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City of Austin
Audit and Finance Committee Meeting January 14, 2026

Audit Report

Speed Reduction Audit

January 2026

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The Austin Transportation and Public Works Department (ATPW) has a proactive approach to speed reduction. Most projects have effectively lowered speeds. Also, Austin's approach to identify locations for projects is more proactive compared to most peer cities we reviewed.

However, the City does not fully document key aspects of the speed reduction process, including decisions about project selection and delivery. The City can better use data to make more informed decisions and set limits on project costs and deliverables. These improvements should be helpful as project costs continue to rise.

ATPW can also improve its maintenance planning for key speed reduction assets (e.g., speed cushions). This can help ensure they remain in adequate condition as they age. Since the Austin Police Department has limited traffic enforcement capacity, it is particularly important that ATPW's engineering efforts remain effective.

Speed Reduction Audit

Objective

Are the City's speed reduction efforts working effectively?

What We Found

Many of the City's engineering initiatives from the Austin Transportation and Public Works (ATPW) department demonstrate a commitment to speed reduction and traffic safety. For instance, the City adopted Vision Zero and created a Speed Management program. ATPW's Speed Management group employs a proactive approach to speed reduction. This is shown through their work in lowering speed limits throughout Austin and their risk-based approach towards identifying locations for traffic calming projects.

We met with transportation staff from several other cities and found that Austin has a more proactive approach towards identifying traffic calming projects. However, there were some differences regarding funding sources and project delivery methods that present opportunities for Austin to consider.

We also analyzed data from several of Austin's traffic calming projects. We found that most resulted in lower speeds, but they varied in cost and effectiveness. For example, projects involving speed cushions were often less costly and more effective at lowering speed compared to those without them.

However, the City does not fully document key aspects of the speed reduction process. This includes decisions about project selection and delivery. ATPW has opportunities to leverage data to help inform project selection decisions, as well as to set financial limits on project costs and deliverables. As costs continue to rise, making improvements in these areas should help the program.

Many of the City's traffic calming assets were installed in the 1990s and have a 20- to 25-year lifespan. Thus, many of these assets have exceeded or are approaching the end of their useful life. The City currently has maintenance plans for some of its speed reduction assets such as signs and markings, but not for asphalt speed cushions. The City can improve their maintenance planning to ensure key assets remain in adequate condition and continue to serve their intended purpose as they age. Ensuring that the City's speed reduction engineering efforts are and remain effective is crucial considering the Austin Police Department's limited traffic enforcement capacity.

What We Recommend

The Austin Transportation and Public Works Director should document how decisions are made regarding traffic calming projects and consistently leverage data to help inform those decisions. The department should also continue to develop an asset management and maintenance plan that includes its key speed reduction assets.

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Cover: New speed limit sign, City of Austin.

Objective

Are the City's speed reduction efforts working effectively?

Background

Speeding & Traffic Safety

According to the United States Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), speeding endangers the safety of all road users. For instance, NHTSA cites that speeding killed 11,775 in the United States in 2023, accounting for 29% of traffic fatalities in that timespan. Managing speeds is essential in preventing serious and fatal injuries on the road. This is because increases in speed can cause crashes to become both more common and severe. Furthermore, even small reductions in speed can significantly improve safety.

The HIN consists largely of busy arterial roads. Crashes occurring on highways (e.g., Interstate-35) are not included in the HIN.

U.S. communities have traditionally approached traffic safety from the lens of the 3 E's - education, engineering, and enforcement. The City established a High-Injury Network (HIN) of roadways to prioritize locations for such efforts. The HIN accounts for 8% of the City's street network and nearly 60% of serious and fatal injuries from 2017-2021.[1]

Education

Austin Municipal Court also conducts traffic safety education and has won awards for their efforts.

Governments can inform motorists about the dangers of speeding and promote safe behaviors through education and outreach. In Austin, the Vision Zero group of the Austin Transportation and Public Works (ATPW) department educates residents about speeding and traffic safety. Vision Zero uses social media, yard signs, billboards, and dynamic speed display devices, among other tools. However, ATPW staff consider engineering to be a more reliable tool in achieving speed reduction. This is because education relies on voluntary behavior change, which can be inconsistent.

Engineering

The City categorizes streets based on levels. Highways and arterials are higher-level streets and some are outside of the City's jurisdiction (e.g., FM 2222/Koenig Lane, Interstate-35). The City's Speed Management projects focus on lower-level streets, mainly in neighborhoods.

Engineering involves designing or redesigning roads to self-enforce road behaviors and promote safer conditions. ATPW staff cite engineering as the main lever that the City uses in promoting speed reduction and traffic safety. While many groups at ATPW contribute to speed reduction, the Speed Management program is most directly involved. Their main efforts include lowering speed limits and implementing traffic calming projects in high-speed areas, mainly in neighborhood settings.

[1] Austin Transportation and Public Works staff indicated they are still working on updated HIN figures for the 2021-2025 timespan.

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According to the United States Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the primary purpose of traffic calming is to support livability and vitality in residential and commercial areas. Reducing speed helps achieve this. Traffic calming measures consist of horizontal deflection, vertical deflection, lane narrowing, and other features. The purpose of these features is to influence the physical environment and motorists' perceptions to produce desired effects, such as speed reduction, in a self-enforcing way.

Vertical deflection creates a change in the height of the roadway that forces a motorist to slow down to maintain an acceptable amount of comfort and safety. A primary example is speed cushions.

Horizontal deflection creates a sideways shift in the roadway that requires a motorist to slow down to comfortably navigate the device. Examples include traffic circles and curb extensions.

Exhibit 1: Traffic calming in Austin include both horizontal and vertical devices

Speed Cushions

Pedestrian Crossing Island

Traffic Circle

Delineator Posts

Source: Austin City Auditor's Office observation, Fall 2025

<u>Enforcement</u>

Like education and engineering, enforcement also contributes to speed reduction through influencing behavior change. For example, the threat of a fine or penalty for speeding is intended to deter motorists from doing so. The Austin Police Department (APD) is responsible for traffic enforcement in Austin.

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What We Found

Finding 1

The City's traffic calming projects are mostly effective at reducing speeds. Also, Austin has a more proactive approach to speed management compared to peer cities.

The City's transportation engineering efforts and initiatives demonstrate commitment towards speed reduction and traffic safety. According to staff, Austin's street network has historically prioritized speed over safety. ATPW employs a "safe systems" approach in their engineering efforts. This approach focuses on altering the street network to make crashes and outcomes less severe. To achieve this, the City adopted multiple initiatives and plans to manage speed and promote traffic safety. For example, in 2015, the City adopted Vision Zero with the goal of reducing the number of traffic fatalities to zero. The City also adopted the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, as well as their Transportation Criteria Manual. This manual is built largely on national and industry standards and guidelines and helps the City meet its traffic safety goals.

Reducing speeds, even by small amounts, can help lower the frequency and impact of crashes.

As noted, the Speed Management program is most directly involved with speed reduction through their work in lowering speed limits and implementing traffic calming projects. In 2020, City traffic engineers completed an engineering study to recommend speed limit modifications for residential and downtown streets. Later that year, the City lowered the default citywide speed limit from 30 mph to 25 mph on over 850 miles of residential and downtown streets. In 2022, City Council approved speed limit reductions on nearly 50 arterial streets, as a result of another study by City traffic engineers. According to an analysis from ATPW, the 85th percentile speed dropped by an average of 1.7 mph on these arterial streets after the 2020 and 2022 speed limit changes. Since 2021, the City has worked on implementing over 40 traffic calming projects across Austin. There are other groups, divisions, and programs at ATPW that play a role in speed reduction, as well.

Motorists driving at or above the 85th percentile are considered to be exceeding a safe and reasonable speed for the road - the 85th percentile speed is the speed 85% of motorists drive on a road segment.

Exhibit 2: Multiple City divisions and groups contribute to speed reduction in Austin

Group	Key Speed Reduction Efforts & Information
Speed Management	• Reviewing and lowering speed limits • Implementing traffic calming projects
Vision Zero	• Using crash data to identify streets with high rates of serious and fatal injuries where education, engineering, and enforcement initiatives should be prioritized
Active Transportation & Street Design	• Delivering multi-modal mobility projects (e.g., protected bike lanes, pedestrian crossings, and sidewalks) that help narrow roads and promote speed reduction
Signs & Markings	• Installing signs and markings (e.g., speed limits and other road signage, crosswalks, and various roadway markings) • Implementing traffic calming assets that involve signs and markings
Arterial Management	• Programming traffic signals to ensure safe traffic flow on arterial roads
Living Streets	• Activating neighborhood streets for safe-community building through the installation of temporary equipment (ATPW management reported reductions in speed, traffic volume, and crashes as a result)

Source: Austin City Auditor's Office analysis of ATPW's speed reduction efforts, November 2025

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The peer cities we met with include Arlington, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio in Texas, as well as Phoenix, Arizona; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington.

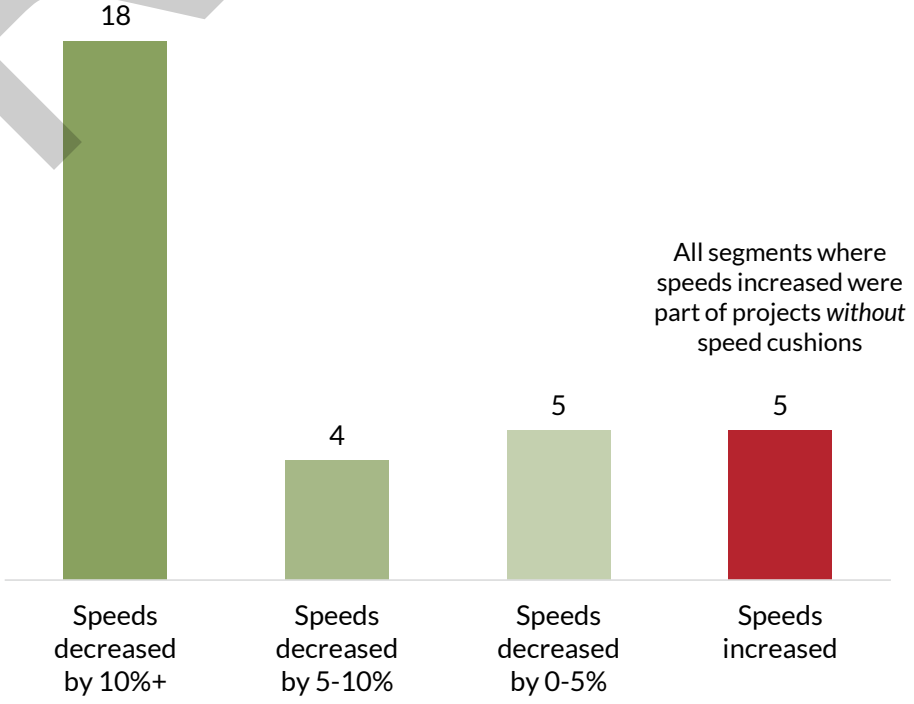
According to the United States Government Accountability Office, management should identify and respond to risk. From a traffic safety perspective, this involves identifying problem areas in the street network and finding ways to address them. As part of our work, we engaged with transportation staff in several cities in Texas and other states. We observed that Austin has a more proactive approach to identifying street segments for traffic calming projects in relation to most of these cities. For example, most peer cities have reactive application or petition-based processes for project implementation. In such approaches, staff generally do not prioritize where traffic calming treatments should be implemented. Instead, residents submit applications or petitions for projects that staff process and review. While Austin does allow residents to submit speed study requests for their streets, City staff use a risk-based process to prioritize street segments for funding projects. The process is intended to ensure that traffic calming projects go to areas with the most need.

The City's risk-based process considers factors such as speed; presence of sidewalks; crashes; and proximity to schools, transit, and equity analysis zones.

According to the FHWA, comparing 85th percentile speed before and after the installation of treatments is one way to examine the effects of traffic calming treatments on speed. City staff told us this is a key metric that they examine in assessing speed reduction for their traffic calming projects. We used this method to analyze speed study data for a judgmental sample of 16 traffic calming projects in Austin from the past few years. We found that 14 of 16 projects resulted in reduced speeds based on this metric. On average, the 85th percentile speed decreased by about 5 mph across projects in the sample. However, results varied more when looking at data from both directions of a project (e.g., eastbound/westbound and northbound/southbound). This indicates that treatments may work better on one direction of road segment versus the other.

For each project, we considered results from each direction of traffic. In all, we analyzed 32 road segments across the 16 projects.

Exhibit 3: Of the 16 projects we reviewed, speeds decreased in 27 of 32 overall segments



Source: Austin City Auditor's Office analysis of before and after speed studies, October 2025

Other factors besides traffic calming treatments may have affected speeds on some projects, including differences in traffic volume and changes in speed limits.

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We visited 12 of the traffic calming project sites from our sample. We observed that motorists generally slowed down as they encountered the traffic calming features, but not always. We also noticed that smaller vehicles slowed down more often than larger vehicles, especially when approaching speed cushions.

Additionally, we found that traffic calming treatments and costs varied across projects. For example, projects that involved speed cushions were often more effective at lowering speed than those without them. Also, projects with speed cushions were often less costly compared to those without them. Projects without speed cushions often involved more intensive road reconfiguration work, such as creating bike lanes or pedestrian crossing islands.

Exhibit 4: Projects with speed cushions were often more effective at lowering speeds and less costly compared to projects without speed cushions

Project Type	Number of Projects	Average 85th Percentile		Average Cost*
		Speed Change	Percent Change	
Projects *with* speed cushions	9	-7.5 mph	-20.3%	~$84,000
Projects *without* speed cushions	7	-1.9 mph	-4.1%	~$290,000

*We were not able to identify individual project costs for all projects since some are grouped into contracts covering multiple projects.

Source: Austin City Auditor's Office analysis of traffic calming project speed and cost data, November 2025

The City's traffic calming projects mostly result in speed reduction based on our review. However, a drawback associated with a proactive approach to speed reduction is that residents may not always want traffic calming projects in their neighborhoods. For example, we heard from residents who were not in favor of these projects. We also noted speed cushions were removed from one neighborhood due to resident dissatisfaction. Also, staff from a peer city indicated this is one reason they do not proactively identify street segments for speed cushion projects.

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Finding 2

The City does not fully document key aspects of the speed reduction process, including decisions about project selection and delivery. The City needs this information to know that it is implementing all the traffic calming projects it can, and whether they are effective at reducing speeds.

Historically, roads have been designed to prioritize motorists. A "complete streets" approach designs roads for use by all modes of transportation (e.g., motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians).

As noted in Finding 1, less expensive projects were often more effective at lowering speeds.

Management should fully document how all decisions are made. The City documents a risk-based process to prioritize traffic calming projects for consideration. Once this is done, ATPW decision-makers ultimately select which projects to implement via an informal process. We also noted an informal process to examine effectiveness after projects are built.

Formally documenting these processes is important for several reasons. For example, institutional knowledge can be lost amidst personnel changes. Also, documenting and using formal processes can help demonstrate to stakeholders that the City is making the right spending decisions.

In addition, we did not see formal processes to use and monitor data or other information about factors including costs, speed, or whether projects achieved objectives. Formalizing these processes can help management optimize project selection, especially amidst resource constraints.

Management should identify and set risk tolerances. ATPW has not established formal financial tolerances or decision points to determine when a project is too expensive to pursue. ATPW generally applies a "complete streets" approach when designing speed management projects. This approach considers other aspects of road safety in addition to speed reduction. For example, a complete streets approach may include adding crosswalks or bike lanes, which primarily serve to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, but may also affect speeds. This may be less cost-effective at reducing speeds, but helps the department achieve other goals.

In addition, we did not see a formal decision point to determine who would construct the project, whether that be a contractor, internal staff, or a mix of both. ATPW staff noted they mostly default to using contractors to deliver projects, although internal staff may be cheaper. Staff from one peer city indicated they had been able to achieve cost savings through having staff construct traffic calming projects instead of contractors. However, ATPW staff noted that internal resources are busy with other tasks (e.g. road maintenance, implementing bond projects) and contractors have the expertise to do the work. Formalizing decision points on project costs and delivery would help inform ATPW's decision-making and be more transparent to the public that bond funds are being spent wisely to achieve their goal.

Taken together, these points are important because staff noted that costs for traffic calming projects are rising. This was also a common theme among peer cities. Additionally, all the City's bond funds for speed reduction projects have been allocated. Funding constraints may limit the City's ability to implement more of these projects where they are needed. Without setting financial tolerances, regularly conducting analyses, and incorporating them into the decision-making process, the City may not know whether they could have implemented more projects or if they did the right projects to reduce speed.

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According to the Government Finance Officers Association, governments must justify the money collected and demonstrate that it is spent wisely.

When faced with funding constraints or other resource limitations, organizations can use tools like optimization analyses to help achieve objectives. What this means for ATPW is that management can use information from past projects to inform their decision-making for future project selection. Peer city staff said they do not conduct any sort of optimization analyses to enhance project selection, but some suggested it could be beneficial, especially for a city that proactively identifies its projects, like Austin.

Finding 3

The Speed Management program has not established a maintenance plan and associated condition standards for the assets they oversee. Without such planning, the City will be unable to ensure that speed reduction assets remain in adequate condition and continue to serve their intended purpose.

There are a great number of transportation assets throughout Austin that pertain to speed reduction. Examples include speed limit signs, speed cushions, medians, curb extensions, pedestrian crossing islands, and delineator posts. We visited a judgmental sample of over 60 speed reduction sites throughout Austin.

Most of the assets we saw were in relatively good condition, but we did find some issues (see Exhibit 5 on the next page). For example, raised pavement markers (RPMs) were often missing from speed cushions. RPMs help provide increased visibility at night, especially during rain to provide wet weather visibility. Pedestrian crossing signs and delineator posts were sometimes knocked down. Also, we were unable to locate one asset, a speed table, listed in the City's GIS map for speed reduction assets.

Industry guidance recommends asset owners should have a maintenance plan for speed reduction assets that include inspections and associated condition standards. In Austin, these assets are managed by various groups. The Signs & Markings group oversees assets like speed limit signs and delineator posts. That group has a maintenance plan and defined condition standards that inform replacement decisions for their assets.

The City must follow federal requirements for sign reflexivity that define replacement timelines.

By contrast, the Speed Management group oversees asphalt devices such as speed cushions. They have not established a formal maintenance plan or defined condition standards for the assets they oversee. This approach did not seem unusual as several peer cities noted their maintenance is also mainly reactive.

We could not identify recognized condition standards for speed cushions. This suggests it is up to individual jurisdictions to define their own standards.

While speed reduction assets like speed cushions are durable, they do wear down over time and may become less effective and safe. Due to this, speed cushions may eventually need to be removed or replaced when they reach the end of their useful life. Staff reported they began to install traffic calming devices in the 1990s and their useful life is about 20 to 25 years. Thus, there are some assets that have exceeded their useful life, and many more approaching that point.

Furthermore, as the City deploys speed reduction assets, they will eventually need to decide whether and when they will replace them as they approach the end of their useful life. Without a maintenance plan, it is unclear how the City will balance adding new assets with maintaining existing ones. Staff reported they are expanding their departmental maintenance plan for transportation assets, but it is unclear how this plan may address speed reduction assets.

The asset management lifecycle consists of the following steps: plan, acquire, operate, maintain, and dispose.

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Exhibit 5: Some of the City's speed cushions and other speed reduction assets have shown signs of wear and tear

Uneven asphalt speed cushion with missing raised pavement markers (RPMs)

Worn asphalt speed cushion with missing RPMs

Uneven asphalt speed cushion with missing RPMs

Flattened delineator post

Source: Austin City Auditor's Office observation, Summer and Fall 2025

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Innovation Opportunity

Austin has opportunities to identify different funding sources and delivery methods for traffic calming projects.

According to the FHWA, funding traffic calming projects can be a challenge. Based on industry research and peer city interactions, it does not appear there is a specific best practice for funding or delivering these projects. For example, Austin is unique among peer cities in funding traffic projects primarily using bonds. It is unclear how the City will continue to fund traffic calming projects in future years if new bond funds are not available.

Other cities fund projects using council district office allocations, operating budgets or general funds, and tax levies. Some cities let residents fund projects either partially or completely. For one city, the funding depends on the severity of speeding.

Exhibit 6: Cities fund traffic calming projects differently

City	Information on Funding Sources/Methods
Austin, TX	• Projects are funded through bonds
Arlington, TX	• Projects are funded from the operating budget
Dallas, TX	• Projects are funded through council allocations • Dallas previously asked for resident funding assistance
Fort Worth, TX	• Projects are funded from the operating budget
Houston, TX	• Projects are funded through council district service funds • Residents can fund projects privately (there can be a mix of private and public funding)
San Antonio, TX	• Projects are funded through council allocations, but each office has discretion whether to provide funding for speed reduction
Phoenix, AZ	• Projects are funded through a mix of public and private funding • Residents provide more funding when the average speed is lower, whereas the City pays more when the average speed is higher
Portland, OR	• Projects are funded through a gas tax, parking revenue, and a clean energy fund
Seattle, WA	• Projects are funded through a transportation tax levy and a property tax levy

Source: Austin City Auditor's Office analysis of Austin and peer city sources to fund traffic calming projects, November 2025

Austin does not currently allow private funds to be used for traffic calming projects. However, management is exploring this option provided all bond funds have been expended, and if there is a documented speeding problem at the location. The City has an opportunity to identify other funding sources to ensure that traffic calming projects continue to be delivered in areas of need.

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Traffic calming projects can be delivered through internal or external resources, such as contractors. Like most peer cities, Austin primarily uses contractors to deliver projects, which can be costly. Staff in some peer cities reported delivering projects using internal resources, which may result in cost savings. Austin has an opportunity to explore alternative delivery methods for constructing traffic calming projects beyond the current contractor-based approach.

Additional Observation

Enforcement is a key lever for speed reduction, but it has remained limited in Austin for several years.

Automated speed enforcement involves the use of cameras to record speeding violations. Staff remotely review and process camera evidence and fines are sent to violators.

As noted, enforcement is a key factor shaping speed reduction. For instance, the threat of a fine or penalty is intended to deter drivers from doing so. Dating back to 2015, Vision Zero cites that Austin Police Department (APD) speeding citations have decreased by 90%. Automated enforcement (e.g., speed cameras) has demonstrated success elsewhere and reduces reliance on traditional traffic enforcement, but it is not permitted in Texas.

Over the last several years, APD's Highway Enforcement Command has decreased in size. Now, individual patrol commanders shape traffic enforcement efforts, but actual enforcement is left to the discretion of individual officers. Staff noted a few targeted enforcement efforts focused on impaired driving enforcement in the downtown area and directed patrols on FM 2222. Like many law enforcement agencies across the country, APD has experienced patrol vacancies. Staff attribute APD's limited ability to conduct proactive traffic enforcement to staffing vacancies and suggest these vacancies will persist for several more years.

ATPW has made efforts to provide APD with a dashboard to help prioritize areas in need of traffic enforcement. It is also important to note that engineering efforts such as speed cushions are effective at reducing speeds in neighborhood settings, but they cannot be used on arterial streets and highways. This is important because segments of the City's high-injury network mostly include arterial and highway roadways. Enforcement remains a key lever to mitigate excessive speeding in these areas.

According to a 2025 news report, over 40% of residents expressed support for more traffic enforcement. During this project, we directly heard support for enforcement from residents, City staff, and Texas Department of Transportation staff. Without targeted or consistent enforcement, drivers may not be deterred from speeding. This poses actual and reputational risks for the City. Residents may feel less safe when there is minimal or no traffic enforcement. Additionally, it may contribute to increased and more severe negative traffic safety outcomes throughout Austin.

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Recommendations and Management Response

1

The Austin Transportation and Public Works Director should document a written process regarding how the department makes decisions on which traffic calming projects to select and how the projects should be delivered. This should include establishing formal financial tolerances regarding the cost of traffic calming projects.

Management Response: Agree.

Proposed Implementation Plan: Measured speed and volume data is used directly to rank streets, along with other criteria documented in our methodology. Based on the design of the City's streets, some streets are residential in nature because they provide the main access to neighborhoods without front-facing residences, or they can be substandard streets with no sidewalks, curbs, parking, bike lanes, etc. Engineers exercise professional judgement in providing the final recommendations for project selection, balancing neighborhood needs and overall safety issues.

ATPW started the process of considering how to modify the program's methodology before this audit to separately allocate funding to streets with lower and higher residential characteristics, with the goal of ensuring funds are going to streets with the highest speeding and crash records while still addressing streets within neighborhoods with front-facing residences. We anticipate making this change in methodology before the program should receive additional funding.

Proposed Implementation Date: December 2026.

2

The Austin Transportation and Public Works Director should incorporate analyses (e.g., optimization or cost benefit) to leverage data on speed, costs, and other project characteristics to help inform speed management project selection decisions.

Management Response: Agree.

Proposed Implementation Plan: ATPW began reviewing financial tolerances and decision points prior to this audit as we anticipated all existing funding being allocated. We can explore setting firmer parameters for scope and timeline when coordinating projects with other programs to improve efficiency and align outcomes to focus more on lowering speeds.

Proposed Implementation Date: December 2026.

3

The Austin Transportation and Public Works Director should develop an asset management and maintenance plan for its key speed reduction assets. This plan should include defined condition standards for assets. It should also include tolerances and a prioritization process regarding implementing new assets versus maintaining existing ones.

Management Response: Agree.

Proposed Implementation Plan: ATPW has begun allocating funding in our operating budget in recent years to repair and replace assets. This process started before the audit to inventory existing speed management assets and to develop a methodology to assess and prioritize devices needing attention. This process is still in development, and we anticipate it being used starting in 2026 to be integrated into ATPW's larger asset management efforts.

Proposed Implementation Date: December 2026.

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Recommendations and Management Response

Austin

MEMORANDUM

To:	Jason Hadavi, City Auditor
Through:	Mike Rogers, Assistant City Manager
From:	Richard Mendoza, P.E., M.P.A., Director, AM Austin Transportation and Public Works
Date:	January 7, 2026
Subject:	**Management Response to Audit of Speed Reduction**

The purpose of this memorandum is for Austin Transportation and Public Works (ATPW) management to respond to the City Auditor's Office draft audit report on Speed Reduction, provided for our review on December 17, 2025.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the report's findings and recommendations. Management agrees with the recommendations and appreciates the work your team did over the course of the audit to understand the complexity of speed reduction and how this item has evolved over time with ATPW's Speed Management Program. We view the internal audit as a reinforcement of our efforts to further strengthen our program targeting the elimination of serious injuries and fatalities on our transportation system by reducing speeds.

ATPW is providing the following responses to the finding statements and opportunities in the report.

Finding 1 Statement: *The City's traffic calming projects are mostly effective at reducing speeds. Also, Austin has a more proactive approach to speed management compared to peer cities.*

Response: Noted.

Finding 2 Statement: *The City does not fully document key aspects of the speed reduction process, including decisions about project selection and delivery. The City needs this information to know that it is implementing all the traffic calming projects it can, and whether they are effective at reducing speeds.*

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Recommendations and Management Response

Response: Noted. ATPW ranks streets through a formal process using measured speed and volume data along with other criteria documented in our methodology. Final project selection typically involves engineering judgement as the team weighs community needs/requests along with highest safety risk based on speed and volume. We understand the "engineering judgement" can appear to not be transparent to the public and are taking steps to update our methodology including 1) potentially creating separate program criteria for local neighborhood streets and 2) improving our review of streets at the start of evaluation to reduce the need to remove ranked streets that are ineligible for the program if they do not meet residential street criteria.

Finding 3 Statement: *The Speed Management program has not established a maintenance plan and associated condition standards for the assets they oversee. Without such planning, the City will be unable to ensure that speed reduction assets remain in adequate condition and continue to serve their intended purpose.*

Response: Noted. ATPW acknowledges this issue and has begun allocating funding in our operating budget in recent years to repair and replace assets as we do not have a formal assessment process and schedule for traffic calming devices. This process started before the audit to inventory existing speed management assets and to develop a methodology to assess and prioritize devices needing attention. This process is still in development, and we anticipate it being used starting in 2026 and to be integrated into ATPW's larger asset management efforts, with the goal of annually assessing a percentage of assets to be determined based on available staffing and funding.

Innovation Opportunity Statement: *Austin is unique among peer cities in funding traffic projects primarily using bonds. It is unclear how the City will continue to fund traffic calming projects in future years if new bond funds are not available.*

Response: Noted. ATPW is actively exploring alternative means to fund speed management projects including allowing private funding from residents as noted in the audit. As stated in audit report, the most effective devices are cushions or other vertical deflection, which also have the best return on investment and lowest life cycle costs. However, initial costs for these devices will likely exceed what most neighborhoods can fund, which we anticipate will lead to residents wanting alternative devices that are possibly cheaper, less effective, and require more maintenance for the City. Our framework states that ATPW will design and approve speed management projects which are comparable to program-funded projects, but we will continue to explore cost-saving measures to ease the cost burden on residents. We anticipate completing the framework for resident funding this spring while completing exploring other funding opportunities by the end of 2026.

Additional Observation Statement: *Enforcement is a key lever for speed reduction, but it has remained limited in Austin for several years.*

Response: ATPW agrees and will continue to work with our partners at Austin Police Department (APD) to explore opportunities for increased traffic enforcement with community support to achieve our shared safety goals. The following is APD's response to this audit:

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Recommendations and Management Response

APD maintains a strong and collaborative partnership with (ATPW) to help ensure the safety of our roadways for all community members. As noted in the audit report, APD is currently understaffed by approximately 350 officers. Despite this challenge, the department remains actively engaged in traffic enforcement as resources permit. Additionally, APD participates in the Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP), which provides funding for officers to conduct high-visibility enforcement (HVE) of traffic laws. This initiative targets critical issues such as speeding and impaired or distracted driving in identified problem areas, using data-driven strategies and public education to improve road safety.

Beyond the STEP program, APD staffs a small but dedicated team of full-time motorcycle officers and a larger auxiliary motorcycle unit, as well as a specialized Commercial Vehicle Enforcement (CVE) unit. The primary mission of these units is traffic enforcement, including speed regulation. Recently, motorcycle officers have focused their efforts on both north and south Austin. For example, on December 3, 2025, two motorcycle units took part in a targeted initiative that resulted in the issuance of 36 hazardous citations, nine non-hazardous citations, and 26 written warnings. Initiatives like this deter violations and, in our assessment, help save lives.

During Fiscal Year 2025, the STEP grant operations, managed through Impaired Driving Investigations, saw high levels of activity across multiple enforcement categories. The STEP Comprehensive initiative led the effort with 12,831 stops and 1,509 speeding citations, while specialized programs like Operation Slowdown showed a high enforcement rate with 122 citations from just 258 stops. Despite this momentum, total year-end figures were significantly impacted by a budget shortfall; due to high participation, grant funds were exhausted by late summer, restricting operations in August and September to only one hour each month. Moving into the first two months of FY26, the program has maintained a steady pace, recording over 2,400 stops and 326 speeding citations across the Comprehensive and CMV divisions.

In addition to grant-funded programs, internal units conducted targeted enforcement through various specialized operations. Operation: Twin Turbo focused on downtown DWI enforcement over 22 nights, resulting in 49 arrests and 275 stops. Simultaneously, the Motors Unit and Commercial Motor Vehicle (CVE) Unit focused on high-traffic corridors and safety compliance; the CVE Unit alone completed 3,030 inspections. While some citation data for the CVE and Motors Auxiliary units remains pending or localized to specific regions, the available metrics highlight a robust departmental commitment to traffic safety, including speed enforcement and impaired driving interdiction across FY25 and the first couple of months into FY26.

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Recommendations and Management Response

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Eric Bollich, Managing Engineer, Austin Transportation and Public Works, at eric.bollich@austintexas.gov or (512) 974-7767.

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Scope

The audit scope includes the City of Austin's speed reduction efforts over the past five years, mainly focused on efforts of the Austin Transportation and Public Works Department's Speed Management program.

Methodology

To complete this audit, we performed the following steps:

- researched best practices, industry guidance, prior audits, academic research, and other relevant considerations regarding speed reduction efforts
- interviewed staff from Austin Transportation and Public Works, Austin Police, Austin Municipal Court, and Austin Public Health departments; the City's Urban Transportation Commission; and the Texas Department of Transportation
- interviewed staff and analyzed information from peer cities to learn about their speed reduction efforts
- reviewed relevant plans, policies, procedures, and reports
- analyzed speeding citation data
- analyzed a judgmental sample of speed management project documents involving speed, costs, and design. Due to the sampling method, the results cannot be projected to the population.
- performed site visits at a judgmental sample of over 60 sites, including traffic calming projects, speed limit signs, markings, and traffic calming devices. Due to the sampling method, the results cannot be projected to the population.
- evaluated internal controls related to the City's speed reduction efforts
- evaluated the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse related to the City's speed reduction efforts

Audit Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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The Austin City Auditor's Office was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services. We conduct performance audits to review aspects of a City service or program and provide recommendations for improvement.

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Alternate formats available upon request

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