

Around a month ago I started a petition on change.org and we now have over 3500 signatures. The petition was to address grievances from both late night employees and patrons and covered three concerns; poor late night public transportation, a shortage of cabs who also often refuse service, and our downtown overnight parking situation. Out of that petition was borne ATX Safer Streets, and we come to you now as the voice of our night scene.

Monthly alcohol tax revenue is in the millions, and we pride ourselves on being the live music capital of the world. We boast more bars per capita than anywhere else in America. We also boast the highest rate of DWI's in Texas[1], and that number increases astronomically each year, with the biggest increases per year coming after Sept 2011[2], when meters began running into Saturdays which confused and dissuaded people from leaving their cars behind overnight. It's clear that our reactive, strict policies on DWI's have not discouraged people from driving drunk, so it's time we start exploring pro-active policies that encourage people to leave their vehicles at home at the beginning of the night. Of the 42 pages of comments the petition received an overwhelming number of them admitted to driving drunk because there simply are no viable options for alternate transportation to many parts of town. We cannot build an entire subculture in Austin and then not support it.

We are a 24 hour metropolitan city of innovation, technology, events, festivals and conferences (and let's not forget drinking!). We need to approach our future with that in mind. We have 1 cab to every 2528 people[*]; that means that out of the over 3500 signatures collected only one of those people could catch a cab. A 2009 Berkeley study on DC found that for every hour bus service was extended, the rate of intoxicated fatalities went down by 70%[3]. And a Denver study found when they extended overnight parking their DWI arrests had decreased[4].

We ask that the focus turn to proactive means to reduce not only drunk drivers but commuters on the roads. Bar and restaurant employees have few options other than driving when working late, and they are but a small percentage of Austin taxpayers similarly affected who do not work typical 9-5 jobs. We can widen the roads all we want, but until we take a more environmentally friendly and cost effective approach to our congestion problems nothing will ever change.

We have included in each packet our original change.org petition, comments gathered from that petition, our proposed changes and a proposed map of Cap Metro routes that will allow more people to leave their cars at home, or take employment at jobs previously inaccessible via public transportation.

I encourage each of you to read through your entire packet, but especially read the comments. These are your taxpayer's voices and there are too many of them to ignore. The signature portion of the petition was over 100 pages and it is available as a PDF on our website. We are working on additional Cap Metro route suggestions, so updated maps will be available shortly at the same web address as well as any research I have mentioned here.

Thank you for listening to me today and I hope to work with the city further. You can find everything about us at atxsaferstreets.org

[1] <http://traviscountyintransition.wordpress.com/area-budget/budget-story-1/>

[2] <http://www.dwhitparade.com/2012/12/31/texas-austin-police-report-dwi-arrests-for-2012-top-prior-year-by-twenty-percent-dwi-no-refusal-nabs-72-over-new-years/>

[3] <http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~raphael/IGERT/Workshop/One%20for%20the%20Road%20April.pdf>

[4] <http://blogs.denverpost.com/opinion/2013/06/12/stop-drunken-driving-in-denver-before-it-starts/40134/>

[*] Correction to this number. Travis Co residents as of 4/1/2014: 1,138,884. Taxi permits: 744. This put the correct number at 1:1531 (meaning two of our petition signers could hail a cab) <http://www.austintexas.gov/demographics>