Beyond Today: Why Homegrown is Key to Austin's Future

Tamara Atkinson – CEO, Workforce Solutions Capital Area
Jeremy Martin – President and CEO, Austin Chamber of Commerce

Across the Austin region, there are nearly $25 billion worth of planned infrastructure projects to support the growth and progress of this community, our economy and the people who live here. From light rail to roadways to the airport, we are working to capitalize on the opportunity ahead to be more connected with each other and the world. An important part of the roadmap to success is to ensure proper training and support for workforce development so more people in Austin can gain access to not just jobs but careers within this rapidly expanding industry. When you create careers for local people, you are creating generational opportunities for the entire community.

Recognizing that Austin has a rare opportunity to create hundreds of thousands of jobs, but also wanting to ensure local people can fill them, Travis County Judge Andy Brown and Austin Mayor Kirk Watson led the leadership group for the first-ever Mobility Industry Sector Partnership in August 2023 to identify ways to help local people gain the skills they need to embrace the career opportunities presented by these infrastructure projects. This work enabled us to have a community-based response and understanding about how to solve local talent crisis issues. These learnings are going to be crucial to the success of these projects as we need 10,000 new trained workers each year annually for the next 17 years.

The future of our region depends on our ability to identify sustainable solutions to support workforce development that result in these infrastructure projects being built by the people of Austin, for the people of Austin. The recent creation of an Infrastructure Academy—one of the few in the nation—was just one of the solutions identified in the mobility sector partnership and is an important step in helping us achieve our goals.

This is going to take buy-in from across the community and we're seeing that already from local school districts, the business community and from two integral organizations to this process, the Austin Transit Partnership and CapMetro. They had the foresight to understand the importance of taking action, collectively and pooling talent and resources together to create something that has never been done in our community.

Our organizations are committed to doing our part too.

The Austin Chamber recently accepted a challenge to identify more internship and externship opportunities for high school students and begin placing students in these roles in the next year.

Earlier introductions to career opportunities in high-demand industries such as transportation, construction, healthcare, semiconductor production, and advanced manufacturing result in retaining talent in this region.

Workforce Solutions Capital Area, the non-profit organization that serves as the leadership and governing body for the Austin/Travis County area workforce system, is already doing the work of connecting job seekers to training and employers and prioritizing reaching middle and high schoolers with these career and industry opportunities. The organization will also serve as the academy administrator, much in the same way it is currently responsible for the city and county's data-driven planning, oversight, and evaluation of workforce development activities in our region.

Workforce Solutions Capital Area's impact data shows a nearly 5-to-1 return on investments made in local workforce training. When we invest in growing local leaders and skilled workers, they will reinvest in our region helping to make it a better place to live, work, play and visit. We are calling on other businesses and organizations committed to the future of our region to join us in these efforts. If we work together to develop the workforce needed, we won't just secure the future mobility of our region, but also the future of our economy and the people who call it home.