

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado River Corridor Plan Background

The purpose of the Colorado River Corridor Plan (Corridor Plan) is to coordinate regional and local planning to facilitate the preservation and enhancement of the many valuable environmental, economic, recreational, and cultural resources of this region over the next 25 years. The Plan includes objectives for improved protection of local bio-diversity, preservation and restoration of floodplains and natural areas; the creation of parks, open spaces and greenways; enhancement of Corridor quality of life through the long-term reclamation of mined sites; and enhancement of mobility through capital project development and new transportation alternatives.

Plan implementation requires intergovernmental cooperation since multiple government entities are responsible for the various aspects of transportation, natural resource conservation and environmental protection in the Corridor. The Corridor Plan is designed to improve collaboration at the regional and local level, and to enhance public understanding of the valuable resources of the Colorado River within eastern Travis County.

Study Area

The study area covers over 30,565 acres on a 32-mile stretch of the Colorado River in eastern Travis County, bounded by US 183 on the west, the Travis-Bastrop County line on the east, FM 969 on the north and SH 71 on the south.

Existing Land Use

The Corridor is comprised of land uses based on the 2008 City of Austin Planning and Development Review Department's land use inventory and the 2010 Travis County Appraisal District property category codes in the unincorporated region of the study area.

LAND USE			
	Residential	2,927 Ac	9.6 %
	Commercial	1,227 Ac	4.0 %
	Civic/Institutional	1,802 Ac	5.9 %
	Ag/Rural/Undeveloped	14,738 Ac	48.2 %
	Recreation and Natural Areas	989 Ac	3.2 %
	Mining	6,549 Ac	21.4 %
	ROW & Colorado River	2,333 Ac	7.6 %

Public Involvement

Travis County, the City of Austin (COA) and the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) have partnered in the development of this plan. The project team sought to identify priorities, concerns of stakeholders

Hornsby Bend - The Austin Water Utility Center for Environmental Research



and opportunities to proactively address these issues in the Colorado River Corridor.

The project was kicked off with a public meeting on December 7, 2010 at the Travis County East Service Center during which participants were asked to provide input on future development of the area and to discuss stormwater, water supply, transportation and environmental issues. The following topics were identified as issues of concern by the community:

- Implement environmental monitoring stations in residential neighborhoods.
- Demands on roads, schools, water and wastewater systems were increasing cost to homeowners.
- Preserve the community's rich culture and discourage suburbia development.
- Create a partnership to clean up the unsightly abandoned mines along SH 130 and FM 969.
- Roadway flooding: isolation of home sites and preventing access for emergency vehicles.

The comments from the residents ranged from their desire to have more housing options in the area but they also wanted to maintain some of the low density that currently exists; however, they expressed how important it was for them to have the freedom to develop their property as they see fit. They would like the neighborhood to be safer and to see more children and parents walking to the Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary School and Dailey Middle School. They would like to see the redevelopment of legacy mines to include recreational opportunities that are accessible to the public and have the traffic corridors in the area to be free of blighted mining sites.

A follow up open house was held on September 22, 2011 at Dailey Middle School. Approximately 50 property owners, interested parties and staff attended the meeting. The meeting provided the opportunity for the public to comment on the draft CRCP, and to speak with project representatives from Travis County, the City of Austin and the LCRA.

Plan Elements

The foundation of the Corridor Plan is the analysis of the following key elements:

- Land Use,
- Water Quality and Water Supply,
- Transportation, and
- Parks and Land Conservation.

Issues addressed within this plan include land use compatibility and transition of land use from mining to post mining uses, water resource management and protection, transportation and traffic safety, neighborhood connectivity, and parks, greenway systems and intensity of public use.

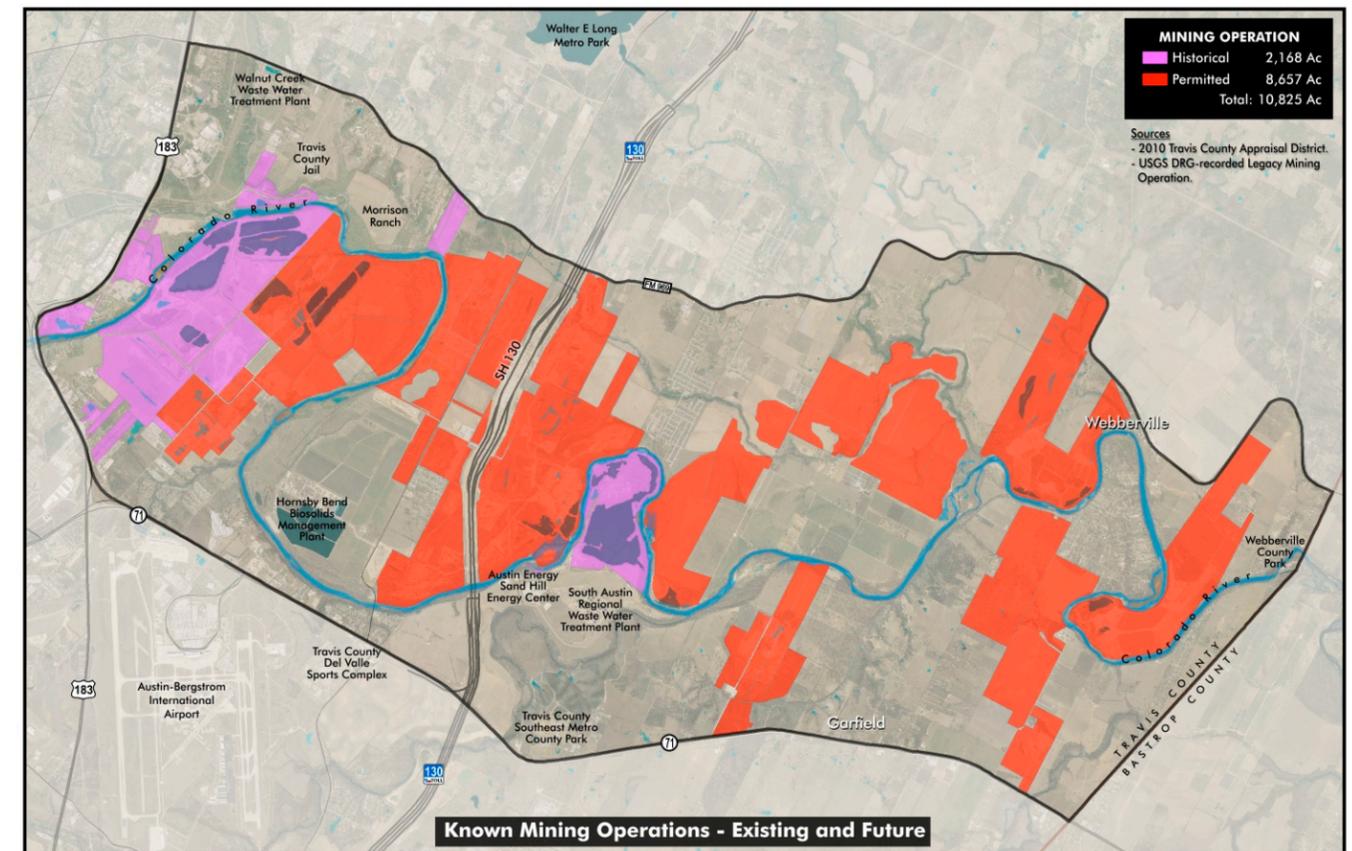
2010 Land Use

The Corridor consists of approximately 30,565 acres. Roughly 2,927 acres, 9.6 percent of the land area are currently identified as residential use. The area is experiencing an increase in residential development; however, the number of residential housing units is relatively small in comparison to other parts of the county. Approximately 14,738 acres, 48.2 percent of the study area are currently being utilized for agriculture and farm/ranch activity or are undeveloped and 1,227 acres, 4.0 percent, are identified as commercial land use. The Travis Central Appraisal District (TCAD) does not list mining operations within a specific land use category; however, approximately 6,549 acres of active and inactive mining operations were identified.

Mining Issues

Increased development and mining operations occurring in rural areas spurred Travis County to consider development impacts on the rural lands and the quality of life. Specifically, the Corridor Plan identifies some of the critical issues facing the study area. Objectives to achieve the goals are located in the Implementation Strategies, Section 8 of the Corridor Plan. Each of the objectives detailed in the full plan is accompanied by action items (tools, policies and steps to implementation) and a time frame for accomplishing each objective.

The study group understands that mining companies not only excavate materials for off-site construction, but are also interested in the long-term potential for the mined land tracts. Once the mining operations are completed, the land may be re-purposed for new community uses. Large areas



of the Corridor can thus transition from mining uses to future urbanized areas made up of schools, neighborhoods, and associated businesses and services, all integrated into a network of parks, greenbelts and farmland. The design and implementation of these multifaceted systems of transportation form a major challenge and opportunity for the Corridor.

Travis County has the authority to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the community. However, state law limits the County's land use and zoning authority. Therefore, it is important to have strong relationships and a shared set of planning objectives with other authorities, including municipal and local governments.

Water Quality and Water Supply

Surface Water Quality - The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) surface water quality standards for the Colorado River downstream from Longhorn Dam establish an “exceptional” aquatic life use for the river, meaning the aquatic system has the capability to support a highly diverse and abundant assemblage of fish and other aquatic life. While this use is considered as attained, TCEQ identifies concerns that this exceptional use could be threatened. The chief threat is urbanization, which has resulted in negative impacts to the surface water quality in the Colorado River and in other creeks and streams in the Corridor, including:

- Pollutant discharges from treated effluent from sewage treatment facilities,
- Increased quantity and decreased quality of stormwater runoff,
- Illicit discharges of pollutants and toxins,
- Overflows of untreated sewage,
- Improperly managed animal waste,
- Encroachment, alteration, and degradation of stream channels,
- Loss of size and natural condition of riparian areas, and
- Introduction of exotic species.

Groundwater Quality - Groundwater within the Corridor comes primarily from the Colorado River alluvial aquifer. Only limited data from studies or monitoring is available about this resource, primarily a single 1994 Austin Water Utility study of the quality of ground water at the Hornsby Bend Wastewater

Sludge Treatment Facility. This study indicated that concentrations in excess of EPA drinking water maximum contaminate levels of nitrate-nitrogen and fecal coli forms were found in wells throughout the facility. Concerns regarding groundwater quality in the Corridor include:

- Lack of systematic monitoring and water quality and quantity data for area wells,
- Lack of hydrological studies of area groundwater,
- Extent and severity of excessive nitrate-nitrogen in the aquifer,
- Lack of a coordinating Groundwater District, and
- Lack of local studies on the impact of aggregate mining on water quality.

Surface Water Supply – The LCRA is the wholesale raw water provider in the Corridor. The City of Austin, Hornsby Bend, Manville Water Supply Corporation (WSC), and Garfield WSC are the largest retail water providers. Nearly the entire Corridor is within Certified Water Service areas. Private water wells are numerous. The City of Austin and Hornsby Bend Utility Co. are the largest retail wastewater providers; however, existing wastewater infrastructure is limited east of SH 130. Critical issues regarding water and wastewater service include:

- Securing capital for water supply infrastructure to support the growing and expanding urban population in the Corridor will likely raise the cost of drinking water,
- Capital expenditures are necessary for non-potable, reclaimed wastewater infrastructure from area wastewater treatment plants to support turf and crop irrigation,
- Agricultural irrigation may not be cost-effective when droughts occur, and
- Long-term water planning should consider the advantages and disadvantages of supplying water from multiple and smaller utilities versus larger, more regionally-based utilities.

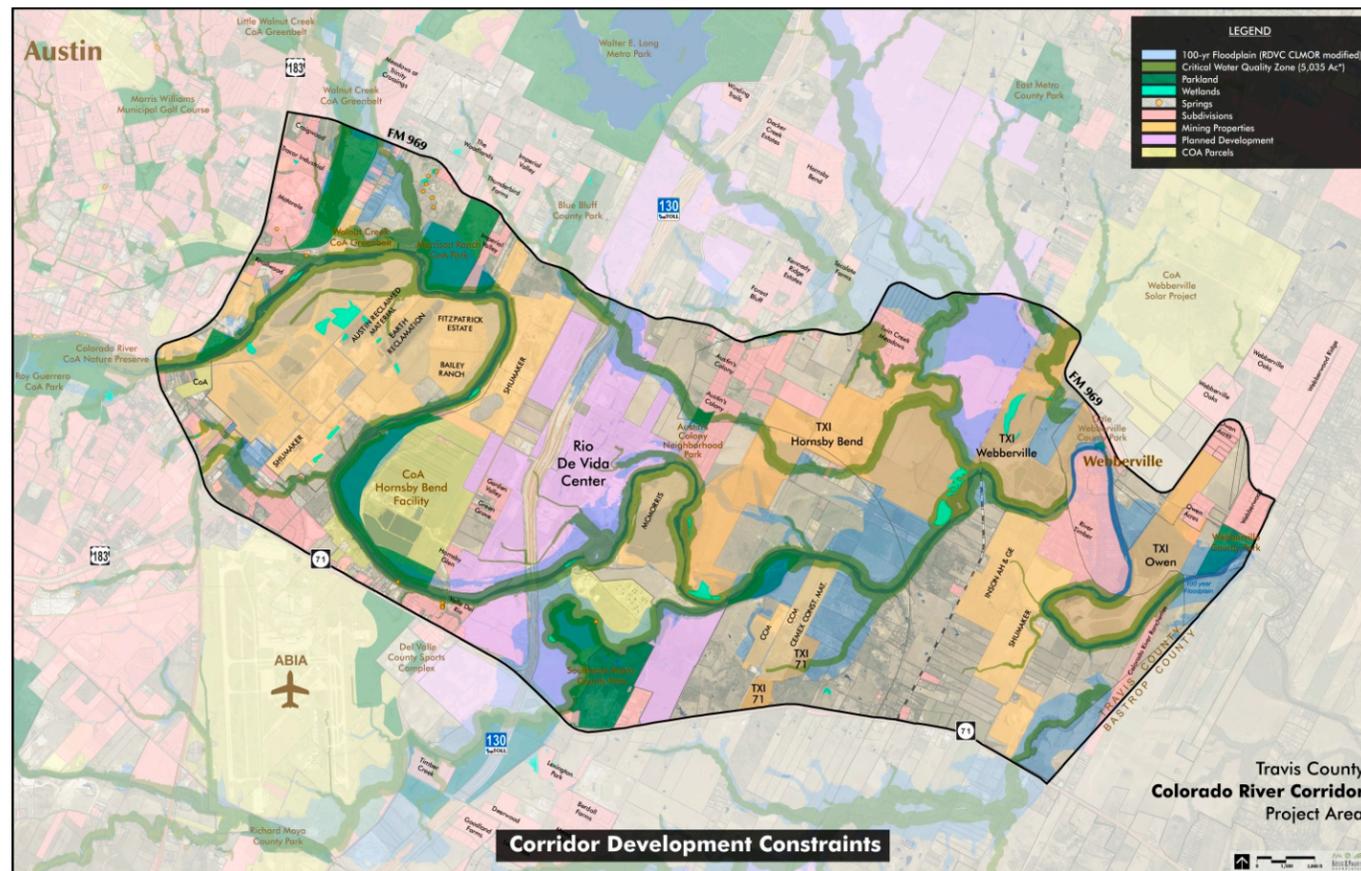
Transportation

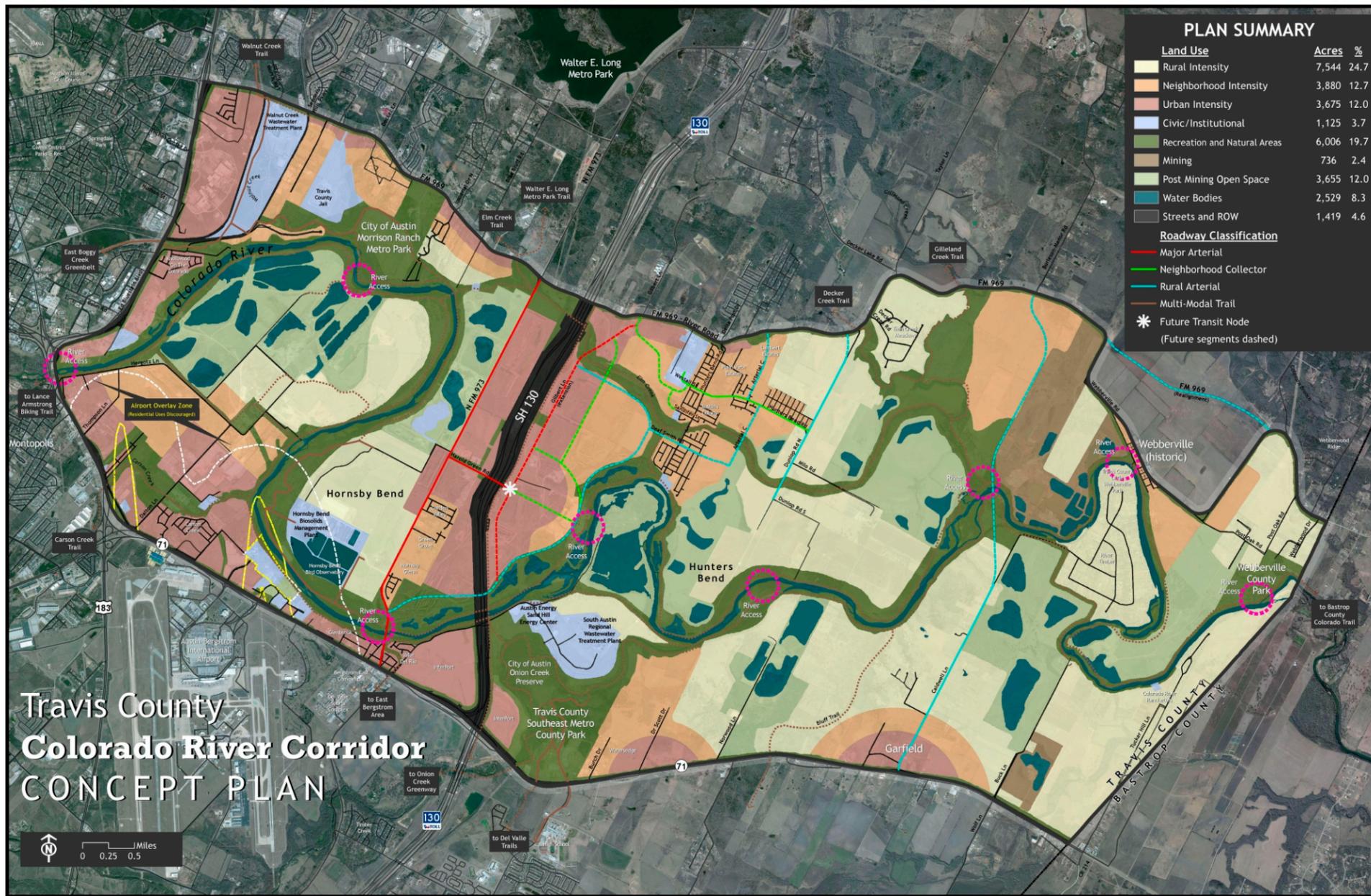
The Corridor is evolving from primarily agricultural and gravel mining land uses to areas of urban, suburban and rural residential. Significant population growth over the past decade has intensified the demand for new transportation improvements. Resulting growth has led to more traffic congestion, and increasing travel times within the Corridor. Residential areas, most notably Austin's Colony, have developed with limited mobility options which have created safety, environmental and economic impacts for local residents.

The Corridor Plan acknowledges that mobility issues will not be solved solely by building new roadways. Alternative modes of transportation, such as facilities for bikes, pedestrians and transit, are needed in addition to roadway improvements and an expansion of existing roadway networks. New design alternatives are needed within the Corridor that take advantage of the Corridor's rural character, help minimize environmental impacts and enhance the quality of life for Corridor residents.

Issues related to mobility include:

- The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) 2035 transportation forecast shows limited growth in population and employment in its recent plan update. However, recent proposed development plans within the Corridor suggest much higher population and employment numbers than the CAMPO forecast, resulting in the need for a more robustly





Parks and Land Conservation

Travis County and the City of Austin have approximately 1,200 acres of parkland on the Colorado River and its tributaries that form the foundation of a corridor-wide park system centered on waterways (see Concept Plan below). The challenge to building a more comprehensive system that meets the needs of the growing population is acquiring land before it is slated for development or aggregate mining. The County and City will continue to employ strategies for timely acquisition of parkland that have worked in the past: fee simple acquisition, parkland dedication by ordinance, and landowner donation. Both are exploring improved creek protections that will strengthen opportunities for greenway systems.

A County's initiative to build greenways along Onion Creek and Gilleland creeks was launched in 2005 with voter-approved bond funds and is continuing with funds approved by voters in the 2011 bond election. Additionally, the City is incorporating new parkland into the area's greenway system.

Furthermore, Travis County has initiated a program to conserve land through conservation easements that may benefit the corridor. Texas Senate Bill 1044 was passed in the 82nd Legislature Regular Session granting counties the authority to finance the acquisition of conservation easements. This program has been funded with \$8.3 million that was approved by voters in the 2011 bond referendum. Easements will be purchased to protect water resources, working farms and ranches, wildlife habitat, scenic views, and other natural and cultural resources.

planned transportation network for proposed future development.

- Transportation improvements are needed to address environmental and man-made constraints that currently pose barriers to Corridor connectivity, such as the Colorado River.
- New transportation alternatives, such as facilities for bikes, pedestrians and transit are needed to provide alternatives for work and recreational trips and for low-income residents impacted by high transportation costs.
- Design of new transportation infrastructure should capitalize on and protect the outstanding environmental features in the Corridor.
- Capital improvement projects will compete for scarce funding sources which will require local jurisdictions to identify the most beneficial cost-effective improvements for mobility.

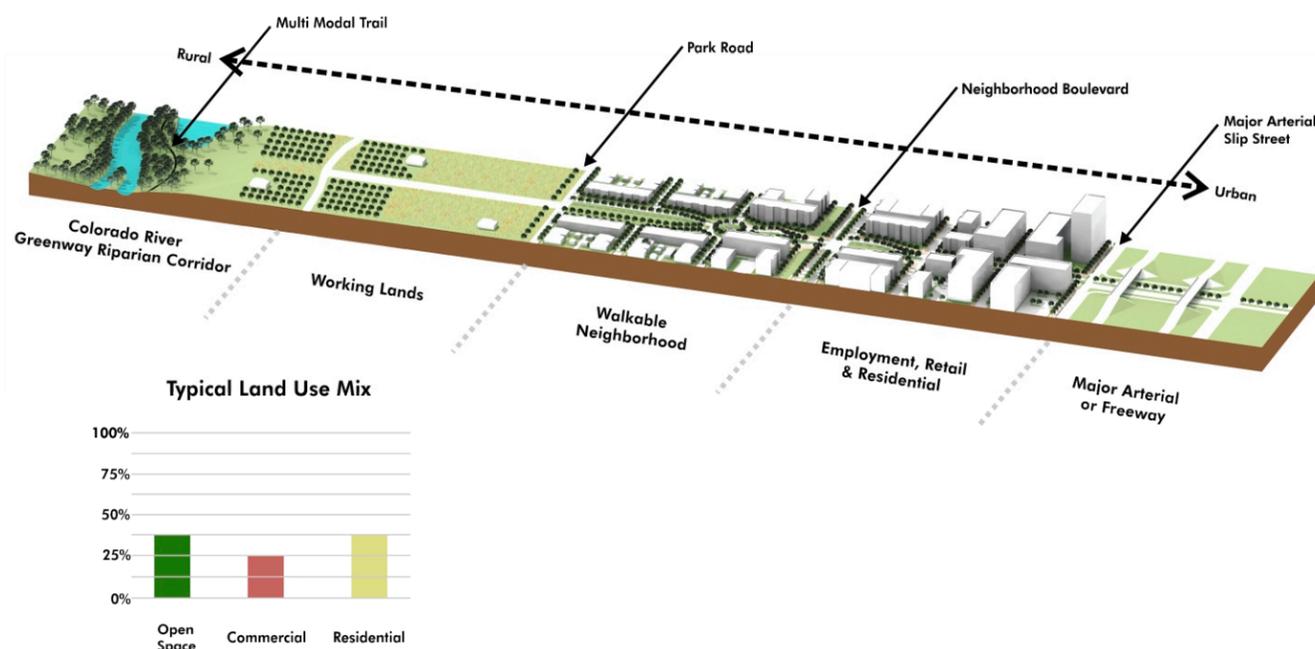
The Concept Plan

The Colorado River Corridor Concept Plan presents a vision of an orderly transition between urban areas, neighborhoods, rural lands, and natural areas. It is a plan that accommodates new development while also protecting the character and environmental quality of the corridor.

Urban areas in the Concept Plan are sited along major highways – SH 130, SH 71, FM 973, and FM 969 – and are adjacent to neighborhoods. This relationship in which urban-intensity land abuts neighborhoods is consistent with CAMPO's "activity centers" concept: activity centers are more intensely developed than the surroundings; are a mix of employment, housing, and retail; are pedestrian-oriented with many destinations within walking distance; and are connected to surrounding neighborhoods and the region by a range of transportation options. With most new development concentrated in activity centers, large tracts of rural land are preserved. Reclaimed mining lands are also part of the inventory of undeveloped lands in the corridor.

Transportation networks in the Concept Plan propose new multi-modal mobility opportunities that currently do not exist within the Corridor. Roadways that accommodate bikes lanes and sidewalks and a regional trails network are proposed to seamlessly move motorists, cyclists and pedestrians throughout the Corridor. It is envisioned that transit will be fully integrated within the Corridor and have connectivity to the Austin Bergstrom International Airport and the City of Austin's future Urban Rail stations. Congested roadways are planned to be improved and new connectivity created. FM 969 will become a focal parkway providing mobility as well as highlighting the visual character of the Colorado

SCHEMATIC COMPLETE TRANSECT



River Corridor. Other arterials will front along greenways to take advantage of the rural visual character that defines the Corridor. New connectivity is also highlighted in the Concept Plan, especially from residential areas east of SH 130. For example, new connections from Austin's Colony to FM 973 are provided as well as a new regional arterial that crosses the Colorado River connecting FM 969 with SH 71.

The envisioned corridor-wide parks and greenway system – centered on the Colorado River, Onion Creek, Gilleland Creek, and other smaller creeks – weaves together developed and undeveloped lands. The intent is to provide the growing population of the corridor with opportunities to enjoy recreational and natural resources close to where they live and to mitigate the environmental impacts of increased impervious cover in watersheds. Recreational facilities will be built at destination parks; boat ramps will be constructed at FM 973 and SH 130 river crossings and at the confluence of Onion Creek with the Colorado River; and long distance hike and bike trails will be developed along the length of the linear greenways. The large portions of the parks and greenway system maintained as natural areas will be scenic places where wildlife thrives. Bottomland woods, grasslands, and wetlands will also serve to capture and filter stormwater, recharge ground water, and mitigate flood damage.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following Goals and Objectives provide a framework for the tools, policies, and implementation strategies of the Corridor Plan, as well as describe the underlying assumptions inherent in the Corridor Concept Plan Map.

The Corridor Concept plan and goals should:

- Establish a unified concept across jurisdictional boundaries, while recognizing different Corridor development contexts (e.g., urban versus rural);
- Consider the range of social, economic, and environmental issues;
- Reflect existing roadway designations (e.g., functional class, access management category, truck route, scenic byway);
- Reflect existing policy documents such as local comprehensive plans and statewide and regional transportation plans;
- Incorporate and reflect current public input about how local residents view their communities and the transportation corridor; and
- Recognize the needs of those who may not be well-represented within the Corridor planning process, such as through travelers from outside the study corridor or visitors.

GOAL 1: Conserve and Protect Natural Resources

Protecting natural systems is critical to human, plant, and animal health and well-being. The concept of natural community planning calls for the protection of natural communities and habitats. Local governments are working to protect habitats from both a regulatory standpoint and incentives for private landowners. Both public and private sectors participate in land stewardship that can protect and manage natural resources. The following objectives support this goal.

- Protect and manage natural areas.

- Protect and manage water quality.
- Integrate floodplain management with natural area preservation.
- Enhance conservation of limited ground and surface water supplies.

GOAL 2: Improve Quality of Life

Quality of life is an essential consideration in a person's decision to live in a community or a business' decision to locate there. In order to attract new residents as well as make the corridor desirable for those already living there, there is a need to provide an attractive physical environment for residents and visitors, as well as provide necessary services and facilities. The following objectives support this goal.

2.1 Parks and Greenways

- Create a park system that is accessible to and meets needs of residents
- Develop a system of parks and greenways within the corridor.
- Enhance economic viability through creation of parks and greenways.
- Implement sustainable methods through the system of parks and greenway infrastructure.
- Develop the park and green space as a foundation of community development.
- Create an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and rural character.

2.2 Corridor Pattern and Design

- Provide for a physical environment that reflects the time honored tradition of civic commitment to high quality and lasting public works.
- Protect and enhance the cultural and scenic resources.
- Strengthen Corridor connections at multiple levels to establish regional identity and foster neighborhoods.
- Support various school initiatives to maintain viable and safe school sites.

2.3 Health, Safety, and Welfare

- Provide for safe and effective access for life safety services.
- Enhance the flood management system to provide better protection and preserve assets.
- Enhance air quality.
- Minimize and manage ambient noise and light.
- Enhance availability of potable water and wastewater treatment.
- Advance energy conservation.
- Instill community resiliency.
- Provide fair and equitable regulatory environment.

GOAL 3: Provide Improved Mobility and Transportation Choices.

Transportation has and will continue to have a profound impact on the Corridor. Various travel modes not only respond to growth, they can also be a primary determinant to the patterns of growth and land use. Transportation investments can determine where and how we live.

Roads have a significant impact on the quality of the corridor. Roads can make up the majority of our public spaces. In some communities, roads and related infrastructure occupy more land than

parks and greenspace. Therefore, we must plan and design our transportation system with consideration for those who live with it as well as those who use it. The following objectives support this goal.

3.1 Mobility

- Provide for efficient and safe highways and roadways.
- Improve mobility, connectivity and access of people and goods.
- Reduce congestion.
- Provide cost-effective opportunities in the development of transportation facilities.
- Provide a multi-use trail network that improves mobility as well as supports recreational opportunities.

3.2 Bicycles and Pedestrians

- Provide a connected network of non-motorized transportation facilities connected to local and regional destinations.
- Provide for safe and efficient connections throughout the Corridor.
- Provide transportation facilities that encourage bicycle and pedestrian usage.

3.3 Transit

- Provide for public transit services that improve affordable and accessible transportation alternatives.
- Encourage transit oriented development within Corridor activity centers.
- Identify and implement strategies to take advantage of new transit opportunities and connections within the Corridor.

Based on various factors, including ease of implementation, agencies involved, and funding availability, the project team identified priority focus areas. Objectives to achieve the goals are found in the Implementation Strategies section. Each of the objectives detailed is accompanied by tools, policies and strategies and a time frame for accomplishing each objective.

The Corridor Plan was developed in response to the need for a comprehensive plan that provides a vision and a framework for a positive long-range future for the Colorado River Corridor. At its heart, any plan for this area needs to acknowledge its unique and exemplary geographical and historic role for Austin and Travis County. This Plan is a first step. It will require periodic updates to account for changing community and resource protection needs and strategies as indicated by new information or research. And, finally, it is hoped that this Corridor Plan will also be of direct assistance to the City of Austin's Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, which shares common goals for the Colorado River Corridor.