

ATX Safer Streets 2014 candidate questionnaire.

Responses are unedited and appear as submitted by the candidate, except as indicated by brackets [].

The percentage under each candidate's name is a score based on how frequently their responses mirrored our responses to each question.

The order the candidates are listed are the order in which they responded.

If you have questions please email outreach@atxsaferstreets.org.

ATX Safer Streets is a volunteer run, grassroots non profit.

CHRIS RILEY - DISTRICT 9

100%

How would you explain your understanding of ATX Safer Streets mission and principles?

I understand that the mission of ATX Safer streets is to create more options for everyone to get downtown to reduce drunk driving and to promote safer streets for all—service industry workers, revelers, and anyone who uses our streets, especially at night. A key principle is that we need a better transportation system to reduce the number of impaired drivers on the roads, as well as traffic congestion.

What is your opinion on the state of transportation in Austin? (Please touch on CapMetro, taxis, TNCs as well as personally owned vehicles)

Austin is like many cities that have grown much larger since World War II: As most of our city took shape, the working assumption was that everyone would be driving everywhere for most everything. And now that there's growing interest in alternatives to driving, we're finding that it's not that easy to get those alternatives in place.

Relying on personal vehicles has become increasingly problematic for many. We're now one of the most congested cities in the country, and we continue to see way too many traffic injuries and deaths – particularly at night, and often involving drunk driving.

Capital Metro provides great service to many commuters; we're at somewhere around 110,000 boardings every weekday, and satisfaction among most users is high. But most routes end at midnight. Cap Metro has been steadily expanding its Night Owl and E-Bus services, which run till 3am; but the reach of those routes is limited, and there are many workers and others who still need transportation after 3am.

Taxis are a longtime tradition in Austin, and there are hundreds of taxi drivers in this city providing an important service for long hours with low pay. But the overall performance of our taxi system is poor. Our taxis are not meeting the demand for service, particularly at night. Between 6pm and 10pm, when the demand for taxis goes up, the number of cabs on the road actually goes down. Our taxi drivers are independent contractors, so just adding more taxi permits is not going to solve the problem. We need to be more creative.

TNCs are a fairly new arrival on the scene – but based on the service they provide, it's clear that TNCs, or something like them, are here to stay. I've been pushing hard for recognizing and regulating TNCs as soon as possible so that they can operate safely and legally in Austin. Over a year ago, I sponsored a resolution

calling for a report on how our peer cities were responding to this new type of transportation. Then this May I sponsored an initiative to create a stakeholder group to come up with a pilot program for regulating TNCs in Austin. Unfortunately, the 90-day turnaround that I asked for was turned into 180 days, and lately I've heard concerns about the way the stakeholder group is functioning. Also, since we created that stakeholder group, both Uber and Lyft have started operating in Austin. I have posted items on the 8/28 Council meeting agenda (likely to get pushed back to 9/25) to get some interim regulations in place immediately. I don't think it's right to have these services operating illegally, and I also don't think it makes sense for Austin to be resisting a new and innovative transportation option. Austin should be an innovation leader, especially when it comes to addressing the serious lack of transportation options in our city.

Do you believe Austin has a transit shortage? (Not enough taxis, buses, etc.) Why or why not?

Yes. I'd like to see more buses in Austin, and I'd like to see them (and the train) run later and more frequently. I'm working with Cap Metro right now to see how we can make that happen.

I'd also like to see more taxis to meet our demand, but under our current taxi regulations, issuing more permits doesn't necessarily lead to better service. I've helped lead efforts to revamp our taxi system, and I'm hopeful that we'll have some significant improvements ready by the time the franchises are due for renewal next August.

The demand for transportation services in Austin is clearly not being met as well as it should be. That's one reason I've been the leader on the Council for creating a regulatory framework that allows TNCs to operate legally.

Do you believe that Austin has enough "for hire" transportation options? (Taxis, pedi-cabs, TNCs, limousines) Why or why not?

No. As long as people feel like they have to bring their personal vehicle with them when they go out, day or night, we do not have enough transportation options. Some people prefer to drive in their own cars, and that's fine; but others are driving because they don't see another choice, even when they're heading out drinking, and that shouldn't be happening.

Do you support an expansion of our current transit system to accommodate daily commuters? Why or why not?

Yes. As Austin continues to grow, our transit system should be expanding too. Our bus service continues to evolve and improve, with the 803 launching on Aug. 24 and real-time data becoming available on all our fixed routes in the next few months. I'm working on the continued expansion of our bus service, and I'm also a supporter of rail: both our existing Red Line, which is now running at capacity, and the urban rail proposal that will be on the ballot in November.

Do you support a more comprehensive late night service plan for downtown visitors, hospitality and graveyard shift employees? Why or why not?

Yes. I want everyone to be able to get home safely and easily from downtown. That means better late night transportation options that would make our roads safer for everyone.

Do you support the current urban rail initiative? Why or why not?

Yes. While I understand the concerns about the current initiative, I also think we need to act now to address our transportation issues in a more significant way. The proposal on the ballot would put high-capacity transit stops within a half-mile of over 100,000 jobs and homes – even if there were no additional development before the line launches. It would also provide great opportunities for creating many more homes and jobs near those stops in the future.

Would you support utilization of city owned parking lots and garages as overnight parking areas on weekends as a means to prevent drunk driving? Why or why not?

Yes. City-owned parking garages can offer safe, overnight parking for many. I support opening more city facilities to the public and making it easier to use them, such as by waiving the overnight parking fee if a receipt from a cab or a bus ticket is shown. I've been working to make more city-owned parking facilities available to the public, particularly in downtown, by bringing the facilities under the supervision of the city's Parking Enterprise instead of having them managed by individual departments and have an item to that effect on the 8/28 agenda.

Do you support the legalization of regulated Transportation Network Companies (such as Uber and Lyft) in Austin? Why or why not?

Absolutely – I have been the leader on the council in trying to get some regulations in place to allow TNCs to operate safely and legally in Austin.

Do you support increasing the number of permanent taxi permits in Austin?

Yes. I support any measure that improves our transportation options. But as noted above, issuing more general permits doesn't necessarily lead to better service. I support finding ways to ensure that additional permits actually improve customer service, which will require reconsidering the existing model for taxi service in Austin.

Do you support temporary “peak time” permits for special events to allow licensed out of town cabbies to meet increased demand?

Yes. During events like SXSW and ACL we need all of the help we can get, and out of town cabbies are one way to meet short-term demand spikes. We just need to make sure that all cabbies meet our standards for safety.

Would you support using designated “cab stands” for downtown pick up as an alternative to “street hails”? Why or why not?

Yes. Cab stands can be very convenient, and it would be great for customers to know they could easily get a cab in those locations. I wouldn't be ready to restrict street hails, though, without talking to a variety of stakeholders.

Do you personally use public or alternative (taxis, TNCs, bicycle) transit? If yes, how frequently?

Yes. It's my only means of conveyance

Would you be willing to join other officials in going without personal vehicles for a week to study, first hand, what issues Austin commuters are facing?

Yes.

Why do you believe ATX Safer Streets should endorse you?

As a car-free Austinite who's committed to innovative transportation and enjoys nightlife, I'm about as enthusiastic a supporter of this cause as we're likely to get on the Council.

ERIN MCGANN - DISTRICT 9

93%

How would you explain your understanding of ATX Safer Streets mission and principles?

I understand that you want to increase the number of transportation options for people to use after a night on the town. You have already changed the rules for parking downtown to make it easier for people to leave their cars over night with out being towed. You are coming up with fabulous, inexpensive solutions to a complicated problem.

What is your opinion on the state of transportation in Austin? (Please touch on CapMetro, taxis, TNCs as well as personally owned vehicles)

The state of transportation is abysmal. We rely too much on personal vehicles, and as a society do not put enough stigma on drinking and driving. We need to throw every potential transportation option out and see what works for reducing drinking and driving. Cab stands (you guys are brilliant), late night (until at least 3am) buses, more park n rides outside the city with bus connections, late night trains, TNCs. All of it needs to be done, and all of it will be used

Do you believe Austin has a transit shortage? (Not enough taxis, buses, etc.) Why or why not?

Yes. This comes with an anecdote. During SXSW this year (at about 1am), I was walking back to my car (parked at Palmer) and I saw a man standing on the corner of S First and Riverside with his arm out-attempting to hail a cab. I walked up to him, and asked him what he was doing. He said I am looking for a cab to take me to my hotel (south of Ben White). This is how a normal cities work, not Austin. I finally got the guy to get in the car with me (which was pretty funny- he kept asking me how I knew he wash't an ax murderer- I finally told him he'd better worry about me) and took him to his hotel. He SHOULD have been able to easily access a ride, but, as we know, he would have been standing there all night.

Do you believe that Austin has enough "for hire" transportation options? (Taxis, pedi-cabs, TNCs, limousines) Why or why not?

No. As noted above, of course that was a super busy time. During the rest of the year, I have wanted a ride and had to wait extreme amounts of time for a cab. I do not think anyone should have to wait more than 15-20 minus for a cab in a city the size of Austin, yet it happens often. Since the TNC's are illegal right now, I have not used them. The Pedi Cabs are happy with their numbers (according to the drivers) so I can't say much about them. I have never actually taken a limo in Austin, nor do I see many of them!

Do you support an expansion of our current transit system to accommodate daily commuters? Why or why not?

Yes. The roads are a nightmare. We need to develop a system of park n rides outside the city and have a regular bus system that services them. If we create a web, we can and will convince people to leave their cars outside Austin and start commuting on busses. The current rail from Howard Lane is full when it leaves there because it goes where people want to go, if we create this web all around the city we will reduce traffic.

Do you support a more comprehensive late night service plan for downtown visitors, hospitality and graveyard shift employees? Why or why not?

Yes. We are a 24 hour city, we need to acknowledge that and start acting like it. We need to look at other cities the same size and see what they have done. Austin isn't the first to go through the growing pains we are having, we can learn from others

Do you support the current urban rail initiative? Why or why not?

No. I am not against rail, however the current rail initiative is too expensive and will most likely cost more when it is finished (most public works projects don't come in at or under cost). This project will not reduce traffic in that it isn't near a highway system so people will not park n ride. Additionally if the project does what it says (using project connects numbers) 18,000 (isn't) people will be served a day (mostly likely not 18,000 new riders a day), more than 20,000 are moving to Austin a year, in 10 years, that is 200,000 people- we will be building a rail for less than 10% of the population growth. A better use of the funds would be more high speed busses, adding curb cuts, so the bus stop doesn't back up traffic, making the "toll" lane on Mopac into a bus/ HOV lane and doing the same on 35. Also creating the park n ride web. These things could be done quickly (less than 10 years) and efficiently now, and will also qualify for federal dollars. Did I mention they would most likely cost less than 1.3 billion dollars?

Would you support utilization of city owned parking lots and garages as overnight parking areas on weekends as a means to prevent drunk driving? Why or why not?

Yes. If you knew you could leave your car over night with no consequence- you would!

Do you support the legalization of regulated Transportation Network Companies (such as Uber and Lyft) in Austin? Why or why not?

Yes. We need more transportation options..... Although it does annoy me that they started running illegally, but it also annoys me that the city is "studying" them again.....

Do you support increasing the number of permanent taxi permits in Austin?

Yes. There are often not taxis when you need them. They should also have an app like the TNCs do so you can get a cab quickly

Do you support temporary "peak time" permits for special events to allow licensed out of town cabbies to meet increased demand?

Yes- with a caveat- During ACL and SXSW- I always give people staying at my house very specific instructions to give the cabbie to get back to my house, many have been taken way out of the way because the driver didn't know how to get to where they need to go. I would say all drivers need to use a GPS System and show the client how they are planning to go.

Would you support using designated “cab stands” for downtown pick up as an alternative to “street hails”? Why or why not?

Yes. Second best idea you all have had- the first being over night parking under 35. Brilliant!

Do you personally use public or alternative (taxis, TNCs, bicycle) transit? If yes, how frequently?

Yes. Infrequently.

Would you be willing to join other officials in going without personal vehicles for a week to study, first hand, what issues Austin commuters are facing?

Yes.

Why do you believe ATX Safer Streets should endorse you?

I would like to see a safer, easier to maneuver Austin. You are doing an amazing job, and as the city council representative for District 9, I know safe streets and better transportation affects the district. Personally, I would love to see better transportation so I can come downtown more often- the parking situation always foils me, but if I could get home on the bus, I would be there in a heartbeat!

KATHIE TOVO - DISTRICT 9
79%

[Editor’s note: Tovo replied via emailed PDF instead of through the google form questionnaire. Her response has been attached below, please scroll down to view]

Safer Streets ATX Questionnaire

Question 1. How would you explain your understanding of ATX Safer Streets mission and principles?

I understand that ATX Safer Streets is focusing on promoting policies to reduce incidences of impaired driving, and in that process, reducing traffic congestion and improving mobility for Austin residents. These are policies of which I am also supportive, and I look forward to working with your organization now and in my next term in office.

Question 2. What is your opinion on the state of transportation in Austin? (Please touch on CapMetro, taxis, TNCs as well as personally-owned vehicles)

Austin's transportation system is failing. Our infrastructure needs have failed to keep pace with rapid, unmanaged growth. To improve our system, we must invest in and develop policies to support a multi-modal transportation network, which includes public transportation (urban rail, rapid bus); bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure (bike lanes, sidewalks, and safety devices); and strategic roadway improvements (fixing intersections and removing bottle necks). I voted in favor of Project Connect, because I support its vision for long-term investments in our transportation network. I also co-drafted the Families and Children Taskforce Report, which provides a blueprint for making our neighborhood streets safer, including recommendations for traffic calming, educational programs, and investments in Safe Routes to Schools. An ideal transportation network would provide individuals and families realistic and affordable choices in transportation options—whether by foot, bike, bus, rail, or car—to meet their basic needs. This should be our goal, and I believe it is in line with our comprehensive and neighborhood plans.

At the present state, our public transportation system is inadequate to serve the needs of our economy, which includes the entertainment industry and the many large-scale events held in our city. The taxi (driver-for-hire) industry helps fill in this gap, and it also provides critical services for those with accessibility needs and for business and other travelers. Thus, we must continue to promote and support a strong taxi industry, which begins by making sure drivers have the ability to make a fair wage at all hours (including non-peak) of the day. With this in mind, council needs to ensure we are meeting peak-time (late-night) and temporary (special events) demands, which requires engaging the various stakeholders in a productive and collaborative conversation to work through solutions that can serve all needs. This is discussed further in response to questions below.

On a related note, earlier this year, I co-sponsored the city's efforts to open a sobriety center Downtown, which will provide individuals a safe place to sober up without fear of additional consequences. Sobriety centers have been shown to not only be effective in improving public safety and connecting individuals with treatment options but can also save the community money with regard to police and incarceration costs.

Question 3. Do you believe Austin has a transit shortage? (Not enough taxis, buses, etc.)

Why or why not?

I believe — as explained above — Austin lacks sufficient transit options, particularly with regard to public transportation. As the population has increased, we have further congestion on our roadways. We can do better. Investing in urban rail is a start, but our transit system must also be complemented by

appropriate land use policies. Our comprehensive plan and our neighborhood plans together offer a vision for how Austin can grow wisely and sustainably—how the city can accommodate density while still preserving the qualities that make each neighborhood distinctive and unique. Growth should be managed and guided to ensure as we grow, we keep pace with our infrastructure needs.

Question 4. Do you support an expansion of our current transit system to accommodate daily commuters?

YES

Why or why not?

See above.

Question 5. Do you support a more comprehensive late night service plan for downtown visitors, hospitality and graveyard industry employees?

Why or why not?

I support comprehensive late night transportation service. The vibrancy and success of our growing Downtown will depend on a transportation system that can keep pace with its needs, at all hours of the day. This is an ongoing discussion at Council, and we need to work with our Downtown stakeholders to identify and address needs so that we can focus our limited funds on efficient expansions and improvements to the system. Some of the areas I see as needing further exploration include finding safe and affordable parking solutions for Downtown employees who work too late to benefit from many of the late-night transit options. I would also like to see more data and planning around expanding and increasing frequency of CapMetro's services at later hours as well as on the weekends.

Question 6. Do you support the current urban rail initiative?

Why or why not?

Yes; I voted to put the urban rail on the ballot, because Austin must reduce its dependence on the automobile. Urban rail is critically important to improving affordability, mobility, and the quality of life of Austin's residents. It will also help reduce our community's collective impact on the environment (air quality, land use, and urban heat island effects). This initial line is an investment in a larger, more robust transportation network that serves all of Austin.

Question 7. Would you support utilization of city-owned parking lots and garages as overnight parking lots and garages on weekends as a means to prevent drunk driving?

Why or why not?

Yes; I opposed the rushed expansion of parking meter hours at night and on the weekends, in part due to the regressive impact of the fees on low-income wage earners, but also in response to concerns raised about increased influence on people who have been drinking to drive their cars home to avoid tickets the next morning. The ability to pay for overnight parking in advance at the meters helped mitigate some of these concerns, but people parked in lots still face the concern of getting their car towed. I am certainly open to discussing how city-owned lots and garages can improve this situation.

Question 8. Do you support the legalization of regulated Transportation Network Companies (such as Uber and Lyft) in Austin?

Why or why not?

I voted for the resolution that directed the City Manager to work with the various impacted stakeholders on reviewing a potential pilot program for the legal operation of TNCs. I am hopeful that through this process, we can have a thoughtful and constructive dialogue on the issues that need to be addressed by industry professionals and other stakeholders, including safety concerns (background checks and appropriate insurance), accessibility requirements, and fair standards and regulations for all vehicles for hire. I also sponsored an amendment to incorporate university students as formal stakeholders, because they are frequent late-night visitors in Downtown.

Question 9. Do you support temporary “peak time” permits for special events to allow licensed out of town cabbies to meet increased demand?

Why or why not?

I am always open to additional conversation on how best to ensure that everyone can get home safely without driving impaired, but I do not support licensing out-of-town taxicab drivers. The City is currently in the process of evaluating its late-night transportation services, which includes a conversation of how best to meet peak-time demands. A stakeholder group, which includes representatives from the taxi industry, shuttles, and frequent users, is working on recommendations for improvements, and I look forward to hearing those recommendations.

Question 10. Would you support using designated “cab stands” for downtown pick up as an alternative to “street hails”?

Why or why not?

It’s unclear whether the question is suggesting that such designated cab stands would be in addition to or in lieu of “street hails.” It would be important to work with taxicab professionals to ensure that the designated stands would have the desired impact, and I support having that conversation; the City currently provides some areas at night throughout Downtown that allow taxis to form a line to pick up customers, but I’ve heard concerns from drivers that these locations are inconvenient and not well designated.

Question 11. Do you personally use public or alternative (taxis, TNCs, bicycle) transit?

If yes, how frequently?

I occasionally bike or take CapMetro buses, and I use taxicabs on most trips to the airport and when traveling.

Would you be willing to join other officials in going without personal vehicles for a week to study, first hand, what issues Austin commuters are facing?

Yes

Why do you believe ATX Safer Streets should endorse you?

Over my years of advocacy as a neighborhood president, planning commissioner, and now a council member, I have a strong record of bringing people from different perspectives together to meet the community's common goals. I am a proponent that the best solutions are those that evolve from collaborative planning efforts, and the most effective role of a council member is to serve as a bridge to ensure stakeholders are engaged in the discussion. There are a lot of immediate challenges with regards to the transportation network, which need to be addressed as soon as possible. By working together and focusing on proper planning, we can ensure we are allocating our resources effectively and efficiently. I believe ATX Safer Streets is committed to "rolling up its sleeves" to help in this process, and I look forward to working with you.

Would you like to schedule a meeting with ATX Safer Streets?

Yes