THE STATE OF PEDESTRIAN ACCESSIBILITY IN AUSTIN

A Qualitative Analysis of ADA Compliance, Equity, and the Path Forward

City of Austin, Texas | Assessment Period: Jan 2020 – Dec 2024 | April 2026

21.5%	78.5%	$506.3M	17.6 pts
Fully ADA Compliant	Non-Compliant or Partial	Est. Full Remediation	District Equity Gap

Austin's sidewalk infrastructure is failing the people who need it most.
This report examines who bears that burden — and what must change.

INSIDE THIS REPORT

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PAGE 1 — AUSTIN AT A CROSSROADS: THE ACCESSIBILITY CRISIS

Austin, Texas is celebrated as one of America's most dynamic cities — a hub of technology, culture, and economic growth. Yet beneath the gleaming campuses and booming skyline lies an infrastructure crisis that receives far too little public attention: the sustained failure of the city's pedestrian network to serve the residents who depend on it most. An independent analysis of all **175,609 active sidewalk segments** across Austin's 10 council districts — spanning the full assessment period from January 2020 through December 2024 — reveals a picture defined by broken ramps, inaccessible signals, deteriorating surfaces, and a compliance gap that affects nearly four out of every five crosswalks in the city.

21.5%	50.6%	27.9%	26,784
Fully Compliant	Partially Compliant	Non- Compliant	Pending Assessment

What Non-Compliance Really Means

Raw percentages can obscure the lived reality of inaccessible infrastructure. For a wheelchair user, a missing curb ramp is not an inconvenience — it is a barrier that ends a journey before it begins. For a blind pedestrian, an intersection without an audible signal is a hazard that cannot be safely crossed. For an elderly resident with a walker, a cracked and uneven surface is a genuine fall risk. These are not edge cases. They are the daily reality for hundreds of thousands of Austin residents. Of the city's 175,609 assessed segments, only **31,970 (21.5%) fully meet ADA standards**. Another 75,361 (50.6%) are partially compliant — functional at a basic level but carrying deficiencies that create real barriers. A stark **41,494 (27.9%) are fully non-compliant**, exhibiting multiple violations or missing critical features entirely.

Three Defining Infrastructure Failures

Curb Ramps — The Most Basic Access Point: The curb ramp is the fundamental gateway between sidewalk and street. Yet **167 locations in Austin lack ramps entirely**, and 93 more have ramps so damaged they require immediate replacement. An additional **644 locations are missing legally required truncated dome tactile warning surfaces** — the yellow domed panels that alert blind and visually impaired pedestrians to the transition zone. These are not obscure technical requirements. They are the minimum features that make a crossing usable for someone with a mobility or visual disability.

Signal Accessibility — A Near-Total Failure: Of Austin's 1,331 signalized intersections, only **324 (24.3%) have Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPI)** — the audible and tactile countdown systems that allow blind and visually impaired pedestrians to cross safely. The remaining **75.7% lack these federally recommended features**. Additionally, 45.4% of signal locations have push buttons that are obstructed or unreachable from an accessible approach — meaning even where signals exist, they often cannot be activated by someone using a wheelchair or with limited reach.

Surface Conditions — An Epidemic of Hazards: ADA standards require crosswalk surfaces to be firm, stable, and slip-resistant. Currently, **41,494 segments have hazardous surface conditions** — 34,366 rated Poor and 7,128 rated Failed, requiring immediate replacement. Another 40,899 segments have improper cross-slope or running grade, conditions that cause wheelchairs and mobility devices to tip or pull sideways. The city's infrastructure is deteriorating at approximately 3.2% annually — meaning every year of inaction converts today's manageable deficiencies into tomorrow's crises.

PAGE 2 — A TALE OF TWO AUSTINS: GEOGRAPHIC & EQUITY DISPARITIES

One of the most troubling findings of this analysis is not the overall compliance rate — it is the pattern of *where* the failures are concentrated. Across Austin's 10 council districts, compliance rates range from a high of just **30.8%** in District 1 (North Austin / Rundberg) to a low of **13.2%** in District 10 (West Austin / Tarrytown). This **17.6-percentage-point gap** is not random. It follows the contours of income, race, and historical patterns of infrastructure investment — and it tells a story about which communities Austin has consistently prioritized and which it has left behind.

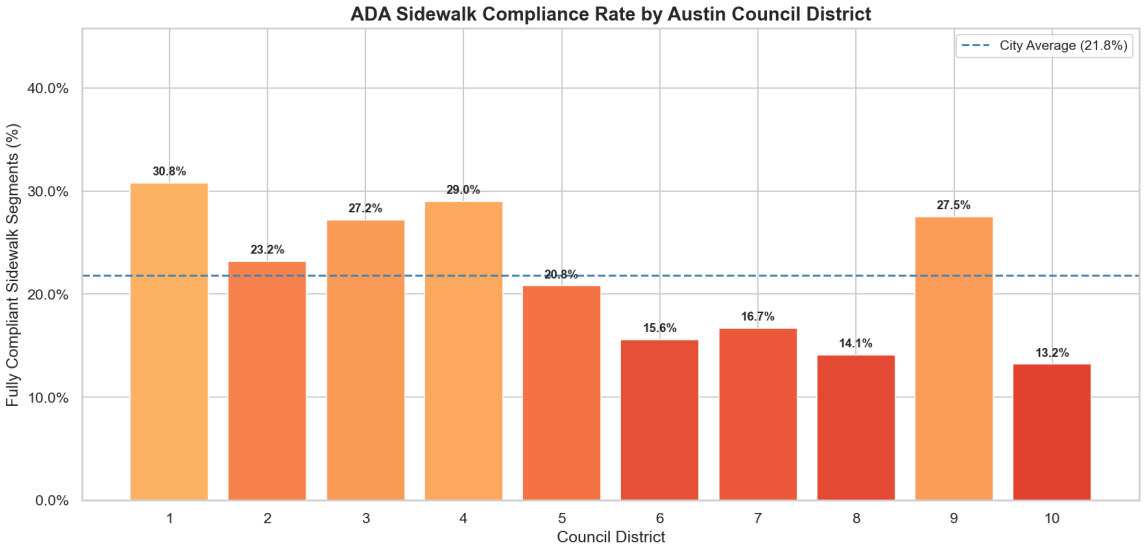

Figure 1: ADA compliance rate by council district. City average: 21.5% (dashed line). Districts below 20% shown in red.

The Inverse Equity Pattern

A consistent and deeply concerning pattern emerges when compliance data is mapped against socioeconomic indicators: **the neighborhoods with the greatest need for accessible infrastructure are receiving the least of it.** Districts with higher concentrations of low-income residents, communities of color, and transit-dependent populations consistently show lower ADA compliance rates. The equity scatter analysis confirms this relationship is not coincidental — it reflects decades of unequal budget allocation, deferred maintenance in lower-income neighborhoods, and a planning culture that has not yet embedded equity as a foundational principle of infrastructure investment.

Consider: District 1 (North Austin / Rundberg) has the city's highest compliance at 30.8% — yet that still means only about one in three segments is fully compliant. It is a striking indictment of the system's overall failure. Meanwhile, communities in East and Southeast Austin — areas with higher proportions of low-income residents who depend on walking and transit for daily mobility — face compliance rates in the low-to-mid 20s. These residents cannot easily substitute a car trip for an inaccessible pedestrian route. For them, the failure of the sidewalk network is not an abstract equity concern. It is a daily constraint on their freedom of movement.

Schools, Transit, and the Compounding Burden

The equity problem reaches its most acute expression where accessibility matters most. Across Austin's **151 AISD school campuses**, approximately **5,130 adjacent sidewalk segments are non-compliant** — meaning thousands of students with disabilities face daily barriers on routes their peers navigate without a second thought. The right to access education on equal terms is a civil rights guarantee, not a planning aspiration. Near Austin's **1,000 public transit stops**, **3,958 adjacent segments are non-compliant** — directly compromising access for approximately 159,000 daily transit riders, a population that disproportionately includes low-income residents, the elderly, and people with disabilities. When a bus stop cannot be safely reached, the transit system's promise of mobility becomes hollow.

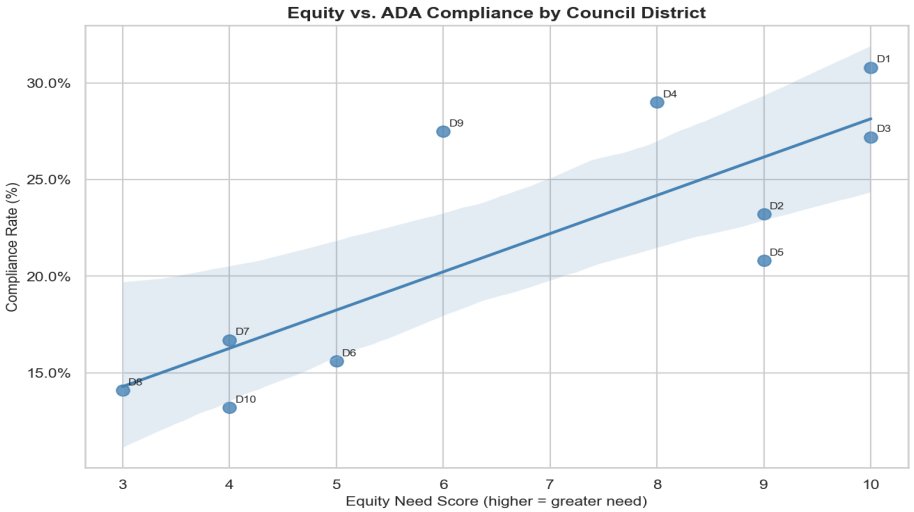

Figure 2: Districts with higher equity need scores show consistently lower ADA compliance rates — confirming a structural, not random, pattern of unequal investment.

PAGE 3 — WHO IS LEFT BEHIND: THE HUMAN COST

Infrastructure data can feel abstract — miles of sidewalk, percentages of compliance, counts of deficiencies. But behind every non-compliant crosswalk is a person whose independence, safety, and dignity are compromised. This analysis identifies four populations whose daily lives are most directly shaped by Austin's accessibility failures — and whose experiences must be at the center of the city's response.

Seniors & Older Adults

133,532 residents 65+ in Travis County

Austin's senior population — 10.4% of Travis County residents — faces the steepest barriers. Mobility limitations are common among older adults, and the combination of missing curb ramps, hazardous surfaces, and insufficient signal crossing time creates environments that many seniors cannot navigate safely. For this group, inaccessible infrastructure does not just limit mobility — it enforces isolation and diminishes independence.

Residents with Disabilities

172,733 Austinites with a reported disability

At 13.4% of the total population, Austin's disability community represents one of the largest groups directly affected. Mobility, visual, auditory, and cognitive disabilities each create distinct barriers — from missing ramps for wheelchair users to absent audible signals for the blind. Current infrastructure meets almost none of these needs consistently across the city.

Students & Families

5,130 school-adjacent non-compliant segments

For the roughly 75,500 Austin ISD students, safe school crossings are a daily necessity and a legal right. Non-compliant segments adjacent to school campuses fall hardest on students with disabilities, who depend on accessible infrastructure for equal access to education. The school-to-street connection is a civil rights issue, not a maintenance afterthought.

Transit-Dependent Riders

3,958 non-compliant segments near transit stops

Approximately 159,000 Austinites use Capital Metro daily — a population disproportionately comprising low-income residents, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Non-compliant segments adjacent to transit stops mean that the first and last steps of a transit journey are often the most dangerous. Inaccessible access infrastructure renders the transit system's promise of mobility hollow.

The Compounding Effect: Health, Independence, and Dignity

ADA compliance failures are not merely legal violations — they are public health crises unfolding in slow motion. When streets are inaccessible, people with mobility limitations reduce their physical activity. Reduced mobility leads to elevated rates of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes. Social isolation follows: the inability to reach stores, medical appointments, community centers, and neighbors. **The medical literature is unambiguous: accessible built environments directly improve health outcomes, particularly for older adults and people with disabilities.** Austin's infrastructure gaps are not just a planning failure. They are a driver of health inequity at population scale — and every year of continued inaction compounds the cost in human terms.

The compounding nature of these barriers is also critical to understand. A senior resident in a low-income neighborhood may face a non-compliant curb ramp *and* a missing audible signal *and* a hazardous surface condition — all at the same intersection. Each deficiency multiplies the difficulty; together, they can make a route simply impassable. For those without alternatives — no personal vehicle, no family member to drive them — this is not a minor inconvenience. It is confinement.

PAGE 4 — FROM COMPLIANCE TO COMMITMENT: THE PATH FORWARD

The picture this analysis presents is serious — but it is not hopeless. Every deficiency identified is one that can be remediated. Every equity gap is one that deliberate policy can close. The question before the City of Austin is not whether to act, but how urgently and how wisely. The analysis points toward a clear framework — one grounded in evidence, structured by priority, and designed to maximize both human impact and financial efficiency.

Four Principles for a Credible Response

Safety First	The most dangerous conditions — missing ramps at schools, non-functional signals at high-volume crossings, failed surfaces near transit stops — must be addressed within 90 days. These conditions expose the City to ADA enforcement action and, more critically, to preventable injuries. The 5,130 school-adjacent and 3,958 transit-adjacent non-compliant segments represent the non-negotiable starting point.
Equity as Principle	Remediation sequencing cannot default to a first-come, first-served approach that perpetuates historical inequities. The priority scoring framework weights equity at 30% — ensuring underserved communities, school zones, transit corridors, and healthcare facilities receive preferential treatment. This is not merely a values statement; it is a structural requirement for the program to fulfill its legal and moral purpose.
Prevention as Strategy	Preventive maintenance costs $3.0K per asset annually versus $25.0K for emergency replacement — a 67% cost savings. A systematic maintenance program pays for itself within a single budget cycle. The city cannot afford *not* to invest in prevention: every year of deferral converts today's "Poor" conditions into tomorrow's "Failed", doubling or tripling future costs.
Governance & Account.	Infrastructure does not maintain itself, and good intentions without organizational structure produce no results. A dedicated ADA Compliance Coordinator, a standing compliance committee with monthly meetings, and a public-facing performance dashboard are essential — not optional — components of any credible improvement program. Without accountability infrastructure, remediation infrastructure will not follow.

The Financial Case: Why $506.3M Is the Right Investment

The total estimated remediation cost of **$506.3M over five years** is significant — but the cost of inaction is higher. ADA non-compliance creates direct legal liability: the Department of Justice has increasingly pursued enforcement actions against municipalities, and settlement costs in comparable cities have reached hundreds of millions of dollars. Beyond litigation risk, infrastructure deteriorating at 3.2% annually means every year of delay grows the bill. The **$151.9M Year 1 investment** is not discretionary spending — it is preventing a far larger obligation from accumulating silently in the deferred maintenance backlog.

Three Actions That Can Begin This Week

- **Authorize the High-Priority Project List (20,260 segments).** Approve the 5,130 school-adjacent and 3,958 transit-adjacent projects for immediate mobilization. These can reach active construction within 30 days of council authorization and represent the clearest liability-reduction investments available.
- **Create the ADA Compliance Coordinator Position ($125K/yr).** A single dedicated FTE provides the organizational nerve center for all remediation, monitoring, and reporting activity. Without this role, accountability diffuses across departments and progress stalls. This is the highest-leverage governance investment the City can make.
- **Commission the Digital Asset Management System ($350K).** Real-time infrastructure tracking enables data-driven maintenance scheduling, public transparency, and quarterly progress reporting to Council. The city cannot manage what it cannot measure.

> ***"Every resident — regardless of disability, age, or zip code — has the right to safely walk to school, to work, to the bus stop, to their doctor. The legal obligation to provide this has existed since 1990. The moral obligation has existed far longer."***

Austin has a choice. It can continue on the current trajectory — deferred maintenance, growing legal liability, and a widening gap between the city's national reputation for innovation and the daily experience of its most vulnerable residents. Or it can commit, now, to the harder and more important work of becoming a city where accessibility is not an afterthought, but a foundation. This analysis provides the evidence. The path is clear. What is required now is the will to walk it.

*Independent analysis conducted by **Ameritech Consulting Group** for the City of Austin. This document is not a final audit. Assessment covers January 2020–December 2024 across all 175,609 active sidewalk segments in Austin's 10 council districts. Data: City of Austin Open Data Portal (vchz-d9ng, p53x-x73x, xwdj-i9he), ArcGIS FeatureServer (curb ramps, AISD schools, CMTA stops, Council Districts), U.S. Census ACS 2022 (Travis County, TX). Tiffany Moore • tiffany@a-techconsulting.com • www.a-techconsulting.com*