
LRT Construction Mitigation Studies

AUSTIN, TEXAS:
Capital Metro Transit
METRO RAIL

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Synopsis

The City of Austin, in conjunction with Capital Metro Transit, is all set to open a new light rail line in March of 2009. In preparation for this, Capital Metro has worked alongside local businesses to ensure that merchants will not only survive the construction process, but be well placed to benefit and thrive with the coming of the light rail. Throughout the construction process this has meant involving community leaders and business owners to ensure that their needs are heard and met when possible.

The approach taken by Capital Metro Transit and the City of Austin has come in two essential steps: shepherding businesses through the construction process and then bringing them successfully out the other side so they can thrive. This has meant engaging in public forums and community meetings to draw residents into the process so as to better understand what they need. By combining individual business services within the broader context of neighborhood strengthening, these mitigation programs strive to draw together both the coming construction process and the subsequent business climate.

This is done so that affected merchants can plan for a future with the light rail. The processes of construction mitigation are fairly straightforward and are comparable to the programs visible in other cities. Where the City of Austin separates itself is giving businesses and neighborhoods the tools to develop themselves beyond the light rail construction and forge a cohesive identity – as both light rail affected businesses and as neighborhoods where businesses can succeed together.



Business Advisory Teams (BATs)

Capitol Metro has provided a forum within numerous business districts to allow affected businesses and surrounding communities to participate in the planning and implementation of the light rail construction project including helping to design business mitigation programs. Each BAT includes representatives from Capital Metro, the City of Austin, local business owners, residents, and existing business and neighborhood associations. Where appropriate, contractors have been involved in the BAT process. This inclusion is so they may work through their own construction process with neighborhood residents and business owners.

“Main Street”

Working in conjunction with professional marketing staff, small business-related government agencies, financial institutions and business organizations, local merchants will be able to develop and market an identity to promote their neighborhood’s economic viability. This program strives to bring businesses together and focus area resources towards addressing neighborhood needs such as traffic patterns, parking, perceived crime and litter. Specifically concerning light rail construction, this program has been focused on how the light rail system can serve as a tool for forging identity and increasing economic viability within a given neighborhood.

Maintain Business Access

During construction, Capital Metro has

endeavored to preserve existing access points (e.g., driveways and building entrances) and protect them from the surrounding disruption of construction. In the event that access points are temporarily inaccessible, alternative access and signage have been provided in addition to well-marked detours where necessary. Additionally, Capital Metro has instructed its engineers and contractors to maintain access to affected businesses during the entire construction process. Construction priorities throughout have included maintenance of high-visibility business signs, directional signage to parking (including new parking alternatives), and well-marked and lighted pedestrian crossings and paths. Early in the project, Capital Metro committed to maintain communication with affected businesses and residents throughout the planning and construction process.

Limited Disruption

Contractor requirements have included restrictions and certain limits on construction schedules to be followed throughout the construction process. Financial incentives can be used to encourage contractors to limit noise-levels, minimize litter, maintain utility operation, and avoid delays. Capital Metro, BATs, and neighborhood associations have worked together to develop specific requirements for each construction segment. These have included limiting the areas of construction (ensuring that one section is completed before moving on), limiting construction hours (avoiding night time, rush hour and major holidays or

special events). Capital Metro, in consultation with local businesses and residents, has been responsible for posting dates and duration of construction along affected routes. Additionally, a hotline number has been made available for people interested in obtaining more information concerning construction.

Marketing Assistance

Capital Metro provides focused marketing assistance to affected businesses during the construction process. Links have been established between light rail project information and affected businesses, including business coupons for affected merchants within project newsletters and bulletins. A large part of this marketing strategy has been to turn the potential negative of construction into an integral marketing attraction itself. This encourages potential customers to witness construction progress while enjoying special events, discounts and other incentives to keep business levels at or above pre-construction numbers.

Maintenance of Traffic Plan

To assure smooth traffic flow through construction areas, the City of Austin and the Texas Department of Transportation have worked together to develop a maintenance traffic plan. This plan has been discussed with local communities to ensure local sensitivity to traffic patterns is not overlooked.

Parking Supply

As parking supply has been affected along the construction route, Capital Metro has worked with affected communities to find temporary parking facilities that are within an acceptable proximity. Where existing parking has been removed permanently, Capital Metro and the City of Austin have worked to find specific neighborhood solutions to assure the continued development of neighborhoods along the light rail corridor.

Maintain Traffic Capacity

The light rail project has been designed specifically so as not to impede or reduce current traffic capacities. Where this has been proven impossible or not desirable – in the case of urban redesign – new traffic circulation patterns have been developed.

New Transportation Patterns

With the development of the new light rail system, traffic and transportation patterns will inevitably be altered – to prepare for these changes and address them as they arise, the city of Austin, the Texas Department of Transportation, and Capital Metro have worked in concert to integrate the transit line into the regional system in the interest of continuing to relieve Austin metropolitan area traffic congestion.