



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Robert Goode, P.E., Assistant City Manager

FROM: Robert Spillar, P.E., Director,
Austin Transportation Department (ATD)

DATE: June 10, 2016

SUBJECT: **Defining a Way Forward (Tumlin Report)**

Tumlin Report

The Austin Transportation Department (ATD) asked the City Manager to authorize an independent review of Austin's Transportation Strategies by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Services, an internationally renowned transportation firm. Jeffrey Tumlin, considered one of the pre-eminent experts in urban transportation nationally and internationally, conducted the external review. This independent effort is consistent with the kind of peer reviews that the ATD values as part of our continual improvement ethic. In meetings with Mr. Tumlin during and after the review, he communicated that he saw the Austin Transportation Department as a national leader in municipal transportation management, specifically due to our willingness to innovate and address longstanding inequities in the transportation network. In his report, Mr. Tumlin presents a plan for moving forward that is consistent with many of the efforts we have been committed to for some time. I believe that continued focus on our program and the recommendations made by Mr. Tumlin will allow ATD to continue meeting our city's mobility needs with sustainable, proactive solutions. (See Tumlin Report, attached).

Looking forward, we are moving in the directions highlighted in the Tumlin report in prioritizing our efforts over the next two years. These priorities are listed below (in no order of priority):

1. Implement Corridor Plans with a Focus on Walkability

- The report applauds Austin's many corridor plans as a reflection of "Austin's forward-thinking planning" but also says more must be done by prioritizing implementation of the pedestrian-focused improvements in these plans, and expanding walkability investments in adjacent neighborhoods.

2. Strengthen the Partnership between the City and Capital Metro by Creating a Transportation Master Plan

- The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) will be this transportation master plan. It is underway and we will be working closely with Capital Metro.

3. Rethink Transportation Performance Metrics

- The report recommends measuring the success of our transportation system by following the larger goals of the City, which ATD strives to do. It notes that the city must measure the success of all modes of transportation, not just the car, and offers a number of detailed performance measures that ATD will evaluate for integration into our policies.

4. Revise Street Connectivity Requirements

- The report highlights the benefits of small, interconnected streets and short block lengths in terms of reducing vehicle trip generation, and encourages Austin to revise our street connectivity standards. This is underway as part of CodeNEXT.

5. Align Transportation Funding to Goals and Performance Metrics

- The report recommends using the suggested performance metrics to create transportation expenditure plans, and deploying a data-driven approach to develop an interconnected transportation system that works as a comprehensive whole and not necessarily one developed by allocating equal amounts to geographic areas, though Nelson\Nygaard also recommends a geographic equity performance measure to ensure that no part of the city is ignored.

6. Develop Key Strategic Plans

- The report recommends developing key strategic plans such as a(n)
 - Parking Management Strategy, which ATD is in process of doing;
 - Transportation Master Plan (again the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan is underway);
 - ‘Urban I-35’ plan, which Nelson\Nygaard says should build upon the work ATD is already doing with TxDOT but also include methods to protect the local population, limit displacement, and ensure housing affordability;
 - Travel Demand Management (TDM) Strategy that should be incorporated into the City’s Transportation Master Plan. We are already planning on doing this and are already implementing actions along these lines. For example, the City already provides the recommended free (or reduced-cost) transit passes to employees and ATD has recommended parking cash-out programs as part of our new centralized management of City parking facilities.

7. Build on Local Technology and Mobility-as-a-Service Environment

- As you know, the City is making great headway in this area through our partnership with the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) on the Mobility Transformation Initiative, and the development of our Smart City Challenge grant application.

8. Create a Transportation Impact Fee

- Transportation impact fees are fees paid to the City by developers to mitigate impacts, and ensure that private companies pay their fair share of the costs imposed on publicly provided services. Council just approved the consultant to help us develop this program.

Since recommendation #2 mentions strengthening partnerships, I thought it would help Council with context if I took the time to share some background regarding the creation of the Austin Transportation Department and the partnerships that we have been building.

Austin Transportation Department’s role in Regional Transportation Efforts - City Manager Marc Ott created the Austin Transportation Department shortly after he came to Austin eight years ago. Prior to his decision to establish a transportation department, the mobility portfolio was buried within the city organization, with elements residing in Watershed Protection, Public Works, Planning and Development, and the Austin Police Department. Without a named department focused on improving mobility as its core mission, the City had a muted voice on regional mobility issues. This earlier lack of focus on mobility by the City of Austin, seemed to allow the region to adopt a default mobility infrastructure strategy of “don’t build it and they won’t come”. Our current mobility challenges in the region clearly indicate that this approach was a flawed policy and that we should have been focused on how we might move more people into and out of our employment centers with a sustainable mobility solution. This alternate approach likely would have resulted in a more-dense, affordable and sustainable urban city than we have today.

We certainly are a partner in regional transportation now due to concerted efforts to build coalitions. In creating the Transportation Department 8 years ago, the City Manager directed me to engage in the regional discussions immediately with a “partnership” attitude instead of an “adversarial

approach". As a result of this cooperative effort, major accomplishments have been achieved in terms of establishing a more responsive transportation policy, as evidenced by billions of dollars in mobility projects across all modes under construction or in development today within the region. Major accomplishments include:

- Completion of the I-35 @ Ben White Blvd. Interchange (facilitated by City of Austin –COA-constructed by TxDOT)
- MoPac @ Ben White Blvd. Interchange (COA financing, construction by TxDOT)
- Oak Hill Y interim improvements (initiated and funded by City of Austin)
- FM973 Colorado Bridge replacement (funded by COA, constructed by TxDOT)
- Establishment of Movability Austin, the City's first transportation management association (facilitated by COA and funded by memberships, COA, and Capital Metro)
- Replacement of the City's central signal master control system within the City's Advanced Transportation Management System (funded/constructed by COA)
- Construction of the SH 71E express lanes (coordination by COA, under construction by TxDOT)
- Establishment of railroad quiet zones, covering the entirety of the Union Pacific MoPac rail line and Capital Metro's Red Line, allowing expanded service into far Northwest Austin (established by COA with support from UP and Capital Metro)
- Development of a Corridor Master Plan for the I-35 Corridor (initiated by COA and construction anticipated by TxDOT)
- Re-design of the MoPac North Express lanes to improve bicycle safety along and across the corridor and to enable the implementation of commuter transit service from far Northwest Austin directly into the downtown (facilitated by COA, constructed by CTRMA, with transit services pledged by Capital Metro)
- Re-design of the MoPac South Express lanes to allow for operational improvements in the existing traffic stream (new ramp locations and designs, reduced traffic weaving, improved direct access to the SH71/US 290 corridor, improved access to downtown Austin, and the potential to reduce both costs and potential environmental impacts – facilitated by COA)
- US 183 Bergstrom Expressway (facilitated by COA, Construction by CTRMA)
- Adopted High Capacity Transit Plan for Austin (adopted by City of Austin and by Capital Metro – facilitated and funded by COA in partnership with Capital Metro and Lone Star Rail District)
- Replacement of the City's parking management system with new pay stations, meters, and pay-by-phone technologies (funded and constructed by COA)
- Partnership with *ParkMe*, an app that allows drivers to find parking using a predictive algorithm and real time parking transaction data (facilitated at no cost by COA, private investment partnership)
- Launch of *Car-2-Go* in Austin as the first North American launch site (facilitated at no cost by COA, private investment partnership)
- Launch of *B-Cycle* bike share program, one of the most successful in North America (facilitated at no cost by COA, private/nonprofit investment partnership)
- Establishment of a transit corridor in the Guadalupe/Lavaca corridor, resulting in the reduction in the number of buses negatively affecting Congress Avenue and the increase in transit ridership (constructed by COA, operated by Capital Metro)
- Enabling of bus rapid transit in the North & South Lamar and South Congress and Burnet Corridors by construction of transit signal prioritization through the corridor (constructed by COA, transit service operated by Capital Metro)
- Replacement of the RR 2222 bridge over Bull Creek (facilitated by COA, constructed by TxDOT)
- Redesign and construction of parking projects in the South Congress commercial district, increasing the total number of spaces and dramatically improving safety for all users (back-

in angle parking, pedestrian enhancements at intersections, new drainage features – constructed by COA)

- Comprehensive corridor development plans for seven critical arterial corridors, including: Burnet, North Lamar, South Lamar, FM 969 MLK Jr., Riverside, Airport Boulevard, and Guadalupe/University District (initiated and fully funded by COA)

This list of accomplishments is by no means comprehensive, and these successes are not due only to ATD. However, ATD has played a critical role in bringing these projects to fruition. In fact, none of these efforts, especially the accomplishments requiring partnership with other mobility agencies, could have been achieved without the City's advocacy for sustainable mobility solutions.

Regional Coordination - ATD enthusiastically supports regional coordination and communication on mobility issues. We are working closely with the agency tasked with the responsibility for regional coordination and communication... the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO). CAMPO, as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is responsible for coordinated transportation investments within this region. One challenge that Austin has in this coordination effort is that, unlike the MPOs in Houston and Dallas, CAMPO operates in a fashion whereby the central city's (Austin's) authority and influence is limited. This reduces the ability of the region to effectively coordinate, and it limits Austin's ability to influence regional interests.

To further detail Austin's role in these regional partnerships, I will explain some of the communication tools we are utilizing. ATD facilitates or participates in a range of regional communication forums to assure that we are coordinating across jurisdictions and departments where possible, while supporting CAMPO in its role as the regional voice on mobility. These communication forums include:

- A regional Municipal Planning Organization (MPO) technical steering committee - ATD serves on the CAMPO Technical Advisory Committee. ATD's Assistant Director served as chair of that group previously and currently four staff members serve, representing System Development, Land use, Planning, Active Transportation and Traffic Engineering.
- Regional transportation agency executives now meet on a monthly basis to discuss regional projects and exchange communications – Austin is a founding member of this forum.
- A regional transit working group has been established by ATD and is now functioning. Under ATD's leadership, this forum allows ATD and Capital Metro operations staff to meet on a monthly basis to develop new transit oriented projects to increase ridership and transit efficiency.
- At ATD's insistence, the regional roadway safety committee has been reestablished by TxDOT and is now meeting on a regular basis to coordinate traffic safety projects. ATD has hired a dedicated traffic safety engineer that actively participates with this regional group.
- Austin's council members, serving on regional transportation policy boards are now supported by ATD staff in analyzing and recognizing regional policies that affect our residents, enabling a more informed representation of Austin's needs on regional organizations such as CAMPO and Capital Metro Board.
- Austin is a founding member along with Capital Metro of the region's first transportation management association, Movability Austin. ATD's Director is an active board member, appointed by Council. This organization allows public and private employers in downtown Austin to collaborate on transportation demand management strategies.
- ATD participates in regular meetings with the University of Texas through the City Manager's Office. ATD provides technical support to UT on traffic and safety issues. We are also directly involved with efforts related to the UT/Dell Medical School project and with the Campus Master Planning team.

- ATD participates in the State Capitol Complex Coordination Team. The Texas Department of Public Safety reinitiated this coordination to assure activities affecting both the City and the State Capitol Complex are well coordinated.
- ATD hosts a monthly fatality review board with APD. This committee makes joint decisions about traffic enforcement, Vision Zero action items, and mobility.

ATD will continue with the efforts listed above. We will also continue to reach out to city departments involved in managing the transportation portfolio and redouble our efforts to include them in on-going efforts.

Playing “Catch Up” - Austin remains congested. This is largely due to the phenomenal growth and economic success that Austin continues to enjoy. It is also a reflection of the past City planning policy of not building sustainable mobility infrastructure over the past four decades. In contrast and over the past eight years, employment and population growth has exceeded 20 percent while congestion levels, measured in average hours of annual delay that Austin residents endure, has grown by only 2 percent, based on the Texas A&M annual congestion statistics. During that same time period, and with the regional advocacy provided by ATD, the region has in fact shifted direction, planning and constructing new sustainable infrastructure such as that listed previously at the beginning of this memorandum. Austin is also shifting in its approach to planning for growth, actively promoting density where it makes sense and demanding infrastructure that is more in line with the outcomes we desire (i.e., we are pursuing narrower streets so that speeding is not a future problem, we are pursuing improved transit speed and reliability along our major corridors so that these modes provide a viable alternative for commuters, and we are promoting electric vehicle technologies to reduce the cost of commuting for those that must continue to drive).

Address Under-Resourcing of Traffic Operations - The Arterial Management Division of ATD is charged with the responsibility of maintaining and operating the City’s signal system. This group is not staffed at its optimum level. Improving staffing levels for this group has been an on-going effort by the department. However, the ability to achieve optimum staffing levels has been constrained by affordability concerns for the Transportation User Fee (TUF). Compounding this issue is the fact that Traffic Engineers represent a specialization of Civil Engineering that demands a much higher pay scale than supported for most Civil Engineering positions. Not only are they hard to find and bring to the City of Austin, they are difficult to adequately compensate. This places an even greater demand on ATD’s portion of the Transportation User Fee.

To compensate for the above challenges, ATD has invested in technologies to leverage the capabilities of our engineers. I would argue that we have one of the most advanced traffic management toolboxes in the country as it pertains to signal management. This allows our engineers the ability to analyze a greater number of signals each year than a lesser equipped city. This year, we have hired a private company to manage ATD’s traffic management center (TMC). This change frees up signal engineers to increase our retiming of corridors.

Despite the advanced technologies being used, we are not at full strength with regards to technical engineering staff. We are seeking additional resources, using the vacancies we have currently in the department to expand our current signal staffing. However, new signal engineering staff are difficult to hire due to their high degree of specialization. We are working with the Human Resources Department so that our positions better reflect the nature of the jobs we are trying to fill. This year, we successfully requested and were awarded a TUF increase, specifically targeted at operations. We will be seeking a similar increase in staffing and funding in the FY16/17 budget cycle as well.

Conclusion – We feel that the Tumlin review verified that Austin is developing the tools (Strategic Mobility Plan, Transportation Impact Fee, Travel Demand Management Strategy, Mobility-as-a-Service, I-35 partnership with TxDOT, Parking Management Strategy, Corridor implementation strategy, etc.) to help us address the mobility challenges we are facing as a region. We are

essentially covering every area/recommendation with an existing program or a new strategic planning effort. I was greatly encouraged by the results of this external review.

The full Tumlin report is attached with this memo. Should you have further questions regarding the recommendations provided by Tumlin, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of all the employees of Austin Transportation, let me say we are proud of the work we accomplish on your behalf.