

October – Leander/Cedar Park

First commuter cars arrive in Austin

Cap Metro board approves spending \$3.7 million more as trains hit town.

By Ben Wear

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

The Capital Metro board, acting as the agency's first train cars rumbled toward Austin aboard 18-wheelers, approved \$3.7 million more for its commuter rail project on Monday.

The two train cars, the first of six custom-made diesel vehicles the agency is buying from a Swiss company, arrived in pieces as darkness fell. They will be reassembled and undergo thousands of hours of test runs on the agency's track between Leander and downtown Austin. Service should begin in about a year.

The board unanimously approved three more commuter rail contracts Monday: \$880,000 to URS Corp. for engineering and design, bringing the total amount for that line item to \$4.88 million; \$2.2 million to Neon Electric Corp. for canopies and other structures at seven of the nine stations; and \$600,000 for improvements at the High Street Crestview Station development being built alongside the Capital Metro track in North Austin. The \$600,000 will go to the developer for putting concrete paving in a road through the development so the agency's buses can travel to the train station, as well as for improvements along Lamar Boulevard.

Passenger service will begin in fall 2008 from Leander to Downtown Austin.- www.CapMetro.org

Leander plans to build sidewalks along busy high school road

Some students have to walk in ditches and near traffic to get to and from school

By Melissa Mixon, AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Thursday, October 18, 2007

Dani Ramos' trip to Leander High School is a little tricky. It can involve trekking through knee-high grass or walking an arm's length from busy traffic. "Sometimes we have to walk in mud," said Ramos, a sophomore who lives near the school. That's because the road in front of her school has no sidewalks. But that will change next year.

Leander officials are using more than \$1.3 million to build sidewalks along parts of the busy four-lane Bagdad Road that runs north and south on the western part of the city. The project has been on the minds of City Council members and city staff members for some time now, said Wayne Watts, Leander's director of public works. He said the road is a hazard for pedestrians. "I grit my teeth every time I drive down that road because we have kids who are walking in a ditch or right next to the road because they have no other place to walk," Watts said. "We've been lucky we haven't had any incidents."

Watts said the city hasn't had funding to build the sidewalks until now. In November, voters approved \$16.7 million in bonds for roads, drainage and the construction of sidewalks. To pay for the project, the city is using \$1 million from the bonds and \$338,000 from a grant the Texas Department of Transportation awarded Leander a few years ago.

Most of the money will pay for sidewalks on both sides of Bagdad from Crystal Falls Parkway south to Kettering Drive. Leander High is between the two roads. The additional money will pay for sidewalks on Bagdad that will stretch from Crystal Falls Parkway north to Sonny

Drive. Those sidewalks will be only on the western side of Bagdad, however. Construction will start this summer, and Watts said he expects the sidewalks to be finished by December 2008.

City officials have long said they want Leander, which has gone from a rural country town to a bustling suburb, to be a walkable city. Leander officials now require that any developments in the city, with the exception of one private development, have sidewalks along the roads. "We have some retrofitting that needs to be done, but we're inching our way toward making Leander a pedestrian-friendly city," Leander Mayor John Cowman said. "That's the whole objective."

The sidewalks are good news to Ramos and her friend Lauren Cleven. "We'd gotten used to it," Cleven said about having no sidewalks. "So this will be cool."