

Austin Light Rail – Austin Transit Partnership

# Fall 2023 Engagement Insights Overview

Community Advisory Committee  
March 7, 2024



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**Engagement Overview**

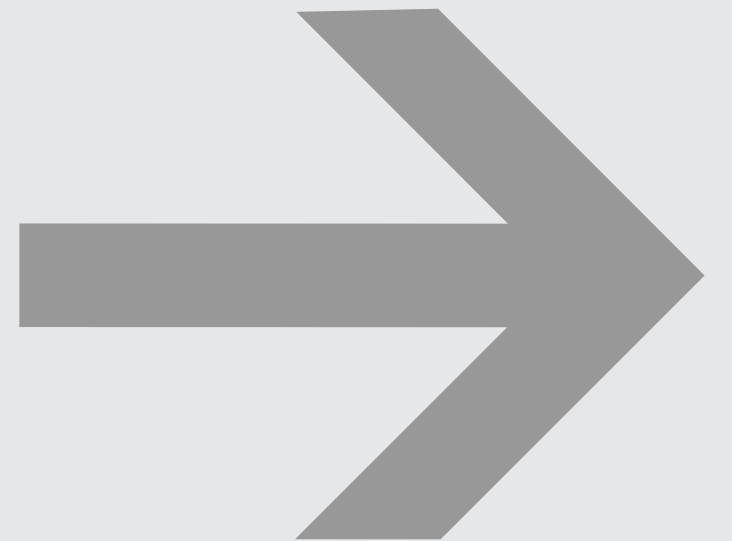
**2**

**Findings**

**3**

**Discussion**

# Engagement Overview



## OUTCOMES



1

Get feedback and build consensus around **design and user experience principles**

2

Inform station design and corridors so they **reflect and support neighborhood aspirations, culture, and identity**



3

Lay the groundwork for a **successful NEPA process** (meeting people where they are, co-creation, and ongoing conversations)



4

Support **mindset shift** and **culture change** towards transit ridership

# In total, we met with a lot of Austin

**1,341\***

people engaged overall –statistically significant with a 3% margin of error

*\*across in-person + digital open houses and online survey*

**306**

people attended in-person open house events

**23**

people attended the virtual design open house

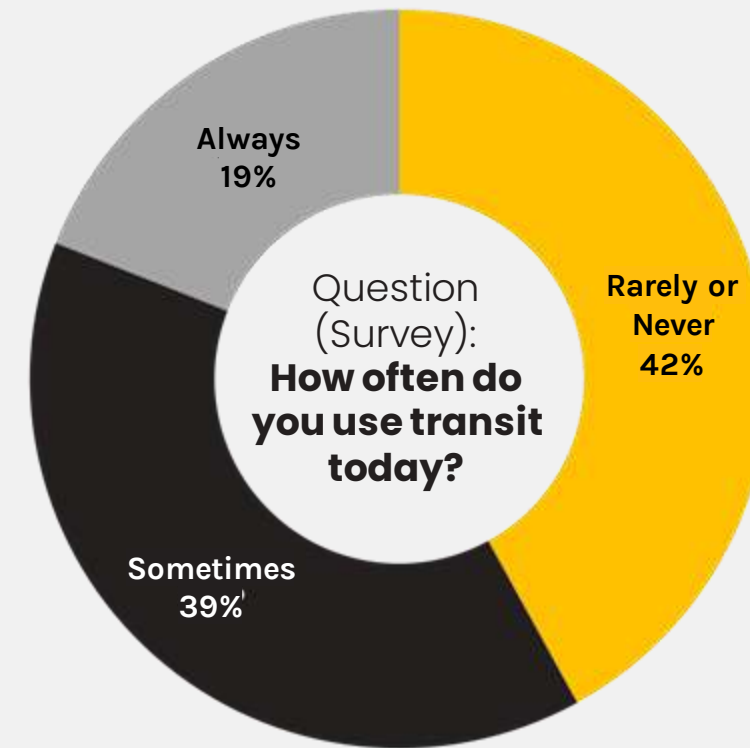
**1,012**

people responded to the online and paper surveys

# Who we heard from

Based on noted gaps from previous engagement efforts, there was special interest in reaching groups less engaged in the past, such as Spanish-speaking, Black, and 18-24 year old residents.

- Most of the special interest populations were not well represented by the open house and survey, with the exception of the Black population – where engagement more closely reflected citywide trends
- The largest share of open house and survey participants identified as White
- 10% of people engaged identified as Asian, 2% as Indigenous/Native, and <1% as multi-racial or other



**67%**

Of all people engaged were White

*While 48% of Austin is White*

**4%**

Of all people engaged were Black

*While 7% of Austin is Black*

**16%**

Of all people engaged were Hispanic or Latinx

*While 33% of Austin is Hispanic or Latinx*

**4%**

Of survey participants were under age 21

*While 19% of Austin is under 18\**

\*Note: Due to a difference between age group buckets from the survey vs. the Census, there is a 3-year difference in age for this point

Data Source: Citywide demographics from Census ACS 5-Year 2021 Estimates

# We asked about...

## Transit Environment

How should your transit environment look & feel?



## Aspirations

How will light rail improve your neighborhood?



## User Needs

What are your top needs for the light rail?



## Transit Journey

Describe your future, imagined transit journey



## Experience Mapping

Where do you go to experience nature, culture & opportunity?



# Findings



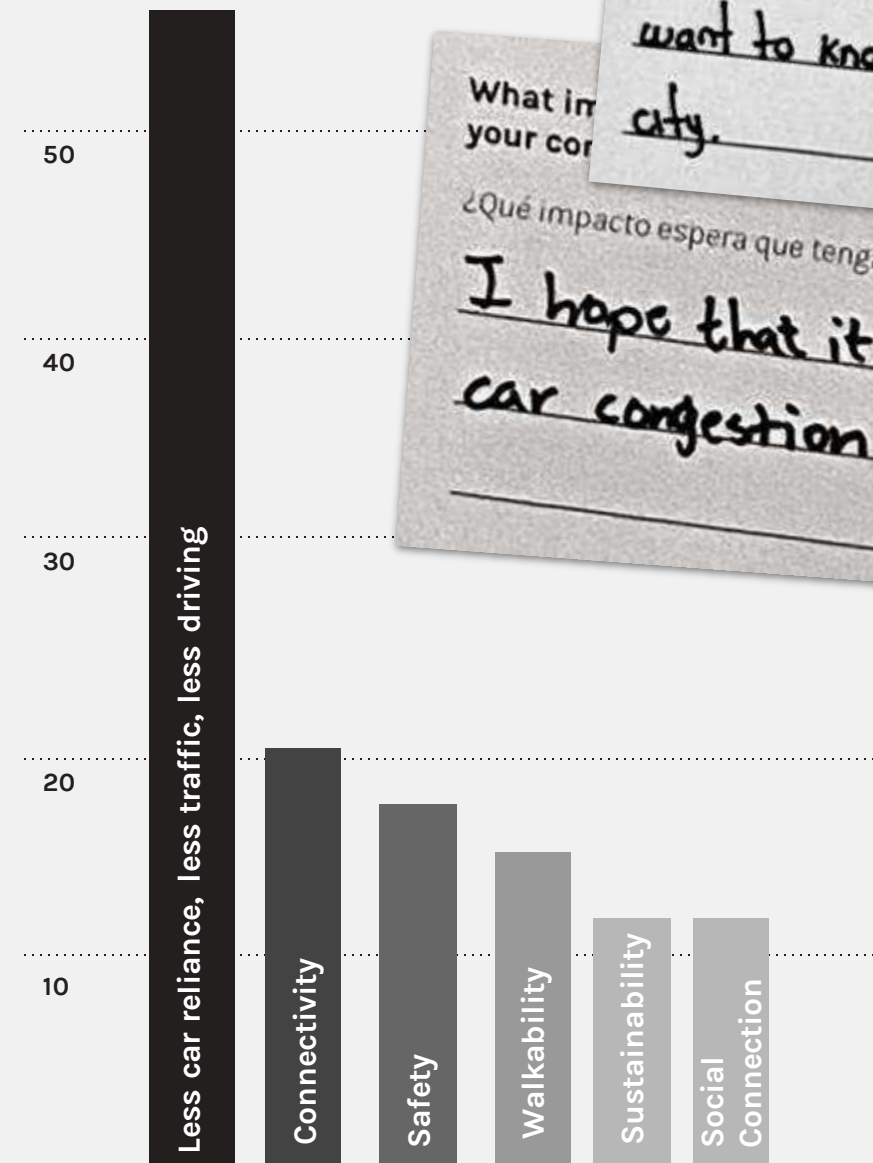
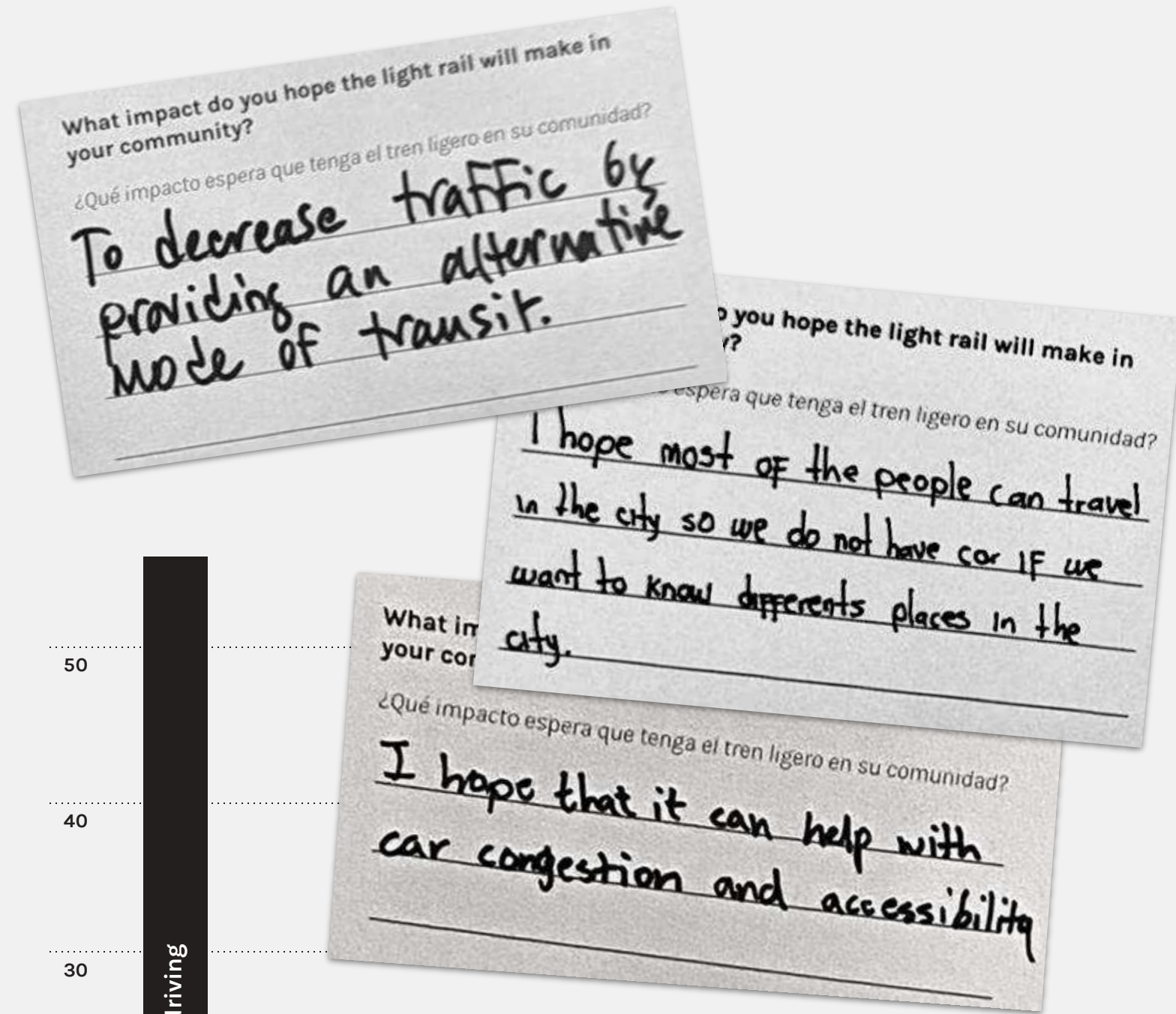


WHAT ARE AUSTINITES' ASPIRATIONS FOR THE LIGHT RAIL?

# Less car dominance

Austinites are tired of car traffic and an over-abundance of car-centered infrastructure.

In their aspirations for the future, the top theme emphasized was a desire for less reliance on personal vehicles, reducing traffic and inspiring a slew of additional social and societal benefits

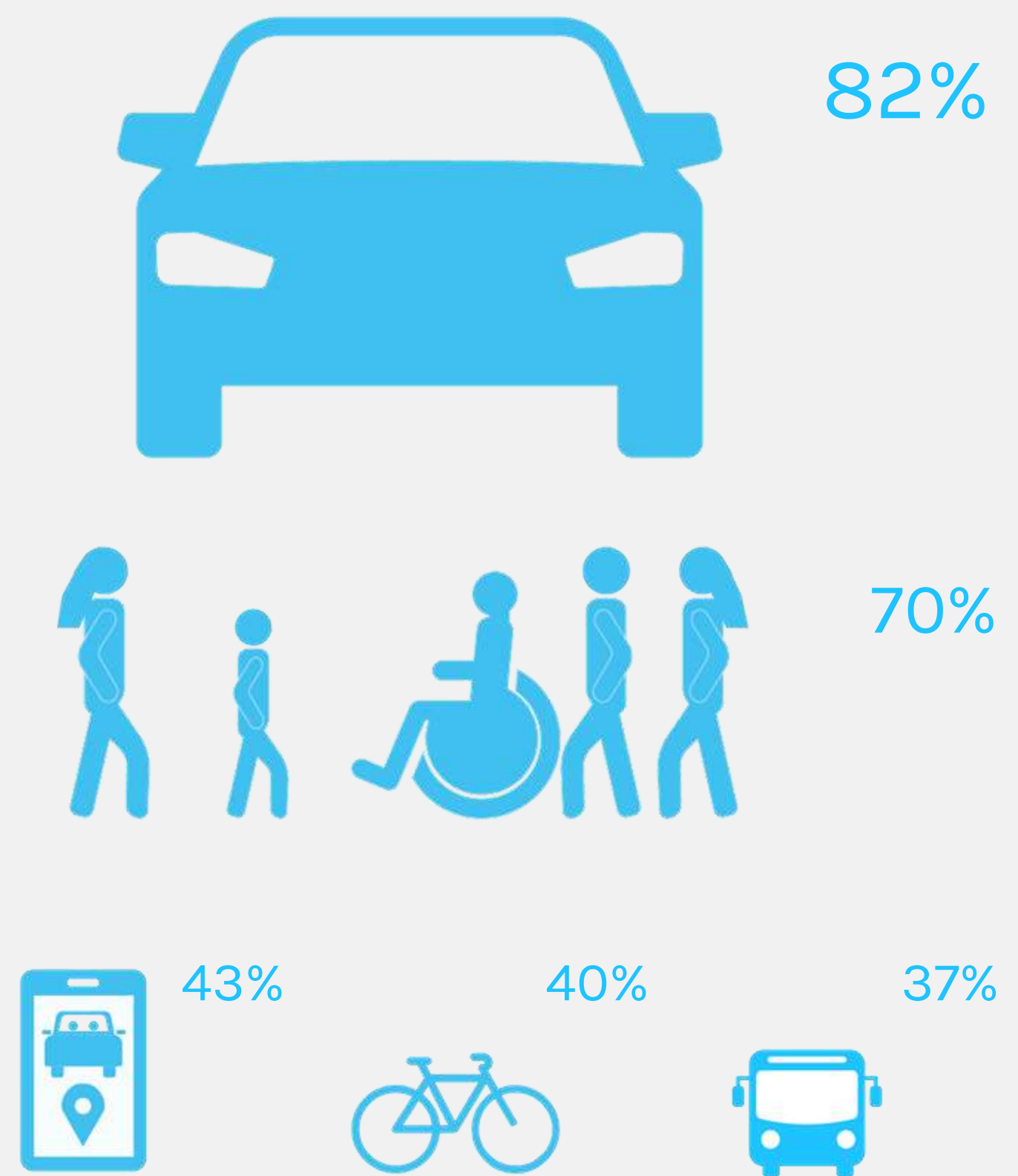


Top Aspiration Statement Themes  
All Open Houses

# Multiple modes factor into people's transportation decisions beyond just cars

When asked, 'What transportation options do you use on a regular basis? Choose all that apply.' 70% of people walk regularly for transportation along with 43% using rideshare, 40% using a bike, and 37% using the bus system. These proportions affirm the idea that **people prefer to have choices** when deciding how to move through their city. Ensuring that multiple modes of transportation can complement and connect to the future light rail will expand the catchment area for each station and enable people to decide which mode(s) are best for any given trip.

Transportation Modes Used Daily Survey

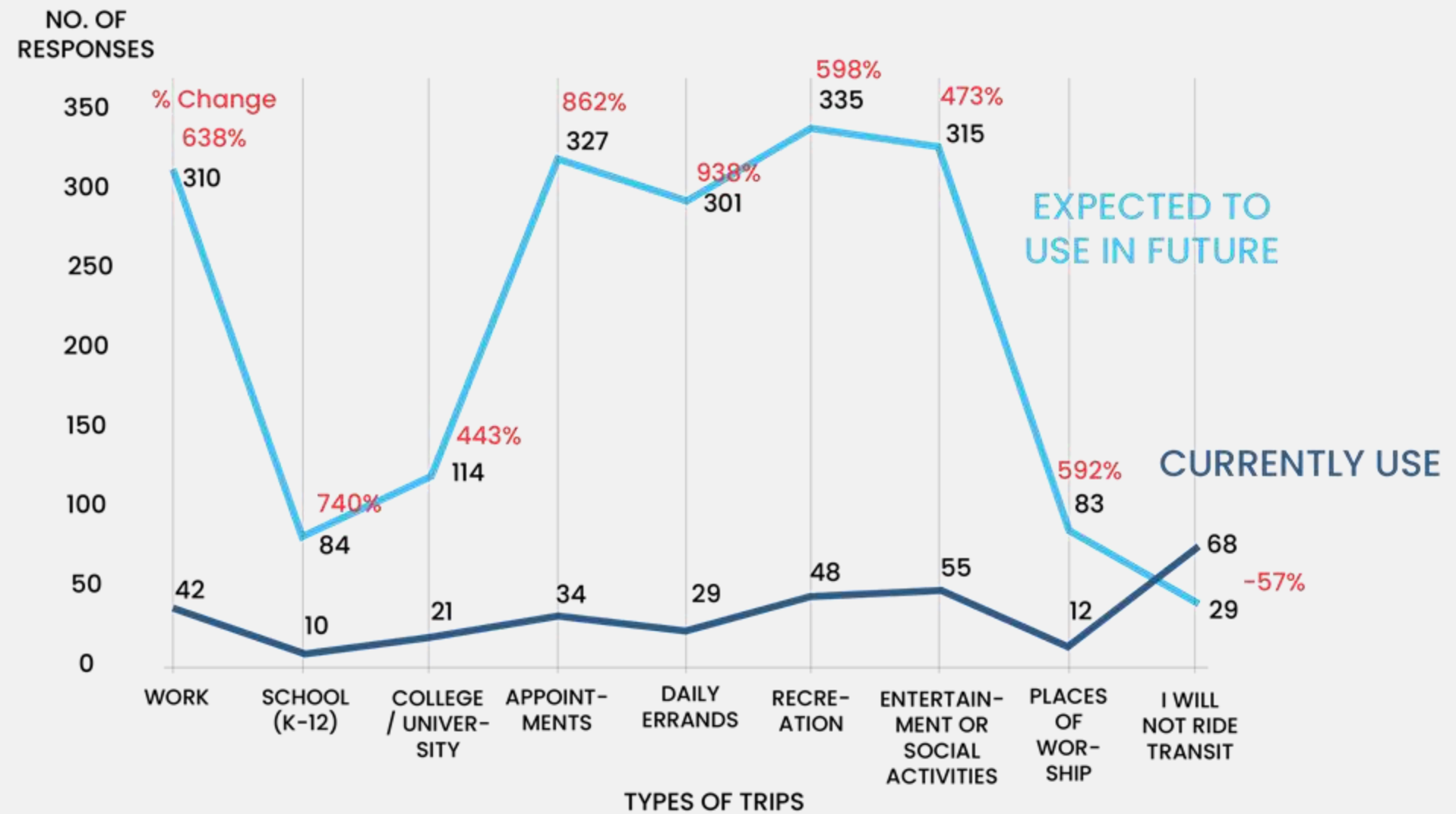


# People will choose to ride transit more in the future with the implementation of the light rail

For each trip type, respondents said they would be nearly 5 to 10 times more likely to ride transit after the light rail is built.

The proportion of respondents who will not ride transit in the future is 57% less than the proportion for those that do not currently ride transit.

So, by every measure, these results show that people will choose to ride transit more in the future with the implementation of the light rail.



WHAT ARE AUSTINITES' ASPIRATIONS FOR THE LIGHT RAIL?

# A better mobility experience

Not driving frees up time and mental space for Austinites to do things that bring them joy while traveling.

Austinites mentioned other things they could do during their journey that would spark joy, including:

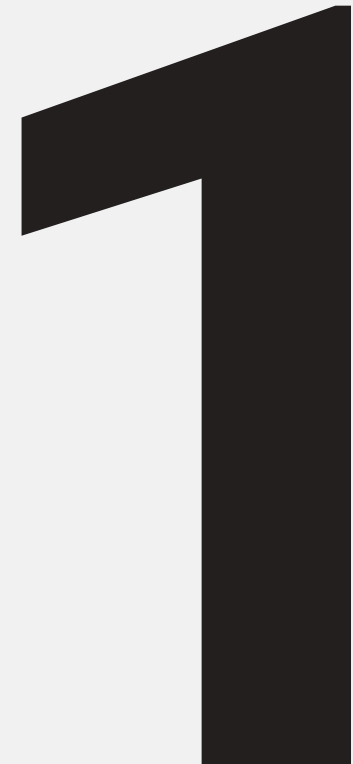
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Relaxing
- Interacting with family and friends
- Enjoying the scenery

Comments on User Journey  
Prompt: *What brought you joy during your transit journey?*  
All Open Houses



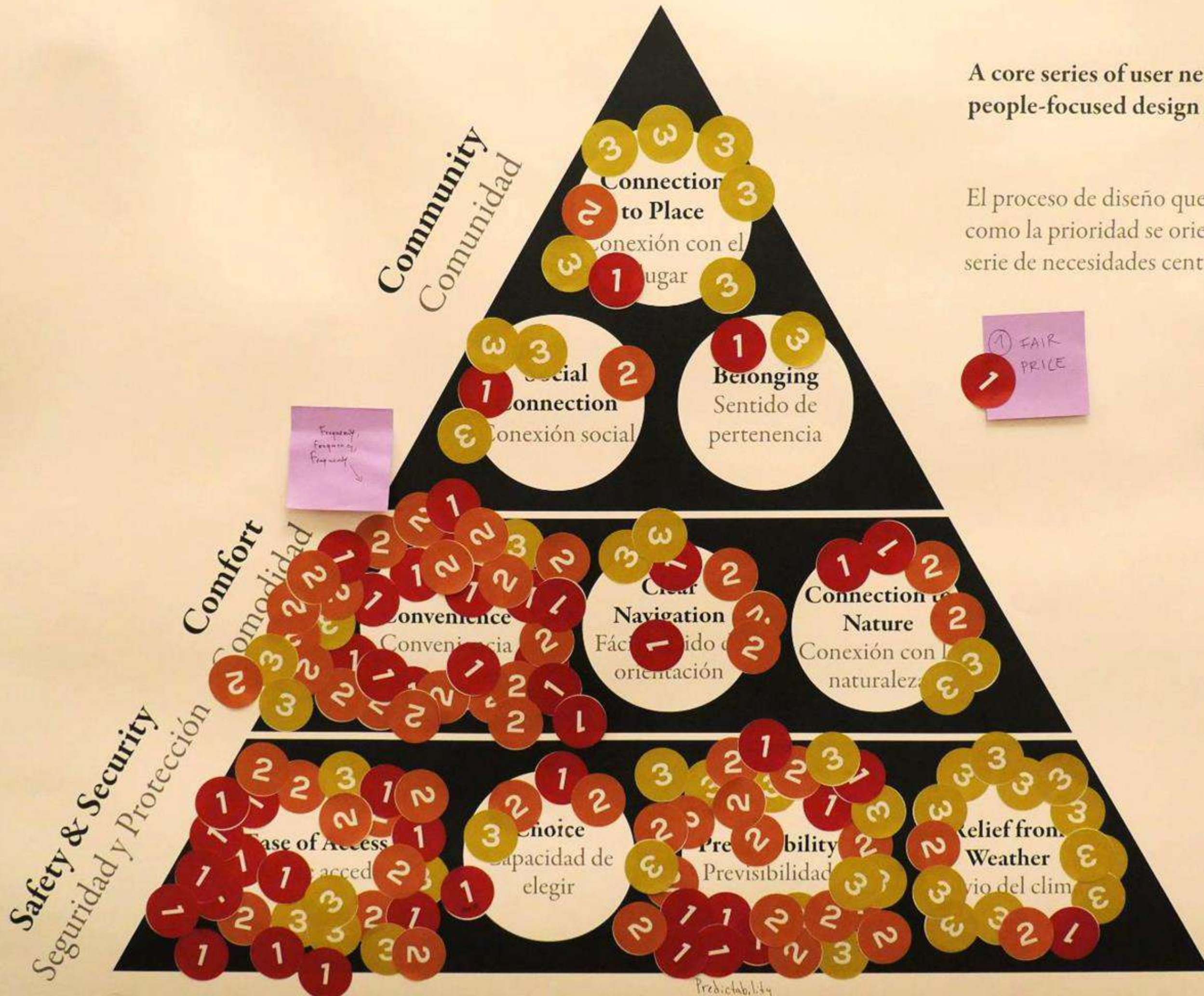
A human-centered design must respond to people's **needs** and **wants**

Core system functions



A core series of user needs will guide a people-focused design process.

El proceso de diseño que ubica a las personas como la prioridad se orienta a través de una serie de necesidades centrales de los usuarios



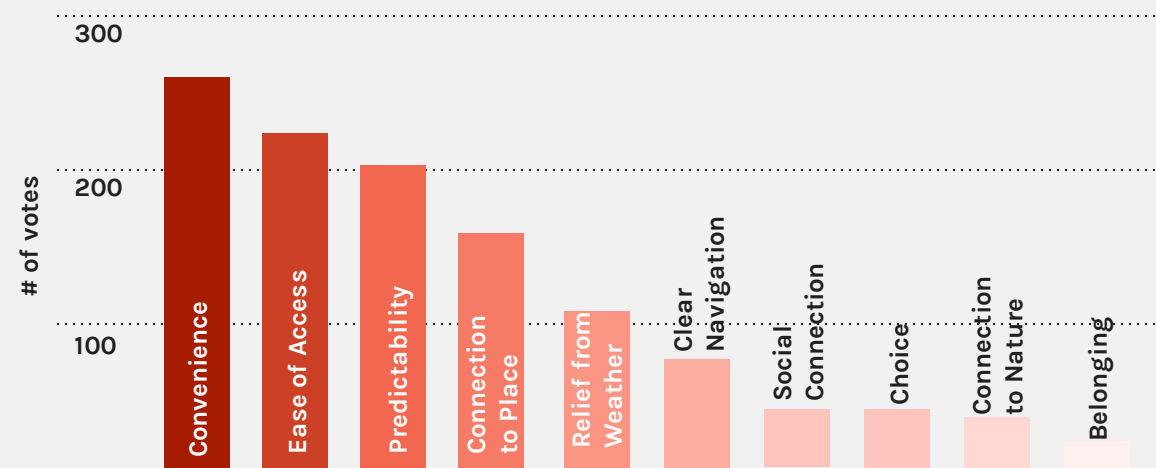
① FAIR PRICE

REDUCE COSTS

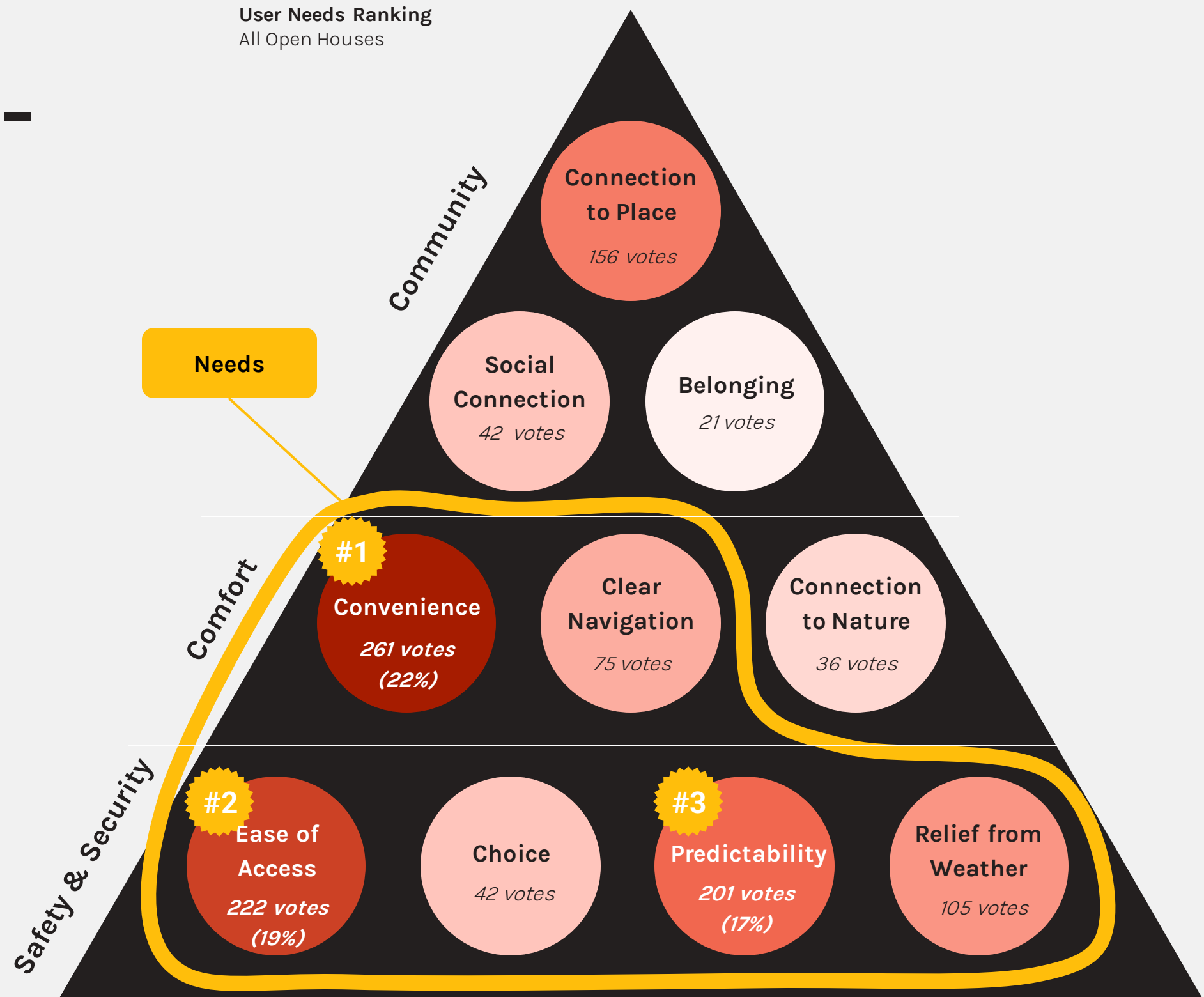
WALKABLE, FEASIBLE, DEVELOPMENT THAT BRINGS THE 3M BUS (AND 21 SUV)

# Basic needs are the foundation of a human-centered system

When we asked people to rank their user needs for taking transit, **convenience, ease of access, and predictability** rose to the top – underscoring the importance of basic yet essential aspects of the system's functionality.



User Needs Ranking  
All Open Houses

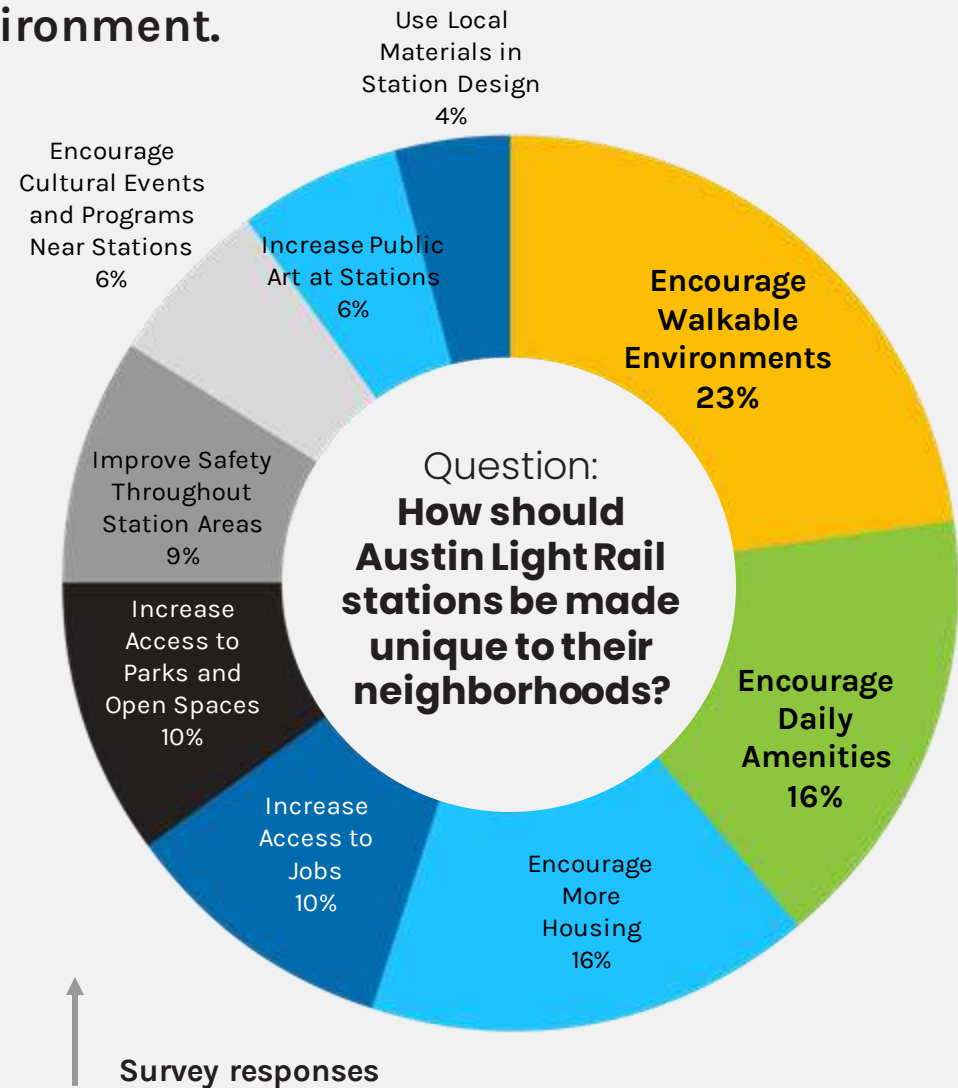


Light Rail **Needs**

# Convenience

Convenience ranked 1st of all user needs during the user needs activity. 1 in 5 participants prioritized it.

Convenience isn't only about convenient travel, but access to amenities and a walkable and bikeable environment.





Light Rail **Needs**

# Ease of Access

Ease of Access ranked 2nd of all user needs during the user needs activity.

Austinites see easy access as a streamlined and decluttered public realm where they feel **safe** throughout first- and last-mile journeys.



Signage



Mode Separation Greenery



Food Stands Amenities



“Ease of moving, no fences, sheltered, connect to neighborhood, walkable”

Safe crossing



“Clean, safe space to travel without cars”

Protected Bike Lane Greenery

Were there difficult moments along the way?

- Bus might get stuck in traffic and be early / late
- Walking along busy street is loud and uncomfortable
- Crossing street that is really wide can take a while and be scary
- Walking through big lot

How do you get to/from the transit stop?

Walk	1 <sup>st</sup> MG	2 <sup>nd</sup> MG	3 <sup>rd</sup> MG	4 <sup>th</sup> MG
Bike (my own)		X		
Bike share				
Bus				
Train		X		
Scooter (my own)			X	
Scooter share				
Private vehicle				
Ride share (e.g. Lyft)				
Other:				

Describe your experience

What did you have to think about or consider before you started your trip?

- Check live tracking on Google Maps for when next bus is coming
- Is it raining/cold?

Were there difficult moments along the way?

- Bus might get stuck in traffic and be early / late
- Walking along busy street is loud and uncomfortable
- Crossing street that is really wide can take a while and be scary
- Walking through big lot

What brought you joy during the trip?

- Being able to relax on trip
- Getting off right by my destination

Light Rail **Needs**

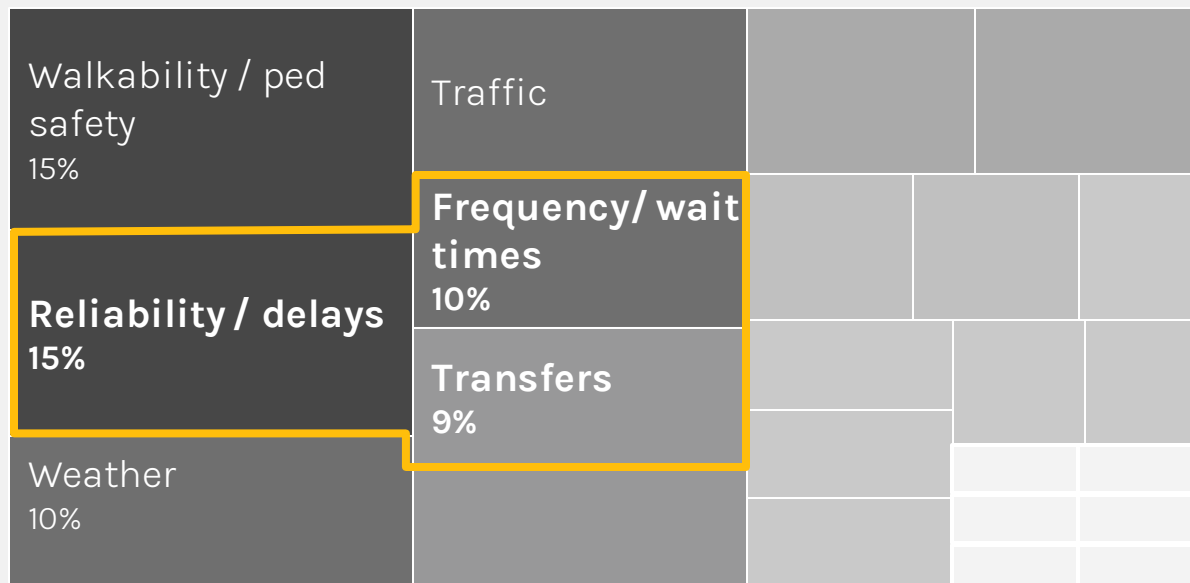
# Predictability

Predictability ranked 3rd of all user needs.

Austinites see predictability as a legible, clearly defined public realm and an experience that **minimizes challenges posed by intermodal connections.**

Question:

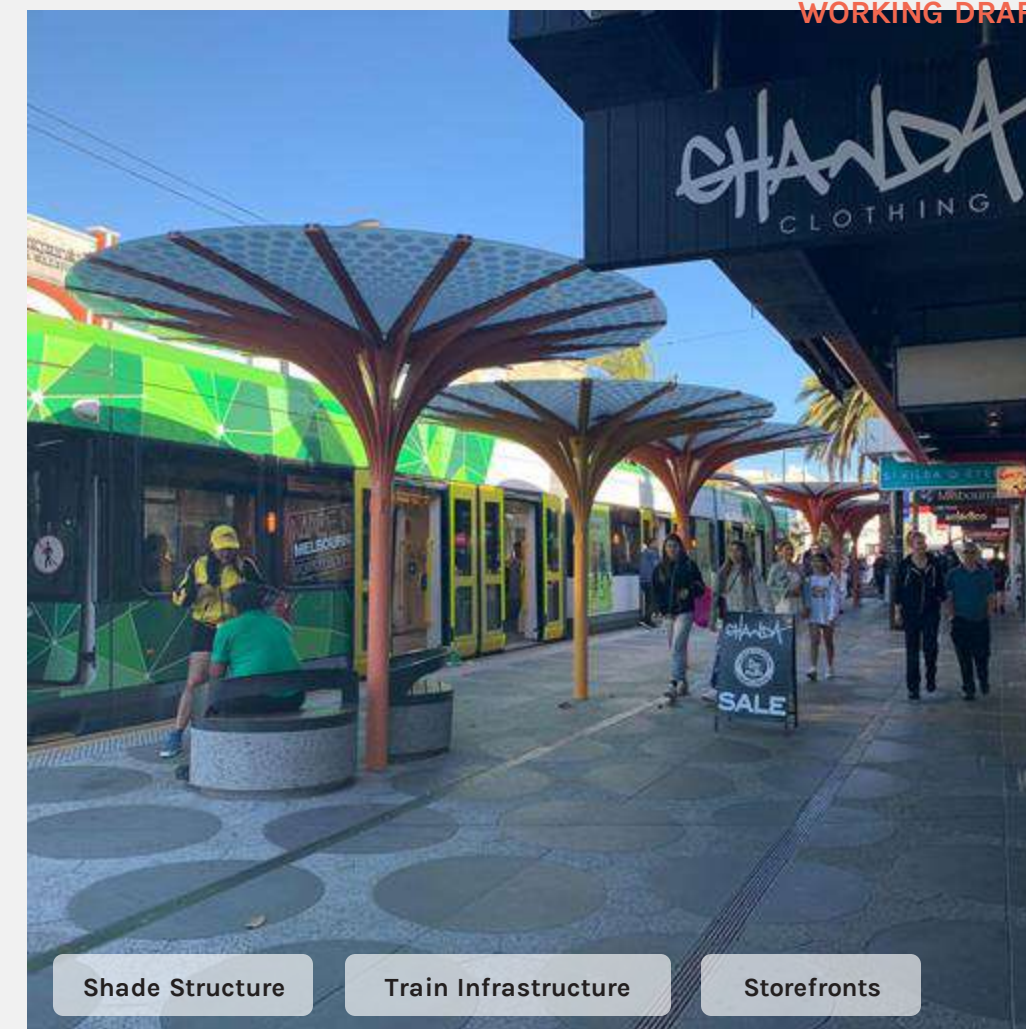
**Did you experience any difficulties in your transit journey?**



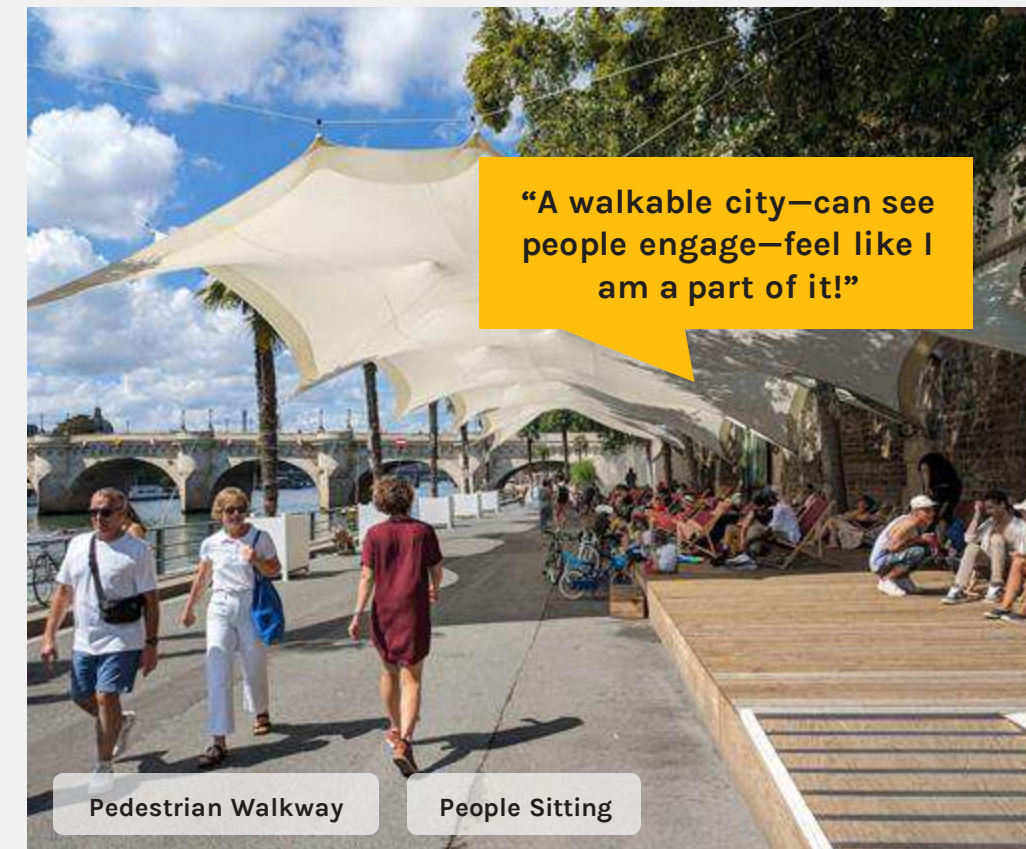
Difficulties in people's current and future transit journeys  
All Open Houses



Signage Digital



Shade Structure Train Infrastructure Storefronts



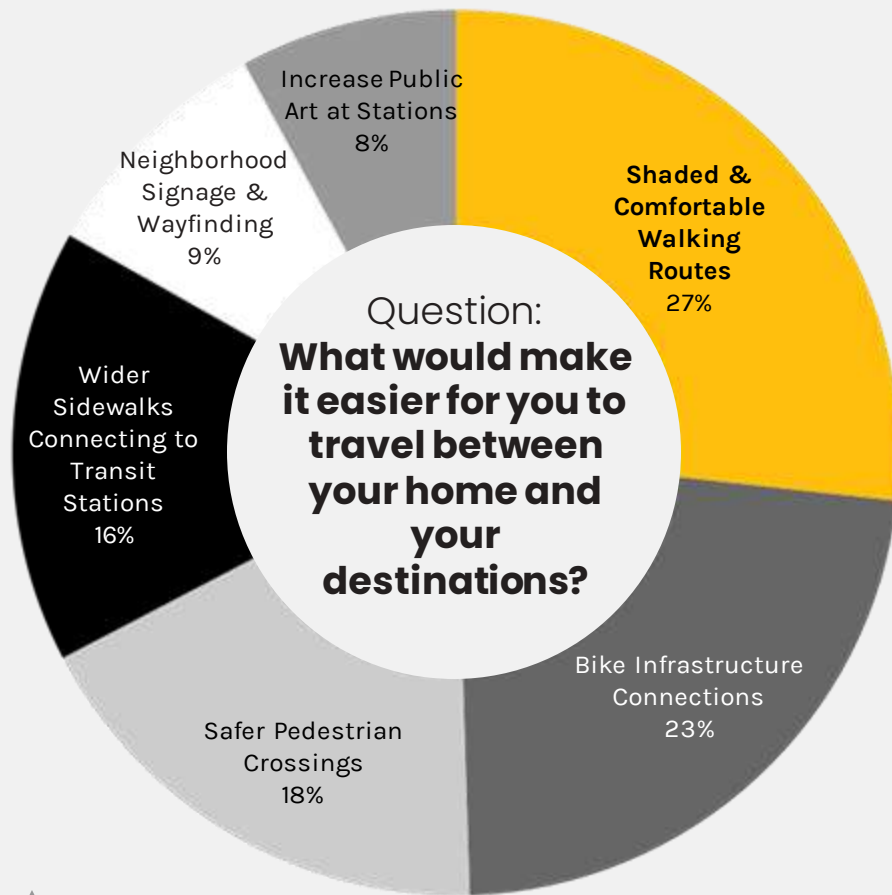
Pedestrian Walkway People Sitting

Light Rail **Needs**

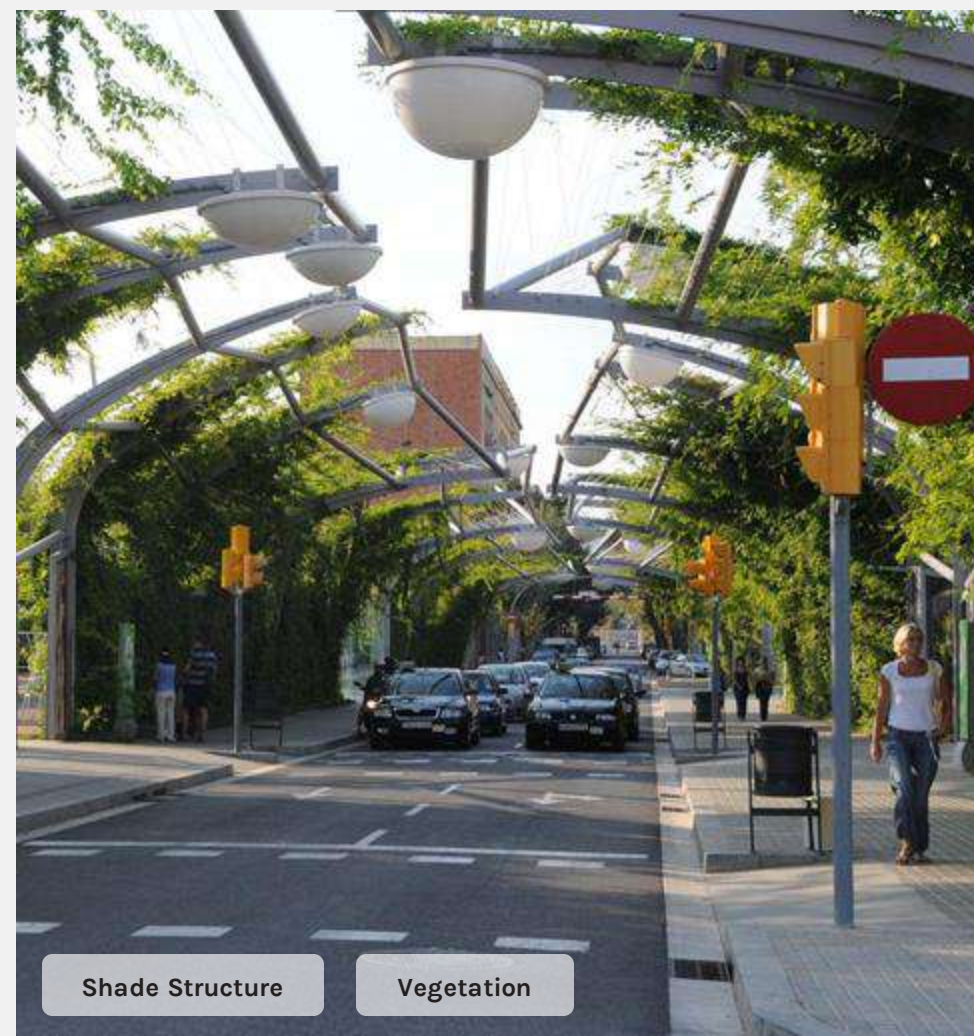
# Relief from Weather

Relief from Weather is essential given Austin’s extreme climate, and a main concern for potential riders.

Relief from Weather means a **shaded, calm and peaceful public realm** – presence of shade can make or break someone’s likelihood to take transit in Austin.



↑ Survey responses



Shade Structure

Vegetation



Tree Canopy

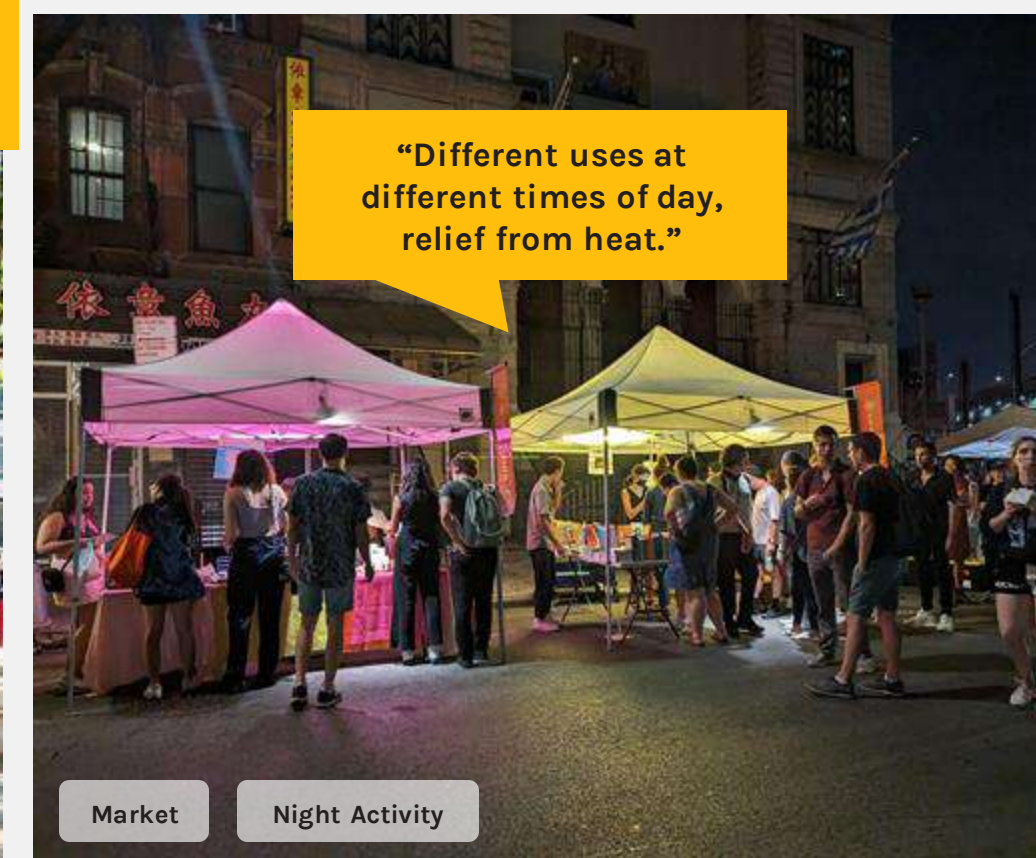
Outdoor Seating



“Calm and peaceful.”

Plaza

Water Feature



“Different uses at different times of day, relief from heat.”

Market

Night Activity

A human-centered design must respond to people's **needs** and **wants**

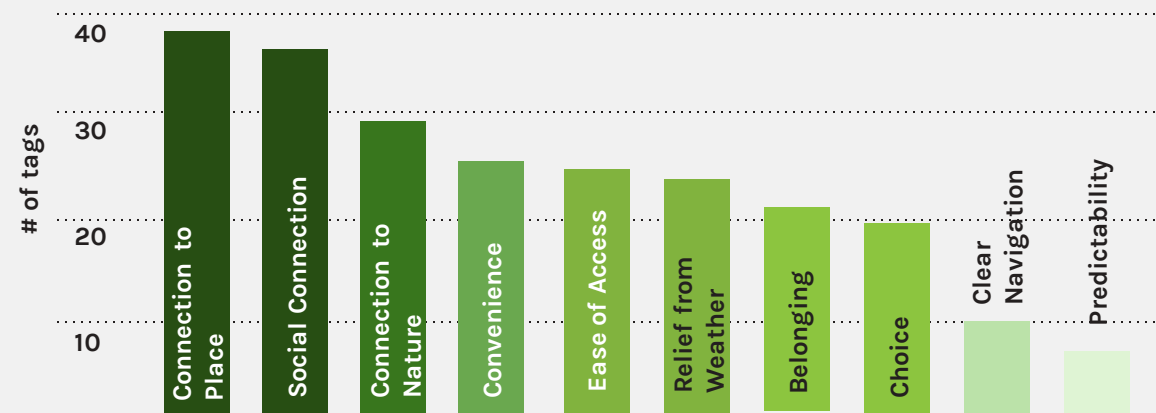
Connecting people to what they cherish about Austin



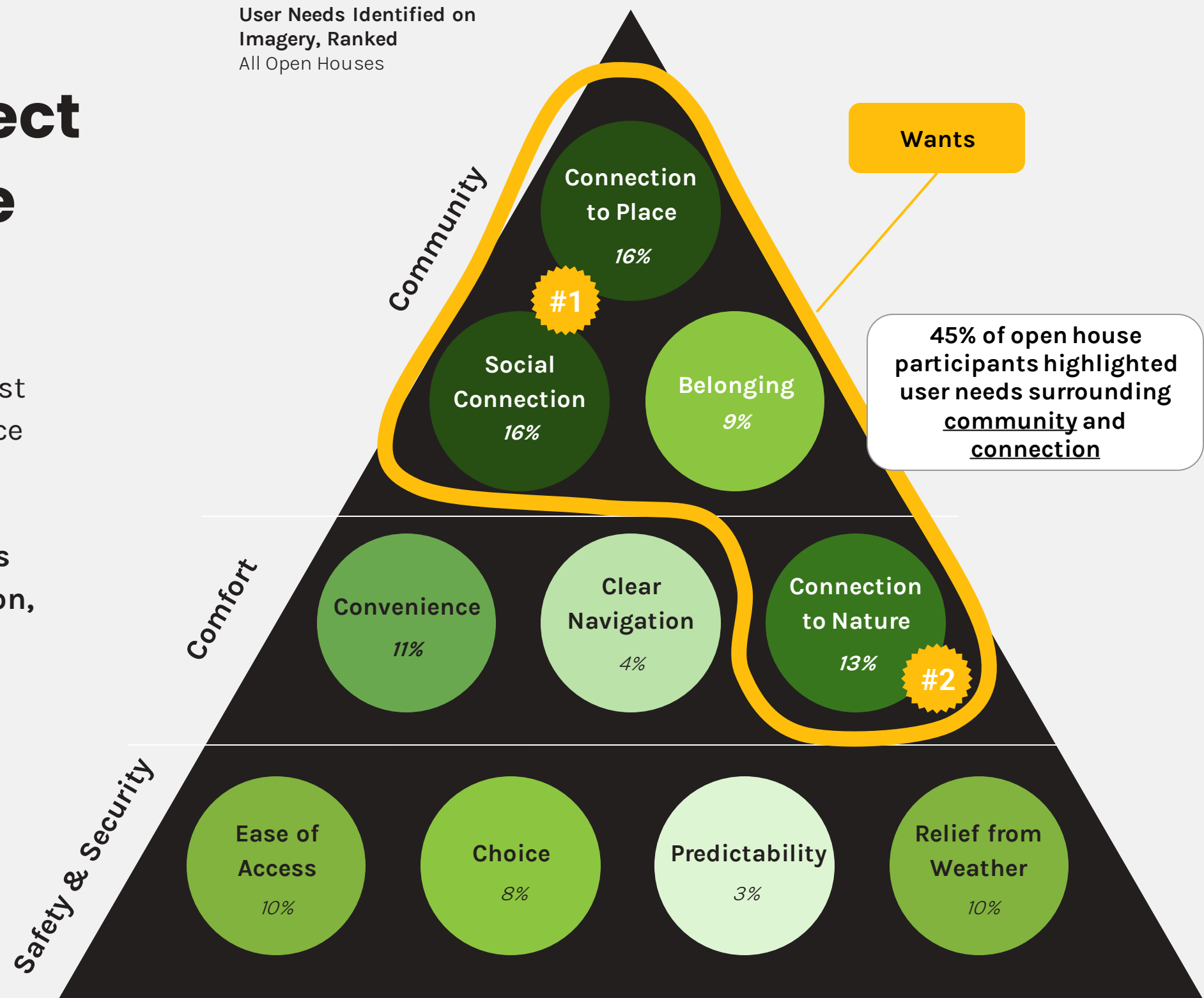


# People want transit experiences that connect them to the city, nature and each other

Interestingly, when asked to identify places that best satisfy their user needs as part of a visual preference exercise, open house participants highlighted different needs from the ones they'd previously ranked. Once their basic needs are met, Austinites want to feel connection to place, social connection, and connection to nature.



User Needs Identified on Imagery, Ranked All Open Houses



Light Rail **Wants**

# Connection to Place

Austinites were most drawn to images that represented connection to place – for them this meant **active, people-dense spaces**. The ways people described how they experience connection to place reflected the city’s **inclusive** culture of free and low-cost social spaces.

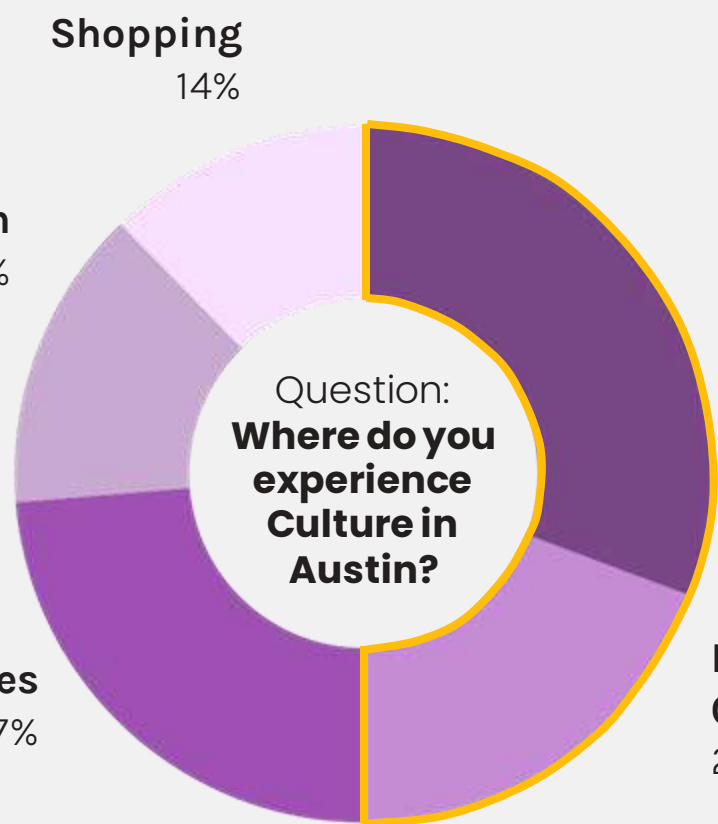


“Place to wait for buses and spending time with other people, food nearby.”

Social Space Multi-use



Outdoor Seating Greenery Social Space



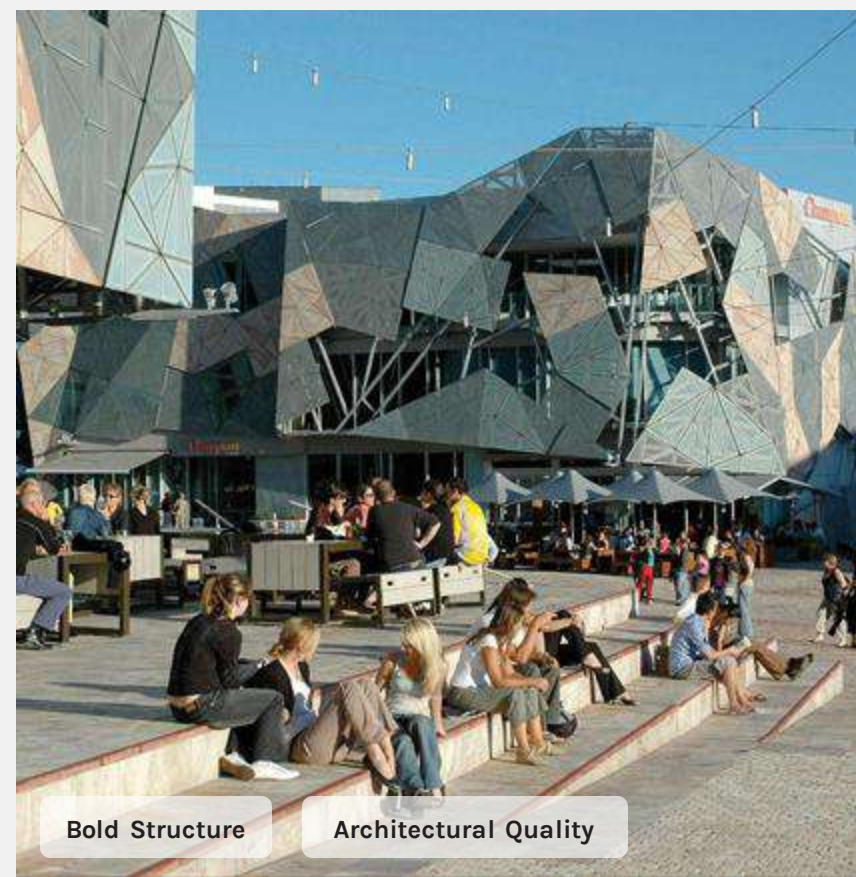
Question: **Where do you experience culture in Austin?**

Downtown 16%

Food, Drink & Music Venues 33%

Arts Venues 27%

Recreation & Open Spaces 22%



Bold Structure Architectural Quality



“Something for kids to do, away from road.”

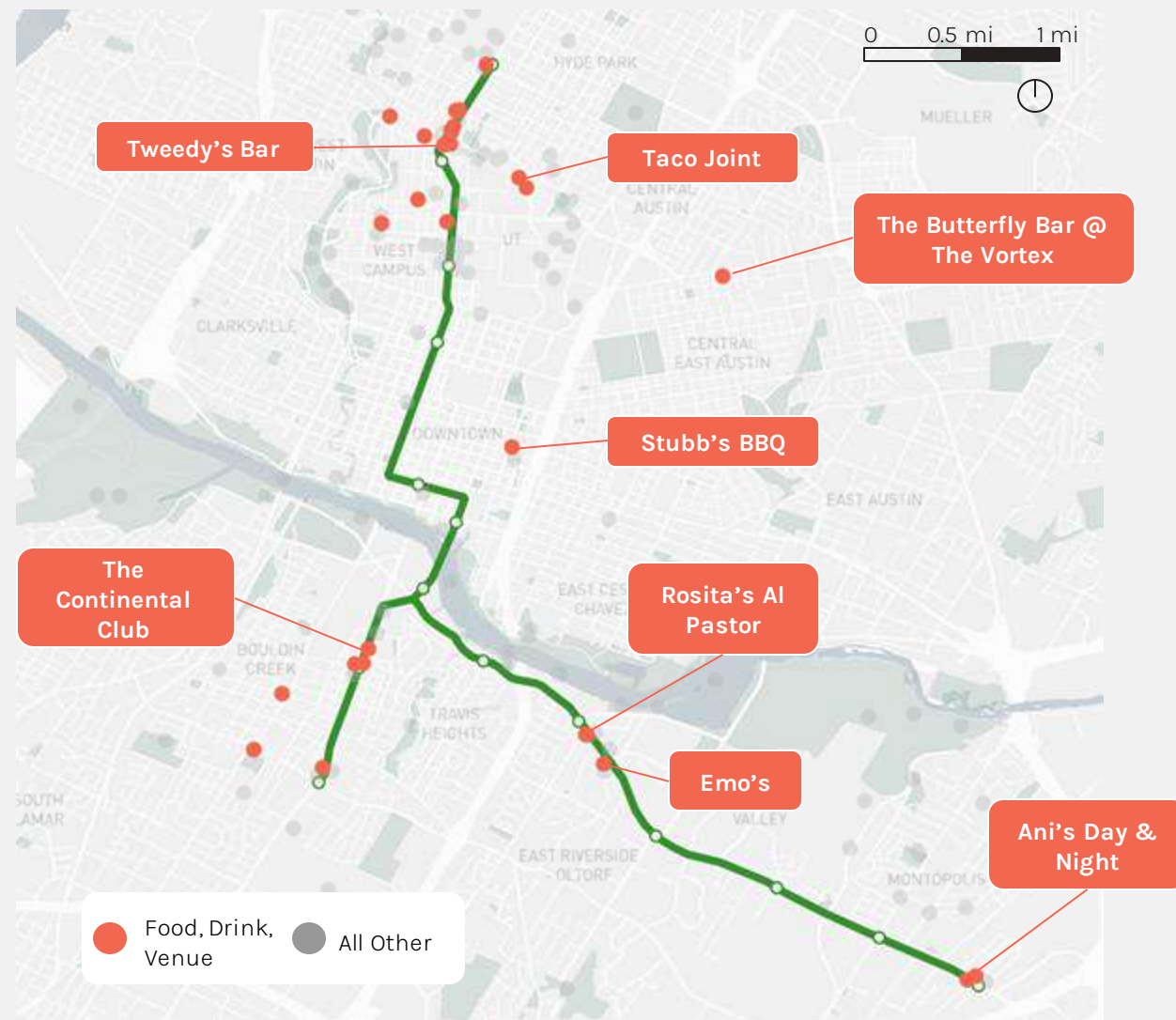
Kids Play

↑ Experience culture in Austin  
All Open Houses

Light Rail **Wants**

# Social Connection

Austinites correlated social connection with places designed to facilitate groups of people interacting. They mentioned experiencing social connection primarily at restaurants, bars and venues, underscoring a **casual** and **spontaneous** social culture.



Q: "Where do you experience culture in Austin?"



WORKING DRAFT





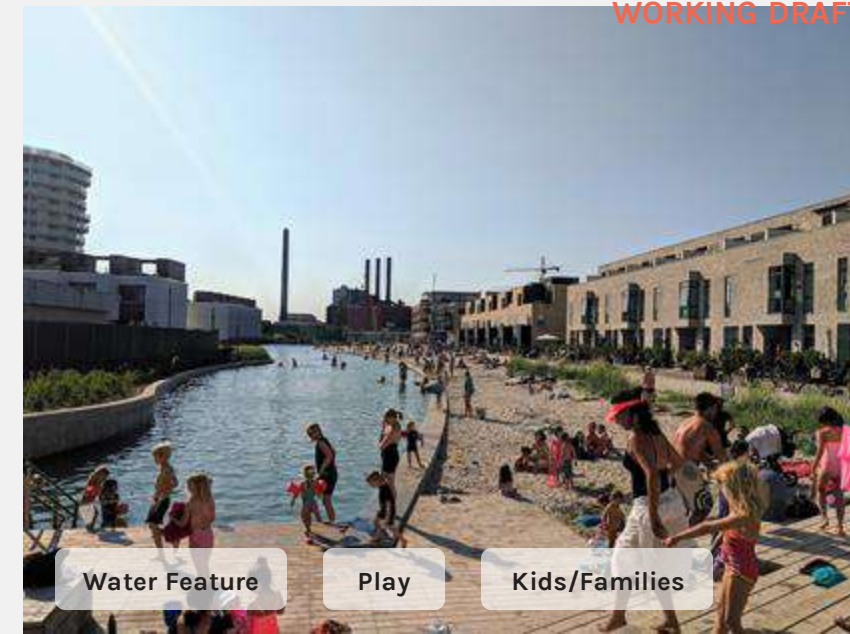
Light Rail **Wants**

# Connection to Nature

Austinites were drawn to photos showcasing “natural” element – such as trees, grass, and plantings. When describing where and how people experience nature, it became clear that **nature is culture in Austin.**

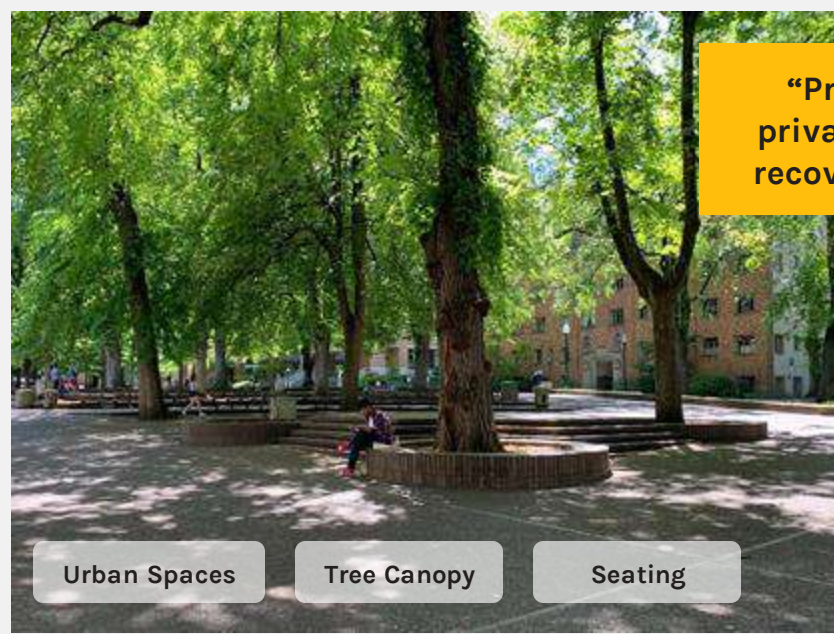


Wood Materials Vegetation



Water Feature Play Kids/Families

WORKING DRAFT



Urban Spaces Tree Canopy Seating

“Provide a smaller private space to sit & recover from the sun.”

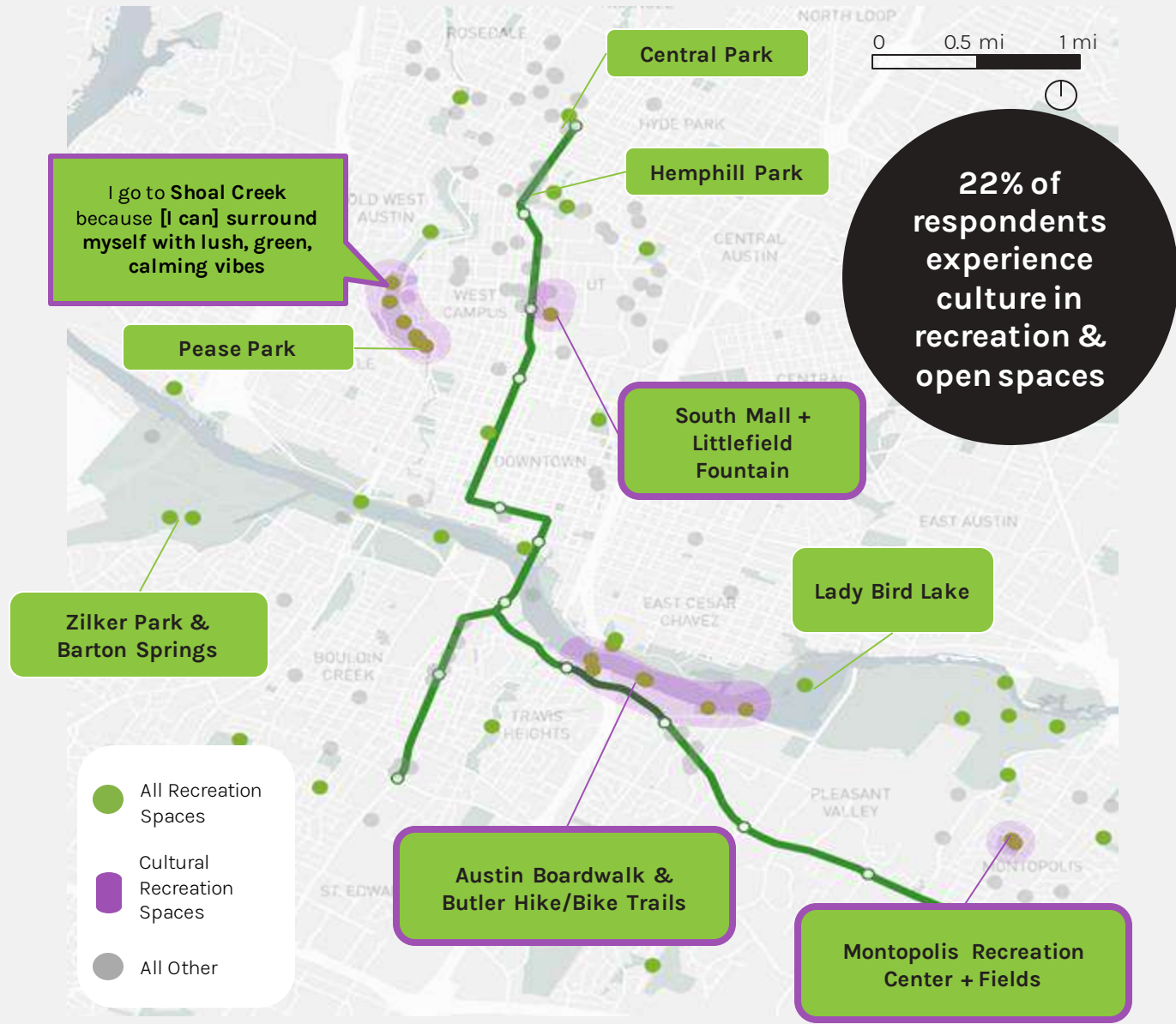


Green Infrastructure Quiet Spaces



Trail Vegetation Recreation

“Having access to [a] trail, safe way to get around, no cars.”



Q: “Where do you experience nature, culture, or opportunity in Austin?”

# Implications for Design

WE HEARD...

A **less car-dependent** city means giving Austinites more time for things they care about

HOW SHOULD THE DESIGN RESPOND?

**Imbue the journey with joy, reducing riders cognitive load to give them mental space for things they want to do**

SPECIFIC FEATURES AUSTINITES WANT TO SEE...

1. Opportunities to enjoy the scenery
2. Comfortable places to do solo activities like read or listen to music
3. Opportunities to socialize with other riders
4. Opportunities to rest

	<u>WE HEARD...</u>	<u>HOW SHOULD THE DESIGN RESPOND?</u>	<u>SPECIFIC FEATURES AUSTINITES WANT TO SEE...</u>
<b>NEEDS</b>	<b>Convenience</b> is more than just amenities, but also dedicated space to walk and bike	<b>Provide integrated, high-quality walking and rolling infrastructure to/from station areas and nearby destinations.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Active edges that boost convenience and perceived sense of safety</li> <li>2. High-quality, dedicated biking and walking infrastructure</li> </ol>
	<b>Ease of Access</b> provides simplified and safe first- and last-mile experiences	<b>Design and planning must extend beyond the station and prioritize walkability and safety.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ample separation from vehicular traffic</li> <li>2. Enhanced pedestrian crossings</li> <li>3. Legible connections to surrounding micromobility infrastructure</li> </ol>
	<b>Predictability</b> is a legible public realm that is well integrated with other urban systems	<b>Intermodal connections need to be highly coordinated and thoughtfully sited to ensure timely, convenient transfers for all riders.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Easy transfers between bus and rail</li> <li>2. Real time information</li> </ol>
	<b>Shade and thermal comfort</b> are essential to both comfort and safety throughout the transit experience	<b>Moving through and waiting at the station area must ensure comfort at every direction.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Shaded walking routes</li> <li>2. Places to wait without working up a sweat</li> <li>3. Ventilation within station structures</li> </ol>
<b>WANTS</b>	<b>Connection to Place</b> is defined by connecting to culture through casual and inclusive experiences.	<b>Design a “sticky” transit environment that draws the rich diversity of experiences people would like to have there.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Opportunities to socialize with nearby food/drink options</li> <li>2. Kid and family-friendly spaces</li> <li>3. Design that reflects local history and culture</li> </ol>
	<b>Social Connection</b> happens in places that foster spontaneous interaction.	<b>The transit environment should support a wide range of social experiences, from active to passive.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Spaces for busking/pop-up entertainment</li> <li>2. Flexible seating options that support active and passive forms of socializing</li> <li>3. Walkable environments</li> </ol>
	The built environment is a conduit for <b>Connecting to Nature.</b>	<b>Nature should be woven into all parts of the transit environment.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Structural and natural canopies for shade on and off the platform</li> <li>2. A waiting experience surrounded by water features and lush vegetation</li> <li>3. Connections to existing greenways, trails, and open spaces</li> </ol>