



Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority 2910 East Fifth Street Austin, Texas 78702

Central Austin Circulator Study Recommendation of a Proposed Streetcar Alignment

Proposed Streetcar Alignment

The recommended streetcar alignment reflects the results of the past year of analysis, stakeholder involvement, and community input.

A map of the proposed streetcar alignment is provided in Figure 1. The streetcar route is a feasible alignment that will be compared against a similar bus circulator alignment in the next phase of the planning process. The following discussion outlines the reasoning for each segment of the proposed streetcar alignment.

West End to Urban Commuter Rail Station

In Downtown Austin, the proposed alignment starts on the west side at the intersection of Bowie and 5th Streets. The proposed route extends south to 3rd Street, turning east and running approximately 2 blocks adjacent to the Seaholm power plant. At Seaholm, an intermodal transit station would be provided to connect with future regional passenger rail in the Austin-San Antonio Corridor.

From the intermodal station, the proposed alignment runs northeast to 4th Street, bridging over Shoal Creek, and then continues on 4th Street to Brazos Street, extending beyond Congress Avenue to intersect with the urban commuter rail line. The 4th Street alignment is preferred to an alternate alignment on 3rd Street because of the potential impact to the chilled water lines owned by Austin Energy, which would have to be relocated if a 3rd Street alignment were selected. The 4th Street alignment also provides the opportunity for a future interlined service connection between the Capital Metro urban commuter rail line and the ASA regional commuter rail line.

Urban Commuter Rail Station to Capitol Complex

The proposed alignment runs north on Congress to 9th and 10th Streets, which are used as a one way couplet to reach San Jacinto. Congress Avenue is strongly supported by the Downtown Austin Alliance in preference to Brazos Street. Congress Avenue is the historic streetcar location in downtown and serves the heart of the major downtown office and retail core. A streetcar would reinforce the already strong alignment of these land uses to Congress Avenue. Connecting to San Jacinto on 9th and 10th Streets is preferred to using 11th Street because of the higher level of traffic on 11th Street, which serves as the major through-street for east to west traffic.

Capitol Complex through U.T.

The alignment on San Jacinto serves the Capital Complex area, and continues north through the University of Texas. This alignment was selected with the involvement of U.T. staff and faculty. However, until the Board of Regents acts, there is not a final decision on the alignment through the campus. The University sees San Jacinto rather than Speedway as the future central spine of the University. Speedway has been closed to vehicular traffic and is being configured as part of the Blanton Museum plaza along MLK. An alignment using Guadalupe Street farther west, would add considerable length to the route (increasing cost and passenger travel times). Using Guadalupe would serve the periphery of the campus. The San Jacinto route provides direct access to the emerging heart of the University as well as good connections to other University transit services.

U.T. to Mueller

At the intersection of San Jacinto and Dean Keeton, the proposed alignment turns east and continues along the Manor Road corridor to the entrance to Mueller at Berkman. This routing is recommended over the use of MLK because of the less steep grades on Manor and because of the generally lower traffic volumes on Manor. Likewise, the route along Dean Keeton is preferred to an alignment that might use Red River to reach Manor Road because it is shorter and can make use of the existing underpass beneath I-35. The Red River alternative would require replacement of the Manor Road Bridge over IH-35.

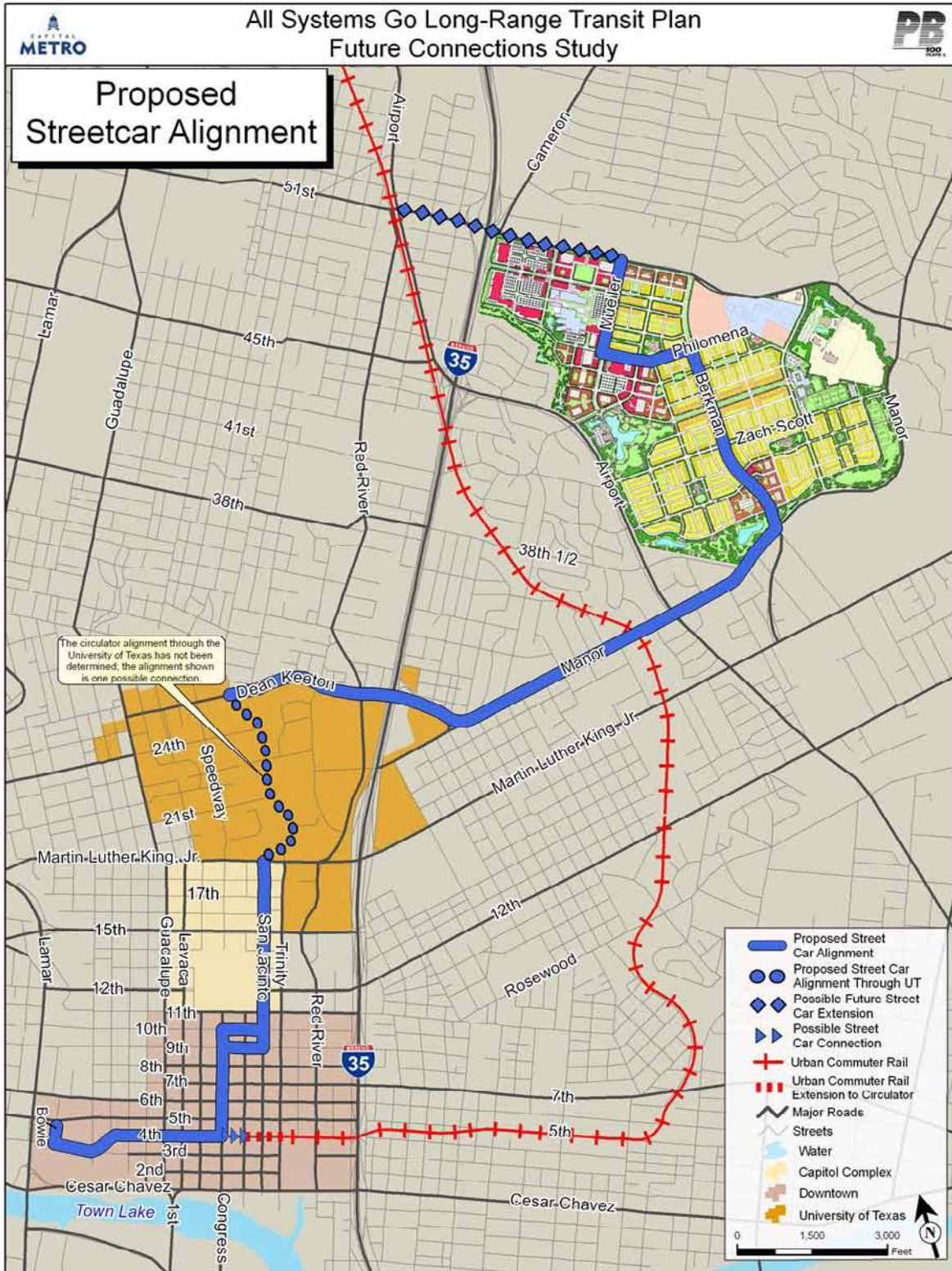
At the intersection of the urban commuter rail line and Manor Road, a transfer station is envisioned. This additional station would work better than routing the circulator south to the MLK Station, which will be located south of MLK. The proposed circulator alignment would then continue east along Manor Road to Berkman Street where it would enter the Mueller Redevelopment project.

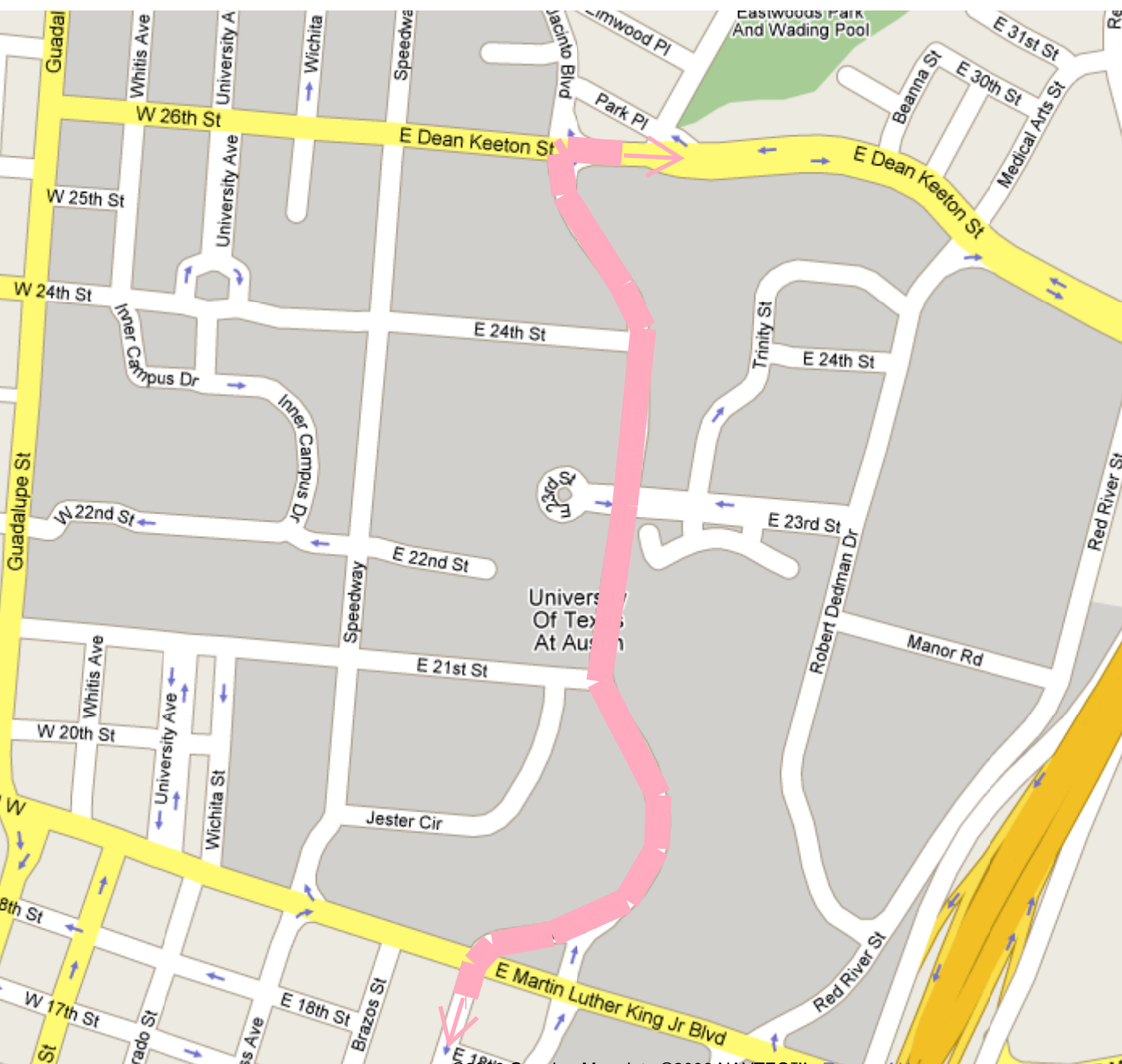
Mueller to 51st

Within the Mueller Redevelopment project, the proposed alignment runs northward along Berkman Drive, turning west on Philomena Street and then north on Mueller Boulevard. This alignment connects the heart of the two proposed town centers within the Mueller Redevelopment project. It is preferred to an alternative routing on Airport Boulevard because it serves both of the town centers, while the airport alignment would miss the southern town center. The Berkman - Philomena alignment is also recommended over an alignment continuing north on Berkman to 51st Street and then along the northern perimeter of Mueller.

The streetcar alignment would terminate at 51st Street on Mueller Boulevard. In the course of this study, it became clear that the 51st Street corridor needs a more comprehensive planning effort than could be included in this study at this time before a clear recommendation could be made. In addition, a further extension of the streetcar to 51st and Airport Boulevard would require the construction of a new bridge over IH-35 at 51st Street. Before recommending that construction, it is important to be sure of the role of 51st Street. Access between Mueller and the commuter rail line can be achieved at the proposed Manor Road station where the streetcar and urban commuter rail would cross. The streetcar route could be extended in a future phase if desired.

Figure 1: PROPOSED STREETCAR ALIGNMENT







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SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A01**LENGTH:** 802 words**HEADLINE:** Agency outlines transit desire**BYLINE:** Ben Wear AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF Capit**BODY:**

Capital Metro on Thursday released a draft version of what probably will be its next rail initiative: a streetcar line from near the Seaholm Power Plant downtown, past the Capitol, through the University of Texas campus and ending at the emerging Mueller development.

Officials with the transit agency emphasized that the proposed alignment is truly a draft, with changes possible in the next month or so. A host of key questions remain unanswered, most notably the cost and anticipated ridership.

And Capital Metro board Chairman Lee Walker said there is no answer yet to the most critical question: Will the board put the streetcar proposal in its final form on the November ballot for voter approval?

But Thursday's release at a board of directors retreat does clear up the question of what mode of transit the board has in mind, who would be served and (probably) which streets would be affected: Fourth, Brazos, Ninth and 10th streets and San Jacinto Boulevard downtown, Dean Keeton Street and Manor Road north and east of UT, and several streets inside the development on the Mueller airport property.

Lucy Galbraith, a co-manager of what Capital Metro calls the Future Connections project, said streetcars and tracks would share lanes with cars. That's in contrast to 2000's light-rail proposal, where car lanes would have been eliminated.

The streetcars would be electric-powered, with overhead power lines connected to them through catenaries. They would stop every two to three blocks, running at intervals of 10 to 15 minutes. And they would be deliberate in their pace.

"It's not there to get you there fast," Galbraith said. "It extends your walking distance."

Galbraith said the streetcars would connect critical areas of Central Austin and make it possible for people to commute by bus or rail, then have a way to get around during the day. Mueller's builders, meanwhile, would be allowed to build a denser project if a rail line comes that way and lowers expected car trips generated by the development.

Galbraith said a final recommended map, costs and ridership estimates should be available in June.

As for that possible election in November?

"I honestly don't know," Walker said as he left the strategic planning session, which was dominated by a 2 1/2-hour closed session with lawyers to discuss labor relations. "You can't have an election until you have all the details laid

on."

Capital Metro, Walker said, has a lot of details to work out with the City of Austin, the State of Texas and university officials. The proposed line, for instance, runs through Austin property near Seaholm and cuts through the UT campus on San Jacinto Boulevard.

"You can't just put (the line) down absent discussions and agreement," Walker said.

Capital Metro also can't put it down, it appears, without getting very creative about coming up with money. Cynthia Hernandez, the agency's executive vice president and chief financial officer, in a presentation to the board just before Galbraith (briefly) presented the map, outlined a bleak financial picture for the agency.

Based on the trends in operating costs, sales tax receipts and fare revenues over the past decade, Hernandez said, the agency's costs would exceed its revenues beginning in four years. And that's without adding more rail in addition to the 32-mile downtown Austin-to-Leander commuter line approved by voters in 2004 and now in the early construction phase.

Hernandez presented a long menu of options to prevent that from happening. A sampling: raising the agency's frozen-since-1985 basic fare of 50 cents a ride; raising fares for people with disabilities who get door-to-door service; transferring routes from the agency's own drivers and mechanics to two contractors who already provide some Capital Metro services; selling naming rights to train stations; and charging for parking at park-and-ride lots.

Hernandez said if Connex - which hires drivers for about \$4 an hour below what Capital Metro drivers get - were to have all the routes, the agency could save \$17 million a year.

As for paying for the capital costs of a streetcar line or the several other future rail expansions on various maps around town, Hernandez mentioned "incremental value," partnerships and transit-oriented development. All of these involve getting money from either other governments or private companies that presumably would benefit from a rail line.

State law requires that Capital Metro hold an election before issuing bonds. Hernandez said the agency would have to shore up its financial outlook to earn a decent bond rating.

Travis County Commissioner Gerald Daugherty, a longtime critic of the agency and its rail plans, withheld judgment.

"I'd like to see a lot more specifics about it," he said, "and especially about how it is financed."

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