4. Field Reports



PROJECT: North Walnut Creek Trail (Braker) / Red Line Trail

PREPARED BY: Kimberly Gilbertson

PRESENT: Kimberly Gilbertson, Christopher Newton

VISIT DATE / TIME: Wednesday, April 12, 2017 / 9:30 – 12:30

CC: Kevin Sweat, Ruben Lopez

Scope:

PWD's Engineering Services Division has been tasked with designing a "rails with trails" section of the MetroRail Red Line Trail. Extending from Braker Lane to MoPac at Park Bend, this roughly 1.5 mile section of trail is located in the "Priority 5" quadrant, as identified in the June 2007 Capital Metro Rail-with-Trail Feasibility Study. The Red Line Trail is intended to be a key link to the already existing City of Austin Walnut Creek Trail.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Double tracks with shallow/gentle slope from Braker Lane to retention ponds at TopGolf.

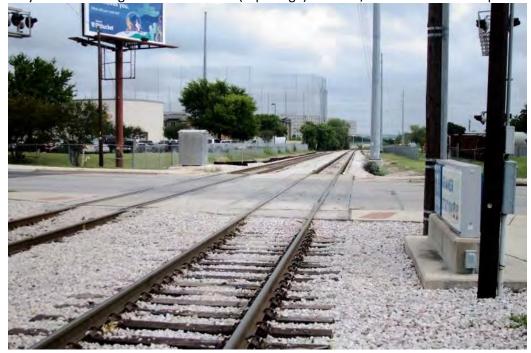




2. Predominantly un-vegetated from Braker Lake to IBM/Charles Schwab campus inner road crossing.



3. Easy street crossing for trail at Kramer (top image) and IBM/Charles Schwab campus inner road (bottom image).





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4. Only one elevated span of track between Kramer and IBM/Charles Schwab campus inner road crossing. (Top image – east side looking N / Bottom image – west side looking S)





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5. Detention ponds on east side of track at IBM/Charles Schwab campus.







6. Single track from retention ponds at TopGolf to trail's end at MoPac at Park Bend.





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7. Heavily vegetated from IBM/Charles Schwab campus inner road crossing to trial's end at MoPac at Park Bend.



8. Frequent steep slope from IBM/Charles Schwab campus inner road crossing to trail's end at MoPac at Park Bend





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9. Major creek crossing at Gracy Farms Lane. Possible clearance for trail under overpass, but easy street crossing for trail.



10. Four elevated track crossings (of varying lengths and amount of water) along span from IBM/Charles Schwab campus inner road to trail's end at MoPac at Park Bend. May require track-level trail or pushing trail into vegetation to avoid the cost of bridging the trail.





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11. Potential bridging necessary to enter/exit Red Line trail to link with existing City of Austin Walnut Creek Trail. (Top picture – west connection to Walnut Creek Trail / Bottom picture – east connection to Walnut Creek Trail)





- 12. Predominant rails-with-trails path suited to west side of track. There appears to be ample land to west of tracks where the trail could be located within the vegetation, making for a pleasing trail experience due to existing shade and vegetative barrier.
- 13. ROW from land owners adjacent to the MetroRail corridor will be necessary



PROJECT: North Walnut Creek Trail (Braker) / Red Line Trail

PREPARED BY: Kimberly Gilbertson

PRESENT: Kimberly Gilbertson, Christopher Newton

VISIT DATE / TIME: Friday, June 30th, 9am t0 11:30

CC: Thuan Nguyen, Janae Ryan, Kevin Sweat, Ruben Lopez

Scope: PWD's Engineering Services Division has been tasked with designing a "rails with trails" section of the MetroRail Red Line Trail. Extending from Braker Lane to MoPac at Park Bend, this roughly 1.5 mile section of trail is located in the "Priority 5" quadrant, as identified in the June 2007 Capital Metro Rail-with-Trail Feasibility Study. The Red Line Trail is intended to be a key link to the already existing City of Austin Walnut Creek Trail.

Our first site visit was conducted on April 12th, 2017, where we walked the entire span of the project for initial understanding and observation. Our second site visit included the span from Gracy Farms Lane to just south of the third elevated track crossing, where we further investigated which side of the track (East or West) is more conducive to placing a trail.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Having parked at Stoneleigh Condominiums on the east side of the tracks, we entered the greenbelt area immediate adjacent to the condominium complex where there are a couple of man-made entrances to the greenbelt. We encountered two small homeless camps.





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Along this span, there is a worn path that the proposed trail could follow. It would require retaining walls and footings to accommodate the existing slope and necessary path widening. There is dense greenery that will need to be surveyed and cleared to make way for a trail.







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Permanent water drainage would also need to be included to replace a washed out, temporary riprap barrier. The proposed trail will need to span this section, so that drainage from the condominium level can continue uninhibited down the hill.





4. Walnut Creek crossing could happen at this juncture. While the creek sides are steep, there appears to be relatively flat ground on either side for easy bridging. However, this would put the proposed trail on the east side of the tracks, very close to the existing Walnut Creek Trail, and might not make sense. We did not continue walking along this side.



Engineering Services Division





5. Upon crossing the railroad tracks and accessing the west side of the project span, we were pleasantly surprised to find flat, easily traversable terrain. We encountered this site condition the rest of our walk distance (just south of the third elevated track crossing). This span is along The Village at Gracy Farms Apartments, just outside of their fence line. There is ample room for a proposed trail, turning our alternative route into our preferred route. There is dense greenery that will need to be surveyed and cleared to make way for a trail.



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6. Towards the end of the span, we encountered a large field-like area that could potentially be a nice spot for a trail pocket park or outlook.



7. We exited via a man-made path that took us back up to Gracy Farms Lane. This path could potentially be utilized as a neighborhood trail access point.



8. Future site visits will include walking the lower span directly off Gracy Farms Lane to determine if the flat terrain that we encountered on the west side of the tracks continues further south as well. This will help us determine the best route for getting the trail across Gracy Farms Lane and on which side it most logically, and cost-effectively, continues north.



PROJECT: North Walnut Creek Trail (Braker) / Red Line Trail

PREPARED BY: Kimberly Gilbertson

PRESENT: Kimberly Gilbertson, Christopher Newton

VISIT DATE / TIME: Friday, July 14th, 10:30 to 3:00 pm

CC: Thuan Nguyen, Janae Ryan, Kevin Sweat, Ruben Lopez

Scope: PWD's Engineering Services Division has been tasked with designing a "rails with trails" section of the MetroRail Red Line Trail. Extending from Braker Lane to MoPac at Park Bend, this roughly 1.5 mile section of trail is located in the "Priority 5" quadrant, as identified in the June 2007 Capital Metro Rail-with-Trail Feasibility Study. The Red Line Trail is intended to be a key link to the already existing City of Austin Northern Walnut Creek Trail.

This site walk was intended to further explore the west side of the tracks north and south of Gracy Farms Lane. During our previous site visit (See Observation 5 in report 2017_7_7_Red Line Trail Field Report), we were pleased to find flat, easily traversable terrain heading north from where we crossed over to the west side of the tracks (approximately half way up the property line of The Village at Gracy Farms Apartments). We also walked the stretch along IBM's campus and the existing Northern Walnut Creek Trail from Metric Blvd. to Mo Pac at Park Bend.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Our first point of observation was at Gracy Farms Lane on the west side of the tracks from a utility station. While the terrain would support a flat, accessible street entrance onto the trail, it quickly becomes too steep and The Village at Gracy Farms Apartment's fence line extends to the ridge boundary making this access point too difficult to pursue.









2017_7_19_Red Line Trail Field Report



2. Returning to Gracy Farms Lane, we climbed the berm to the left of the tracks and found a more suitable entrance for the trail. The bike crossing at Gracy Farms Lane will need to direct trail users along the left side of the tracks. Due to the existing berm, earthwork and grading will be necessary to make this point accessible for trail users. A retaining wall along the berm ridge will likely be necessary.









3. At the second elevated track crossing, the trail will need to bridge the creek before connecting to the flat, easily traversable terrain that we discovered during our June 30th site walk.



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4. We intended to walk the west side of the track south of Gracy Farms Lane but abandoned the idea upon hearing yelling from the creek. We decided to enter via IBM's property instead. The IBM side of the tracks appears to be interspersed with numerous existing, informal trails on relatively flat terrain. There are some smaller water crossings from creek outlets. We encountered a couple of homeless camps, so our exploration was fragmented. While walking IBM's property line, we noted numerous employees out enjoying a break or their lunch hour, supporting our thought that IBM could likely be amenable to a multi-use trail running along their property edge. At the IBM inner-loop road, there is very easy access for the trail to continue along the IBM property edge. Three large pecan trees are a picturesque backdrop to this potential trail entrance point.



5. Post this site walk and during a subsequent meeting with CapMetro (July 19, 2017), we were informed of Brandywine's Broadmoor Campus Master Plan, which redevelops the existing IBM campus into a mixed-use campus with apartments, condos/townhouses, hotel, and office/retail space. CapMetro is planning a new transit station for this location and removing the existing Kramer Station*. Our next steps will include reaching out to Brandywine to see how the proposed Red Line Trail can work into the Broadmoor Campus Master Plan. The inclusion of the Red Line Trail in the Broadmoor Campus Master Plan has excellent potential for strengthening the presence of the Red Line Trail not only as an urban multi-use trail but also as an important part of a larger transportation and connectivity hub.

*CapMetro representative indicated a willingness to allow us to repurpose the existing pedestrian/bike walk ways that are along the east side of the Kramer Station stop, which strengthens our interest in running the trail along that side and may also reduce construction costs along that section of the trail.

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Full Master Plan Image

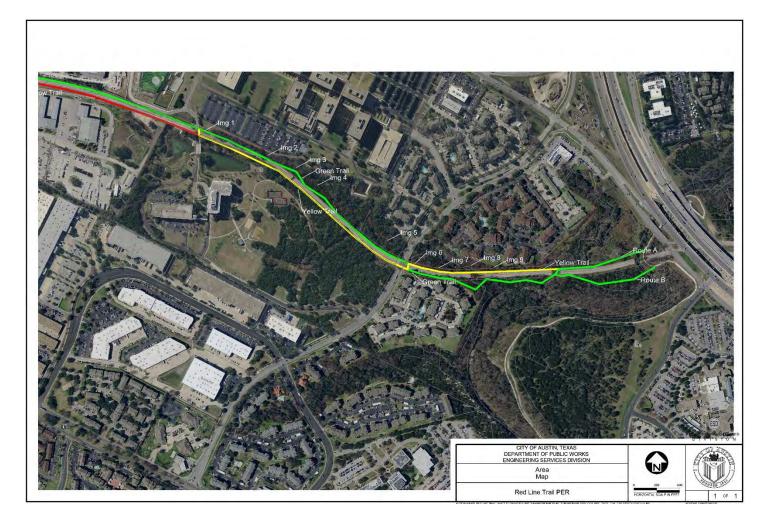


Closer View of Proposed Platform and Vehicular/Pedestrian Traffic Flows.

FIELD REPORT

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6. The map and corresponding key images (below) illustrate our exploration along the west side of the tracks thus far from IBM's campus past the apartment communities north of Gracy Farms Lane. As we suspected from our previous walk, the west side offers the greatest opportunity for traversable pathing with minimal creek intrusion and potential infrastructure. The ultimate success for this section of alignment will hinge on our ability to dove tail our trail with the proposed IBM campus master plan.





Location/Image 1



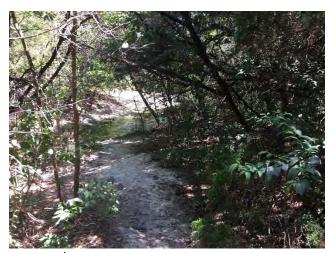
Location/Image 2



Location/Image 3



Location/Image 4



Location/Image 5



Location/Image 6



Location/Image 7



Location/Image 8s



Location/Image 9



PROJECT: North Walnut Creek Trail (Braker) / Red Line Trail

PREPARED BY: Kimberly Gilbertson

PRESENT: Kimberly Gilbertson, Christopher Newton

VISIT DATE / TIME: Thursday, October 12, 11:00 to 4:00 pm

CC: Diana Wang, Janae Ryan, Kevin Sweat, Ruben Lopez

Scope: PWD's Engineering Services Division has been tasked with designing a "rails with trails" section of the MetroRail Red Line Trail. Extending from Braker Lane to MoPac at Park Bend, this roughly 1.5 mile section of trail is located in the "Priority 5" quadrant, as identified in the June 2007 Capital Metro Rail-with-Trail Feasibility Study. The Red Line Trail is intended to be a key link to the already existing City of Austin Northern Walnut Creek Trail.

This site walk was intended to supplement information already gathered for the 30% PER by confirming the location of possible conflicts along the west side of the trail and getting additional photos of key points along the trail.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Our site walk began at the Kramer Station where we took more in depth photos of the existing rail stop's infrastructure. CapMetro is considering closing this station and relocating it as part of the IBM campus redevelopment plan (Broadmoor Campus Master Plan). A CapMetro representative has indicated a willingness to allow us to repurpose the existing pedestrian/bike walk ways that are along the east side of the rail stop. This walk way is a 5' wide sidewalk that runs roughly 200' behind the north-bound platform from the bike cage to the pedestrian track crossing at Kramer Lane.





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We continued to the Austin Energy / City of Austin Facility off Kramer Lane to assess drainage from the Red Line tracks, which is directed under the adjacent service track into ponds located beyond the fencing onto the City's property. We observed track maintenance equipment on the track inside the fencing on the City's grounds. We anticipate that this track is only occasionally used to move maintenance equipment.





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3. The apartment complex across from the City's maintenance facility includes a retention pond that sits in proximity to drainage that flows under the Red Line tracks (as described in the previous observation).



4. On IBM's campus, we were able to further explore the terrain between the property edge and the tracks. As we previously reported, it is relatively flat terrain intersected with small tributaries of the creek and outfalls where water flows off IBM's property. There is ample area for trail placement depending on how our trail alignment can connect to the Broadmoor Campus Master Plan.



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At Gracy Farms Lane, we were able to photograph the creek's drop at the southwest side of the road. As illustrated in the image below, the bottom of the road is only a few feet above the water's steep drop. The lack of headroom under Gracy Farms Lane makes crossing at the creek level on the west side impossible.



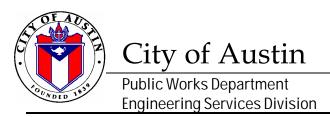
6. There is additional intermittent drainage south of Gracy Farms Lane on the west side. We believe this drains into a possible tributary of the Little Walnut Creek (further investigation required to confirm). The trail alignment will need to cross to the west of this drainage.





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7. Outfall north of Gracy Farms Lane on the west side of the Red Line tracks.

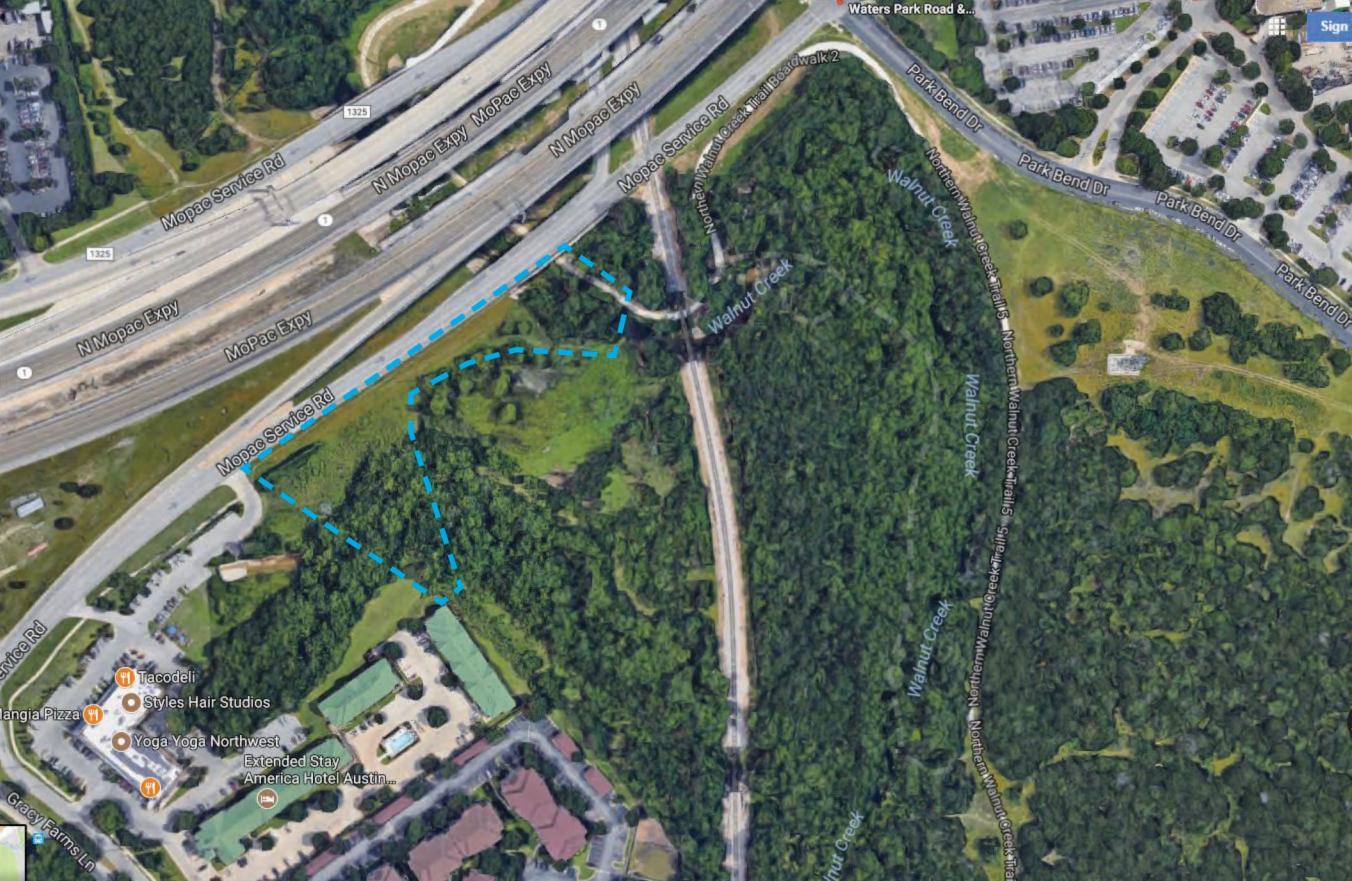




8. Drainage observed at the apartment complex along the west side further north of Gracy Farms Lane.



9. Finally, we were able to walk some of the previously unexplored area past the apartment complexes and behind the Extended Stay Motel and shops on the corner of Gracy Farms Lane and the MoPac Service Road. This area is in immediate proximity to the existing Northern Walnut Creek Trail as it loops around and continues under MoPac Expressway. We will need extensive mapping of the flood plains in order to best understand the different tributaries that seem to cross through this area. Some simple land clearing using the department's machete will also help us get a clearer picture of whether the west side is the best location to have the Red Line trail connect with the existing Northern Walnut Creek Trail. As such, while we were able to walk through some of this area, we were unable to make definite conclusions about the viability or location of the trail's alignment due to the vegetative density and numerous tributaries.





PROJECT: North Walnut Creek Trail (Braker) / Red Line Trail

PREPARED BY: Kimberly Gilbertson

PRESENT: Kimberly Gilbertson, Christopher Newton, Christopher Evans

VISIT DATE / TIME: Wednesday, November 15, 9:00 to Noon

CC: Diana Wang, Janae Ryan, Kevin Sweat, Ruben Lopez

Scope: PWD's Engineering Services Division has been tasked with designing a "rails with trails" section of the MetroRail Red Line Trail. Extending from Braker Lane to MoPac at Park Bend, this roughly 1.5 mile section of trail is located in the "Priority 5" quadrant, as identified in the June 2007 Capital Metro Rail-with-Trail Feasibility Study. The Red Line Trail is intended to be a key link to the already existing City of Austin Northern Walnut Creek Trail.

This site walk was intended to re-investigate the final span past the apartment complexes and behind the Extended Stay Motel and shops on the corner of Gracy Farms Lane and the MoPac Service Road. During our October 12th site visit, we were able to walk through some of this area but were unable to make definite conclusions about the viability or location of the trail's alignment, due to the vegetative density and numerous tributaries. As the trees have started their fall defoliation, we had much better ability to determine the location and trajectory of Little Walnut Creek and make some conclusions about how the trail can proceed to the proposed ending point, while minimizing impact on flood plain and critical erosion zones.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Our site walk began by accessing the Little Walnut Creek area via the MoPac Service Road. Despite the trees beginning to defoliate, the area is still heavily vegetated with dense undergrowth. The banks of the Little Walnut Creek are steep and severely eroded. It is likely that the banks will need to be armored. The creek sides are relatively flat, so a bridge to continue the trail north behind the apartment complex and Extended Stay Motel across Little Walnut Creek is our preferred route.

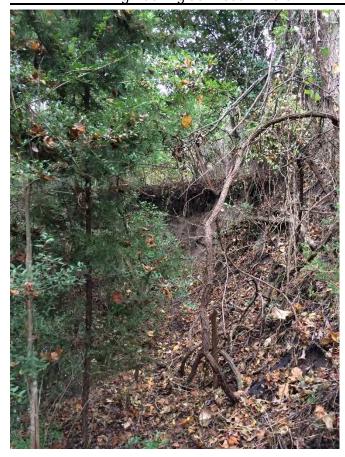


Image 1: Boundary of site walk



Image 2: Little Walnut Creek







Images 3 and 4: Severe bank erosion along Little Walnut Creek 2017_11_17_Red Line Trail Field Report



Image 5: East side of Little Walnut Creek landing



Image 6: West side of Little Walnut Creek landing



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2. The bridge crossing will bring trail users out along the MoPac Service Road where we suggest locating the trail 40' – 60' off the road following along the natural ridge, keeping the trail in a more picturesque setting and protecting the trail users from adjacent car traffic.



Image 7: An existing sidewalk adjacent to the MoPac Service Road



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3. The natural ridge curves in such a way that it would allow us to bring the trail around and gradually descend to connect to the existing Northern Walnut Creek Trail as it loops around and continues under MoPac Expressway.



Image 8: Existing Northern Walnut Creek Trail headed West under MoPac Expressway.



Image 9: Top of ridge line that the trail could follow along before connecting to the existing Northern Walnut Creek Trail.

4. The natural ridge where we are suggesting to locate the proposed trail is above the flood plain. This is a beautiful wetland area that could be a design feature and focal point along the proposed trail.



Image 10: The area where both trails connect could become a popular destination for bird watchers and nature enthusiasts as well as trail walkers/bikers.



PROJECT: North Walnut Creek Trail (Braker) / Red Line Trail

PREPARED BY: Kimberly Gilbertson

PRESENT: Kimberly Gilbertson, Christopher Newton, Darren Sluyter

VISIT DATE / TIME: Wednesday, August 29th and Thursday, August 30th, 9:00 to Noon

CC: Diana Wang, Janae Spence, Kevin Sweat, Bimal Adhikary

Scope: PWD's Engineering Services Division has been tasked with designing a "rails with trails" section of the MetroRail Red Line Trail. Extending from Braker Lane to MoPac at Park Bend, this roughly 1.5 mile section of trail is located in the "Priority 5" quadrant, as identified in the June 2007 Capital Metro Rail-with-Trail Feasibility Study. The Red Line Trail is intended to be a key link to the already existing City of Austin Northern Walnut Creek Trail.

This site walk was intended to acquaint Darren with the project, geolocate trees in the area north of Gracy Farms Lane on the east side of the tracks, where we are considering a possible alternative route, and assess how best to locate the trail in the span between Kramer Lane and the Charles Schwab interior road.

OBSERVATIONS:

- 1. On Wednesday, our site walk began in the Taco Deli parking lot at MoPac and Gracy Farms Lane. From here, we walked the sidewalk along the MoPac frontage road to where it intersects with the existing Northern Walnut Creek Trail at Park Bend Drive and talked through the different alternatives (and their corresponding challenges) for how to connect Red Line Trail to the existing trail.
- 2. Our next location was the east side of the railroad tracks at Gracy Farms Lane. We recently decided that crossing Gracy Farms Lane and continuing the trail along the east side was a possible alternative. At this location, there is a berm running parallel to the tracks. This densely planted berm is dedicated parkland and is located along the western edge of the Stoneleigh Condominium's property. The berm widens travelling north and ranges from roughly 30 80 feet wide. There is rim rock at the inner edge, adjacent to the CapMetro right of way. Walking along the interior of this berm, we geolocated specific trees to help us determine the best possible trail placement through this tangle of red oaks, junipers, cottonwoods, willows, and dense briar undergrowth. Due to extreme changes in topography in this area, following this path will require significant retaining walls or a raised boardwalk-style path.
- 3. The possible alternative of running the trail on the east side upon crossing Gracy Farms Lane does require us to get the trail back to the west side of CapMetro's Red Line, so as to avoid the extensive park land and flood zones further north. We exited the berm adjacent to the third CapMetro rail bridge (roughly 120' long) to examine the possibility of directing the trail under the rail crossing. This appears possible, as there is ample head room (8' 7" minimum) and width (roughly 16') to take the trail through. We will have to bridge the creek and navigate the steep slope on the opposite bank to meet ADA requirements.

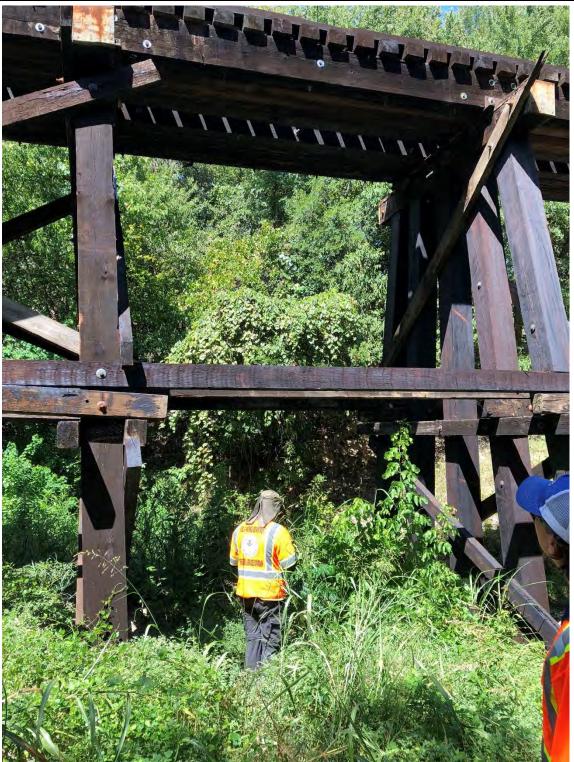


Image 1: Measuring height and width for under rail trail crossing.

Image 2: Steep slope on opposite bank will require grading and retaining walls to make the crossing ADA accessible.



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4. Upon crossing to the west side of CapMetro's Red Line, we were back to the flat terrain adjacent to The Village at Gracy Farms Apartments that we previously explored and determined is a good location for the trail. The foliage along the apartment complex's fence line was recently cut back/thinned, so we were able to walk south along the fence line back to Gracy Farms Lane for the first time. This allowed us to better see what is possible for maintaining our original choice of taking the trail across Gracy Farms Lane and up the west side of CapMetro's tracks. The environmental report recently completed by the project's subconsultants identified rim rock along this steep edge. Consequently, we added the option of taking the trail along the east side of the tracks (previously discussed in bullet point 2) to avoid the rim rock. We believe it may still be possible to run the trail up the west side if we can bridge over the apartment complex's pond. Coordination with the apartment complex will be necessary, as we will need to cross their existing pond and there is also a small play ground that will need to be relocated if this option is chosen.



Image 3: Looking south along the apartment fence line.

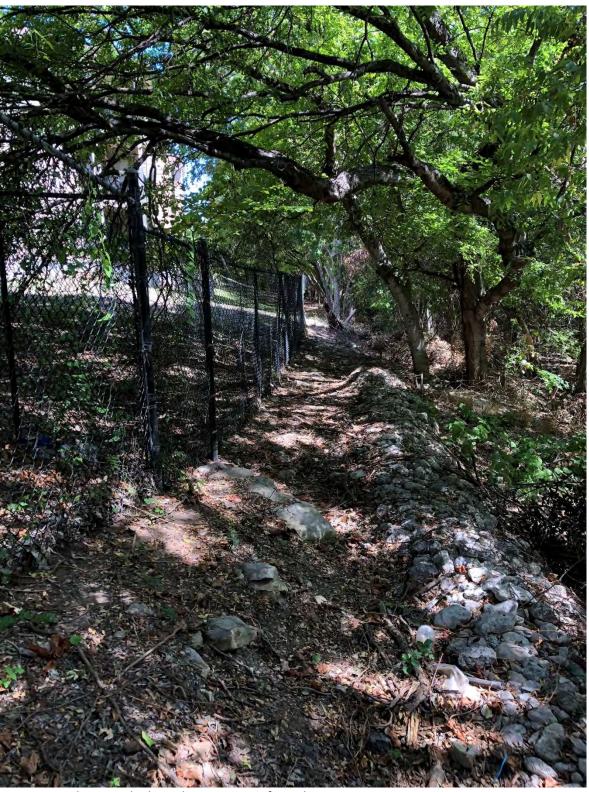


Image 4: Looking north along the apartment fence line.



Image 5: Playground along the fence line is just visible in this image. Dog park is south of the playground area.



Image 6: Steep banks with a narrow path along the fence line.

5. Our second day began at the IBM parking lot where we looked more closely at available space heading south along the west side of CapMetro's tracks to Kramer Lane. The triangular shaped natural area south of the Charles Schwab interior road has been identified as wetland in the environmental report. Heading further south past the triangle, the available space narrows and numerous factors need to be navigated, such as CapMetro equipment, drainage infrastructure, probable pinch points for the trail, and additional identified wet lands.



Image 7: Location Map



Image 8: Wetland in the triangular area south of Charles Schwab interior road is easily traversed.



Image 9: Other side of wetland feature. Both sides have ample room for trail placement, which will flow nicely into the IBM campus and future Broadmoor Campus master plan.





Image 10: Space narrows moving south in front of Top Golf. CapMetro equipment and drainage will need to be traversed or relocated.



Image 11: Roughly 17' deep wetland (identified on site as Grow Zone) along the Esperanza Crossing apartment's property line is adjacent to the CapMetro tracks. Wetland at its widest is 65' wide and narrows down to roughly 10' wide, which will need to be a pinch point for the trail. Additionally, the trail will need to be up against the apartment's retaining wall.



Image 12: Available space south of Esperanza Crossing apartments and north of Kramer Lane. CapMetro equipment will need to be traversed or relocated.

6. After looking at the west side of this span, we re-assessed the east side of the tracks along the Austin Energy property up to the Charles Schwab interior road at the southern riparian pond. There are significant challenges along this side of CapMetro's tracks, including a service track that goes into the Austin Energy property and drainage infrastructure that would need to be bridged. For this option to be possible, space would likely need to be acquired inside the Austin Energy fence line. The trail could then continue north along the ridge above the Charles Schwab pond, cross west along the interior road, and into the IBM campus.



Image 13: The east side of the tracks heading north from Kramer Lane narrows upon reaching the Austin Energy facility.



Image 14: Service tracks with stored cars, which could make traversing the tracks challenging.

