



# Austin, Texas

## PROFILE:

POPULATION: 780,211  
MEDIAN INCOME: \$50,147  
MEDIAN HOME VALUE: \$214,000  
% W/ BACHELOR'S DEGREE: 27.5%  
WALK SCORE: 47/100

## KEY FACTS:

- Steck Avenue Road Diet Before & After Study shows no significant disruption of level of service to motor vehicles, while bicycling and walking quadrupled.
- Initial 2011 counts of the Lance Armstrong Bikeway, as part of the Active Transportation Monitoring Plan, show an average of 70,000 bike and pedestrian uses a month and more than 10,000 uses a day during the South by Southwest Music Festival.
- The Neighborhood Partnering Program of the City of Austin provides funds of up to \$150,000 for community-initiated projects such as bike and pedestrian improvements. Participating neighborhoods must provide at least 25 percent of the total cost of the project, which can include "sweat equity." Successful projects include sidewalk installations and traffic-calming improvements to dangerous intersections. ([Austin DPW](#))



Photo credits

## Budgeting by the People

Most people would probably claim that developing budgets is not fun...and that developing budgets for infrastructure is *really* not fun. So how do you get citizens engaged in a budgeting process? Austin, Texas, found a way: participatory budgeting.

Participatory budgeting is a general term that refers to any budgeting process in which taxpayers have a role in selecting projects to be funded with their tax dollars. There are now more than 1,000 known budget processes worldwide that include a citizen role, and Austin has taken a unique approach to maximize citizen involvement.

In Austin, the citizens have a direct role in establishing the budget for infrastructure projects. Taxpayers serve on an oversight committee that reviews proposals from city agencies for bond funding. Not only does the committee evaluate staff-led proposals, it also initiates its own projects, as well.

Locally driven bond programs are important because the dedicated local funds can be used to leverage federal money. Austin used this reasoning to get taxpayer approval for the latest \$150 million Mobility Bond.

Bike/pedestrian advocates in Austin know the power of participating in the bond process; in November 2010, they persuaded the Bond Oversight Committee to approve \$44 million in funding for bike/pedestrian projects around the city!

In Austin, participatory budgeting is not a one-time effort. In fact, through the Neighborhood Partnering Program, which was established by the City, citizen-led community organizations propose neighborhood improvement projects. The City has dedicated funds available on an annual basis to fast-track these projects.

## LINKS:

City of Austin Bicycle Program  
Bike Texas  
Major Taylor Austin  
League of Bicycling Voters  
Capital Area Metro Planning Organization  
The Trail Foundation  
East Austin Environmental Justice Project  
Texas Tribune Article

## REPORTS:

Austin 2009 Bicycle Master Plan (includes a brief history of city bike initiatives since the 1970s)  
Working Together to 'Complete' Our Streets  
New Bike City, *Austin Chronicle* 2010  
North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Association Minutes, *Road Diet*  
Walk this Way and Bicycle Too, *TTI Magazine*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### CONTACT:

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy  
National Office  
Tracy@railstotrails.org  
202.974.5110



Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Thanks to the Neighborhood Partnering Program, children walking on St. Elmo Road now enjoy a safer commute to school. Today, that street has new crosswalks and bike lanes as part of a project funded by the initiative.

Many cities now have some form of citizen participation in infrastructure budgeting. Austin is leading the way by including taxpayers in deliberations over both bonds and annual expenditures. Perhaps that's how Austin has become one of the nation's most friendly communities for active transportation.

*"Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure offers better connectivity and more travel options, all of which are becoming more important in Austin as roadways are becoming more congested. By coordinating bike and pedestrian improvements with other infrastructure projects such as road and drainage work, we've been able to promote public health and quality of life, as well as our transportation network, in ways that are cost-effective, efficient, and timely."*

— Austin City Council Member Chris Riley

*"The Hike and Bike Trail is a major — perhaps **the** major — recreation area for all of Austin. It's a tourist attraction, a transportation corridor and a big part of what attracts people and businesses to our city."*

— Lee Leffingwell, Mayor of Austin