounding bus and rail transit stops are seeing rapid growth in housing and non-residential development. The Austin development community views transit as a benefit to provide an investment into the system through impact fees. This reduces the amount of parking, saving substantial costs. This TDM strategy is commonplace, especially along rail infrastructure. With the investment of bus rapid transit proposed through Project Connect, this is occurring along these lines too.

## Walking and Bicycling in Austin

Most transit systems require a strong foundation built upon safe, convenient, and comfortable walking and bicycling infrastructure. Included are some of the key features that support people walking and bicycling in Austin.

- Wide sidewalks along major corridors and in downtown with furniture, trees and safe intersections create a comfortable walking experience.
- “Leading pedestrian intervals” allow people to enter the intersection before traffic lights turn green to avoid conflicts between motorists and people walking.
- Protected, Dutch-influenced bicycle lanes and intersections within and connecting to downtown are also used by scooters and e-bicycles.
- Effective blending of recreational paths and transportation facilities create a complete, connected network of sidewalks, trails and bikeways.



## Road Map for the Palm Beaches: Next Steps

### Develop a road map for re-envisioning transit and transportation services.

The TPA, Palm Tran and Palm Beach County are committed to enhancing transit and transportation services across the region for all visitors and residents. These agencies will develop a road map to improve fixed bus route and paratransit efficiency, traffic signal improvements to improve vehicle flow, more bus shelters and transit amenities, on-demand transit service zones, express bus services, pedestrian and bicycle improvements and building a community vision for moving all of Palm Beach County's visitors and residents.

### Continue learning from local and national partners.

The TPA will continue to engage with CapMetro and local partners who participated in the Peer Exchange to learn and explore ideas to implement locally. This also includes municipalities and additional partners to explore future peer exchanges with and to build a better vision for transportation and transit grounded in what is already happening around the country.

### Grow the village.

The business and economic development communities are a staple for advancing transportation initiatives and projects throughout the country. These partners must be involved in the early development of any transportation plans and consulted for their expertise and relationship with the community. No stakeholder is better suited to be a unified voice than one with touch points with the community every day. This includes connecting with a wider audience of non-profits and advocates for better quality of life including sustainability advocates, people who walk, bike, and take transit, higher education students and professionals, and others who have a vested interest in a reliable, safe and clean transportation system and community.

### Utilize the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan to understand Palm Beach County needs.

Palm Beach County is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The TPA is responsible for forecasting this growth in people and jobs, identifying transportation improvements to accommodate all people using the system in a safe, efficient, and connected manner, and adopting performance targets to ensure a quality system. This is completed through the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The TPA is committed to developing an informed LRTP that understands the needs of people living and visiting Palm Beach County, and identifying new or existing local, state, and national resources to support the transportation system.