

Georgetown Transportation Discussion Outline July 18, 2014

In the last 30 years, Williamson County has grown dramatically, creating significant traffic congestion in the county and along the Williamson County/Austin corridors. County population more than tripled between 1990 and 2012, from 139,000 to 456,000. Williamson County now has traffic rivaling many major cities. Heavier traffic has a negative impact on quality of life in the county—greater pollution, lost productivity, and traffic safety.

Georgetown Overall Transportation Plan (OTP)

The OTP is an element of the Georgetown's 2030 Comprehensive Plan setting planning policies for short-term and long-term transportation needs. The OTP includes all forms of transportation—road widening and new roads, light-rail, high-speed rail, bus service, and non-auto forms of transportation such as pedestrian, bicycle and other alternatives.

The OTP includes four primary types of improvements: (1) roadway widening, (2) new roadway facilities, (3) transit improvements, and (4) bicycle/pedestrian improvements. OTP foresees the development of a southern and western freeway system, generally following the inner loop alignment on the south and west and provides needed congestion relief to University Avenue, the downtown area, and Williams Drive southeast of Shell Road. The new freeway facilities provide high speed and high capacity routes for both local citizens and through travelers.

The plan encompasses key transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) activities that currently are offered or may be offered in the future to Georgetown residents. The City will need to work with other area agencies to ensure the best use of these alternative travel modes to help reduce traffic, improve air quality, and serve special needs populations.

1. Traditional fixed-route transit service
2. Local routes that operate on fixed routes and schedules
3. Commuter fixed-route service via High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes or major interregional highways (also utilizes existing park and ride lot infrastructure): service between Georgetown and Round Rock and Central Austin; service between outlying communities (Taylor or Cedar Park, for example) and Georgetown.
4. Regional rail service: Georgetown as the northern end of regional commuter rail service through Round Rock, Austin, San Marcos, New Braunfels to San Antonio.
5. Carpools and Vanpools via High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes or major interregional highways (also utilizes existing park and ride lot infrastructure).
6. Bicycling and Walking: Providing infrastructure for biking and walking to serve other than recreational purposes—to bike or walk to a transit stop, and either take a bike onboard transit to the final destination, or provide a place to store the bike before boarding transit.
7. Special needs transportation services (dial-a-ride type service)/paratransit service for the elderly, medical patients and special needs passengers unable to utilize traditional forms of transit, or who need additional assistance during transport.

Potential CARTS Service

The CARTS Williamson County Transit Study describes Georgetown as: “a traditional city (for transit purposes) with a downtown that includes retail stores, city and county government. Georgetown also has a college and most importantly, much of the city (east of the interstate) is transit friendly (through streets, sidewalks, and the downtown core), allowing for the potential of higher ridership.”

The study estimated that Georgetown could support a three-bus transit system—one route operating hourly providing service to Sun City Texas, and two other routes operating on the half-hour. Each route would interconnect at the downtown transit hub every half to one hour. The routes would serve many types of potential transit customers: public school and university students; commuters; shoppers; medical trips; and governmental and other personal business downtown.

Lone Star Rail

Traffic on Interstate 35 through the Austin-San Antonio corridor is one of the most congested interstate segments in America and the biggest bottleneck on I-35 between Mexico and Canada. It's also one of the deadliest stretches of highway in the country, with over 100 fatalities a year. Rebuilding I-35 to accommodate all of the different travel demands it now handles would take decades and could consume Texas' entire transportation budget. For many years, regional leaders and thinkers have been looking at alternatives. One of the best alternatives is passenger rail. The Union Pacific (UP) corridor that parallels I-35 is an important link for moving goods through the region, but as a freight rail line, it suffers from many of the same challenges as I-35. However, that same UP right-of-way is almost perfectly suited to passenger service to bring people to the region's major destinations downtown Austin and San Antonio, a long string of university campuses, tourist attractions, and major employers from Williamson County to Port San Antonio and beyond. Lone Star Rail District is currently conducting engineering, environmental and station area studies; developing financing plans; and pursuing alternatives for freight rail relocation.

Lone Star Rail Projections:

- 75-minute express service from downtown Austin to downtown San Antonio, with stops in San Marcos and New Braunfels.
- Local service from Georgetown to the South Side of San Antonio with stops at all stations in between.
- The LSTAR service will cover close to 120 miles, in the existing Union Pacific right-of-way.
- Up to 32 trains a day, including midday and evening service, seven days a week in each direction for commuters, students and other regional travelers.
- Up to sixteen new stations in convenient locations with ample secure parking, comfortable waiting areas and connections to local transit.
- Modern, safe, clean and comfortable rail cars; amenities including wireless Internet access.
- Service nearby to college and university campuses in Georgetown, Round Rock, Austin, San Marcos and San Antonio; employment centers such as the Domain and Port San Antonio; and the region's top tourist and lifestyle destinations.

Capital Metro Plan

The Capital Metro Plan would add 52 miles of new MetroConnect bus service and 53 miles of new MetroExpress bus service, providing connections from Georgetown and Round Rock to The Domain shopping center in Austin. MetroRapid service includes a dedicated lane for busses through downtown Austin. The plan also advances the Lone Star Rail's designs on commuter rail from Georgetown through Austin to San Antonio. 200 passengers who use 167 automobiles could instead fit in 4.24 buses or one train. Project Connect could take more than 10,000 vehicles off the roads each day.