

Significant Central Texas Initiatives Over the Past Five Years

The Central Texas region has seen a number of significant initiatives, projects and planning efforts unfold since the inception of Envision Central Texas (ECT) in 2001. While not exhaustive, the recap below provides some of the highlights of efforts that relate to the ECT Vision issue areas, such as transportation, land use and the environment.

Transportation:

Central Texans put the wheels in motion to bring urban commuter rail service to the region. In November 2004, a commuter rail referendum was passed by voters, creating the region's first urban commuter rail line. Called the "Red Line", it will run on 32-miles of existing freight tracks between Leander and Downtown Austin. Service is scheduled to begin late 2008 or early 2009. This is just one element of [Capital Metro's](#) larger [All Systems Go Long Range Transit Plan](#), which includes plans for additional rail, rapid bus, expanded local and express bus service and local circulators. Capital Metro has also coordinated local efforts to plan for pedestrian and bicycle trails along several rail corridors in their service area. Over the past six years, Capital Metro has committed over \$7.2 million of its transit sales tax to trails development.

Efforts are also underway to link the Austin and San Antonio corridor via a commuter rail line. The [Austin-San Antonio Intermunicipal Commuter Rail District](#) has been working to determine the feasibility of commuter rail passenger service within the existing Union Pacific Corridor that parallels IH 35 between Georgetown and San Antonio. Financial and economic studies have been completed, station location evaluation criteria have been developed, numerous jurisdictions along the corridor have been engaged and funding commitments for the regional rail project have been received, including commitments from the San Antonio-Bexar County and Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

A number of toll roads began opening in the fall of 2006, including the Loop 1 extension and portions of State Highway 45 and State Highway 130. Then in March 2007, the [Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority](#) opened the 183A project in Cedar Park and Leander. Throughout 2007 and 2008, the [Texas Turnpike Authority](#) continued opening segments of SH 45 and SH 130. In all, more than 75 miles of new toll roads were constructed during this period at a cost of more than \$4 billion.

In addition to projects underway today, much has happened in the realm of transportation planning, which will have significant implications for future road and transit projects. When the [Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) (CAMPO) adopted their CAMPO Mobility 2030 Plan in June 2005, their Transportation Policy Board directed staff to explore alternative future growth patterns in their 2035 planning efforts that would improve transportation and regional quality of life and would integrate the information from the ECT scenario planning effort. This led to CAMPO's 2035 [Regional Growth Concept Initiative](#), which looks at ways of encouraging the development of future "activity centers" where they make sense for the region. CAMPO is currently refining its modeling and developing scenarios which it will bring back to the public in early 2009 and use to shape its 2035 plan and policy development.

Another initiative unfolding recently is the [CAMPO Transit Working Group](#). In December 2007, CAMPO Chair, Senator Kirk Watson, appointed Austin Mayor Will Wynn to chair an effort to help bring stakeholders together to discuss transportation and transit, and guide a research and policy-making process. The CAMPO Transit Working Group is comprised of elected officials, CAMPO board members, and representatives from institutions, businesses and community groups from throughout our five-county region. They were charged with the task of analyzing and evaluating the potential for rail in Central Texas, and the optimal role for rail as part of a comprehensive regional transportation plan that also

includes new roads, toll roads, rapid buses, traditional bus service, and other modes of transportation. They have recently developed a "Transportation Investment Decision Tree" which establishes evaluation criteria for assessing all proposed transit and road projects and ensures that proposed projects will be evaluated uniformly.

Land Use Planning and Policy:

The City of Austin has introduced numerous land use planning and policy changes in recent years which are aimed at fostering growth patterns in alignment with the region's vision. In May 2005, Austin adopted a [Transit-Oriented Development \(TOD\) ordinance](#) to facilitate compact, walkable, mixed-use development near public transportation centers. All TOD districts will have a [Station Area Plan \(SAP\)](#) so that there will be a development vision and plan tailored to each specific TOD context. A SAP will contain a land use strategy, urban design standards, zoning recommendations, and implementation strategy to realize the vision, developed through an educational and participatory planning process.

In August 2006, the Austin City Council approved a major amendment to the City of Austin's Land Development Code referred to as the [Design Standards and Mixed Use Subchapter](#), or "Commercial Design Standards". These new standards are for non-residential and mixed-use developments and address issues such as connectivity, compatibility, land use and design, with the goal of fostering a quality built environment that has high aesthetic and sustainable values and promotes Austin's unique character and environment. A particularly key element of the Commercial Design Standards is the Vertical Mixed Use (VMU) Overlay, which applies to commercially zoned properties on some 50 miles of roads designated "Core Transit Corridors" in the Commercial Design Standards ordinance. The VMU Overlay incentivizes pedestrian-friendly, transit-enhancing projects by allowing developers to build denser projects while requiring certain design standards, green features, pedestrian amenities and a percentage of affordable residential units.

Austin also has several major planning initiatives underway, including the development of a new [Downtown Austin Plan](#) undertaken in 2007. Phase one of the process has been completed which includes an analysis of conditions, challenges and opportunities, land use and development capacity, urban design issues and trends and a review of prior Downtown plans and studies. The Austin City Council also adopted a resolution on December 13, 2007 authorizing an interim update to the [Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan](#), and directed the City Manager to study alternative approaches to future comprehensive planning.

Significant site-specific plans have been developed throughout the region as well. In Austin, the [North Burnet/Gateway Master Plan](#) presents a long-term vision for the area near Highway 183 and Loop 1 to redevelop from its existing low density, auto-oriented and industrial uses into a higher density mixed-use neighborhood that is more pedestrian-friendly and takes advantage of the links to commuter rail transit. Georgetown's [Williams Drive Gateway Redevelopment Master Plan](#) addresses 85 acres along IH-35 frontage and Williams Drive which will turn an underutilized and marginal area into a compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed use activity center. The City of Pflugerville has developed its State Highway 130 and 45 Corridor Districts, resulting in a hybrid form-based approach to zoning which will allow traditional neighborhood design and land use patterns, increasing pedestrian amenities and mix of uses.

In 2005, the Leander City Council adopted the [Leander Transit Oriented Development Master Plan](#) and Code. This new form-based code completely replaces the city's current zoning and subdivision ordinances in the 2300 acre area in the northeast quadrant of the city. The TOD is governed by the Leander Smart Code, which emphasizes the location and public interface of development and fosters traditional pedestrian-oriented communities with neighborhoods and town centers, integrating residential, commercial and retail uses. Leander also adopted the nation's first comprehensive [Composite Zoning Ordinance](#) for areas outside the TOD zone. The Composite Zoning Ordinance incorporates distinct

components including use, site and architectural components, to enable a natural evolution in building function and foster vibrant communities.

Others have developed new ordinances to foster the conservation of green space and protection of environmental resources through the clustering of development. In December 2006, the Travis County Commissioners Court passed a [Conservation Development Ordinance](#), which was the first of its kind for a Texas County. Its primary purpose is to encourage the permanent preservation of open space, ranch, agricultural and habitat lands, address water quality, quantity and stormwater runoff issues and encourage a more efficient form of development that consumes less open land. In 2008, the City of Georgetown approved a [Conservation Subdivision Ordinance](#) to encouraging developments in areas within the city and its extraterritorial jurisdiction that are intended for low-density single-family residential to be designed in a manner consistent with its conservation design standards.

Another notable planning effort is that of Bastrop County and its recently developed vision and plan called [Opportunity Bastrop County](#). In the summer of 2006, Bastrop County Commissioners Court began a public process to find out what county residents thought their county should look like in the future. A Steering Committee then developed goals, objectives and tactics to address the major themes citizens expressed, and identified strategies to implement the plan going forward. Another community to take up a visioning and planning effort was Elgin with their [Envision Elgin](#) initiative begun in 2004 in which community members came together to develop a vision for their future, and which is now informing their comprehensive planning efforts.

New Developments:

While the list of commercial, residential and mixed-use developments that have occurred in Central Texas since 2000 is far too extensive to capture here, the following represent significant projects with regional implications.

The redevelopment of the [Robert Mueller Municipal Airport \(Mueller\)](#) into a mixed-use urban village provides an unprecedented opportunity for Austin and Central Texas to create new models and chart new directions for urban growth. With the opening of Austin Bergstrom International Airport in 1999, the 711-acre Mueller site became available to be transformed into a thriving urban environment, ultimately becoming home to 10,000 residents, creating 10,000 jobs, and providing thousands of affordable homes and 140 acres of public open space and other community amenities. In 2007, the first residential and retail developments within Mueller opened. The second phase of housing is targeted to open in early 2009. At least 25% of Mueller's 4,600 homes are guaranteed to be affordable to residents who make 60% - 80% of the Austin area Median Family Income.

In June 2007, Samsung Electronics announced the opening of the largest 300mm NAND flash memory wafer plant, part of [Samsung Austin Semiconductor](#), in Austin, Texas. The 1.6 million square foot building is one of the largest single semiconductor facilities in the United States. The facility will manufacture NAND flash memory chips, which are widely used in a host of consumer-related products, such as MP3 players, cell phones, digital cameras, and other mobile devices. Samsung has committed to an investment of \$3.5 billion for the project, making it the largest single foreign investment in Texas and one of the largest in the United States. Samsung Austin Semiconductor hired about 700 new employees during the construction of the plant and now has 1,600 employees in Austin.

[Downtown Austin](#) has seen a boom of new residential buildings in recent years. Austin Mayor Will Wynn has challenged the City to reach a goal of 25,000 residents in Downtown Austin by the year 2015. According to a [Downtown Condominium Study](#) by Capital Market Research, since the year 2000, 5054 apartment or condominium units have been completed or are under construction. There are 24 condominium developments under construction or planned that, when completed, will add 4,319 new

residential units downtown. In addition to residential, Downtown Austin has seen the emergence of new retail, restaurant and entertainment venues, such as the 225,000 square feet of such development in the [2nd Street District](#).

Land Conservation / Environmental Preservation & Planning:

Land conservation and increasing our region's parks, natural areas and green spaces has been a priority for many Central Texas communities in recent years. Since 2000, a number of large bond packages have been approved by voters for parkland and natural area conservation. [Travis County](#) passed a \$62 million dollar bond in 2005 and the [City of Austin](#) followed in 2006 with its own bonds for water quality land conservation (\$50 million) and parkland projects (\$20 million). [Williamson County's](#) \$22 million park bond passed in 2006 and [Hays County](#) voters approved a bond in 2007 for \$30 million for parks, open space, water quality and wildlife habitat preservation.

The funds from these and other bond funds passed before 2000, as well as funds from foundations, non-profits, the private sector and others sources, have been invested in numerous park and land conservation projects. Strategies such as conservation easements and purchase of development rights have been effective ways of protecting critical lands and ensuring that they remain to preserve water quality, habitat and other natural functions. Significant properties added (or expanded) to the region's conserved and parkland areas include [Bastrop State Park](#) in Bastrop County, [Storm Ranch](#) in Hays County, [Milton Reimers Ranch Park](#) in Travis County, and [Southwest Williamson County Regional Park](#) in Williamson County.

Planning for land conservation, parkland and other uses has been very prominent in recent years as well. One such planning process and tool is the [Travis County Greenprint for Growth](#), initiated by the [Trust from Public Land](#) and developed in partnership with a diverse group of stakeholders. Greenprint helps a community identify and prioritize land conservation priorities and leverage available resources more effectively. [Envision Central Texas](#), in partnership with the Trust for Public Lands and the [Capital Area Council of Governments](#), is currently developing a Central Texas Greenprint for Growth.

Another exciting and grassroots environmental planning initiative, the Austin Bastrop River Corridor Partnership, began in 2003 as a loose partnership of nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, businesses and local citizens concerned with the future development of the Colorado River corridor from Austin to Bastrop. They have since developed a compelling vision for the area called the [Discovering the Colorado: A Vision for the Austin-Bastrop River Corridor](#). Conservation planning is also underway in counties throughout Central Texas, including the [Hays County Conservation Plan](#), [Travis County's Parks and Natural Areas Master Plan](#), and the [Williamson County Regional Habitat Conservation Plan](#).

Another major initiative undertaken by the City of Austin is the [Austin Climate Protection Plan](#). While its focus will extend into transportation, green building, energy production and efficiency and land development issues, this ambitious plan's core implications relate to the long-term health and stability of our environment. Approved by Austin City Council resolution in February 2007, the Austin Climate Protection Plan has set a multi-pronged approach to reducing carbon emissions, increasing clean energy production and energy efficiency. The goals include making the City of Austin – all of its internal municipal functions – 100% carbon-neutral by 2020, having Austin Energy meet 30% of all energy needs through renewable resources by 2020, and having all new single-family homes zero net-energy capable by 2015. The plan also will involve the community in city-wide activities to reduce our carbon footprint and methods for calculating and offsetting carbon emissions.

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