AUSTIN CLIMATE EQUITY PLAN

Summary

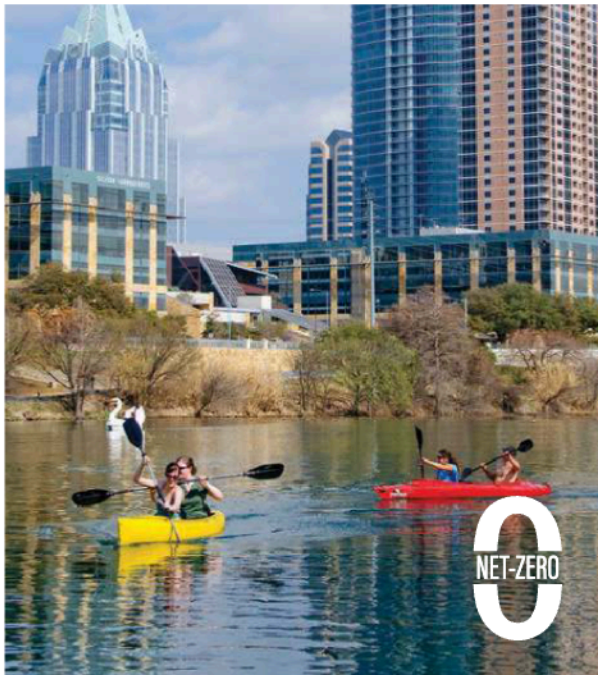








2020-21



NET-ZERO

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COVER PHOTO CREDIT, BOTTOM LEFT: Freedom Solar

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Impact

If we reached all the goals outlined in the Climate Equity Plan—including Austin's major energy and mobility plans—we could lower our current greenhouse gas emissions 52% by 2030.



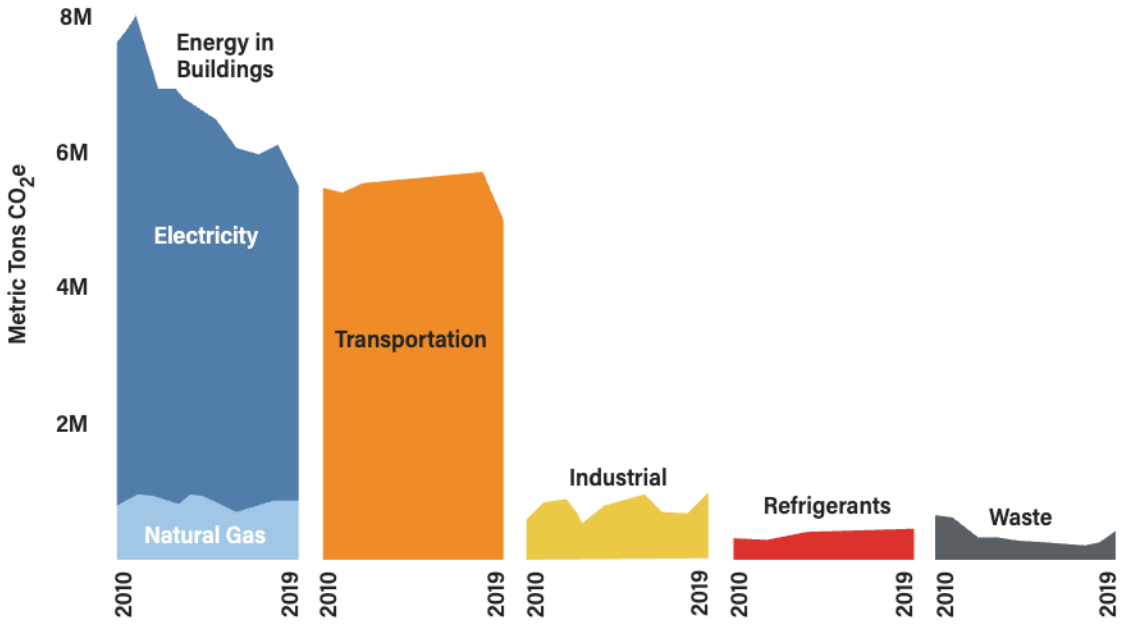
RISING TO THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

Over the past few years, it has become clear that the Earth's climate is changing faster than anticipated, and we are not reducing emissions quickly enough. Climate scientists warn that to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and preserve a livable climate, we must reduce emissions drastically. Currently, we are experiencing a global pandemic, successive waves of catastrophic climate disasters, and international protests against police brutality in support of Black lives. In this global moment of change, the solutions needed to combat systemic racism and the exploitation of the environment are more urgent than ever. The time for real change is now.

The Austin Climate Equity Plan proposes the bold and aggressive goal of equitably reaching net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. Getting to net-zero means the Austin community would emit zero greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The new proposed goal updates our previous goal, set by the City Council in 2015, to reach net-zero by 2050.

AUSTIN'S CURRENT EMISSIONS AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED

In Austin, greenhouse gas emissions have peaked and are heading downward. Yet, we still have more work to do to keep pace with current scientific recommendations and avoid the worst climate impacts. In Austin, our emissions come primarily from five areas:



Right now, on-road transportation and electricity used in buildings are our largest sources of emissions. But in the last eight years, building emissions have fallen nearly 20% despite a 20% growth in Austin's population. This reduction is mostly due to investment in renewable energy generation through our community-owned electric utility, Austin Energy. Since energy use in our city is becoming cleaner, the transportation sector is quickly becoming our number one source of emissions.

Equity

Racial equity is the condition when race no longer predicts a person's quality of life outcomes in our community.



Community Climate Ambassadors

Crucial to the development of this plan was reaching out to community members who have been systematically excluded from the climate change conversation. To help engage with these groups, we created a Community Climate Ambassador Program. Our ambassadors received modest financial compensation to host discussions with their communities about energy, transportation, food, and access to nature. These conversations informed us about community concerns and priorities and helped us think about meaningful framing and implementation.

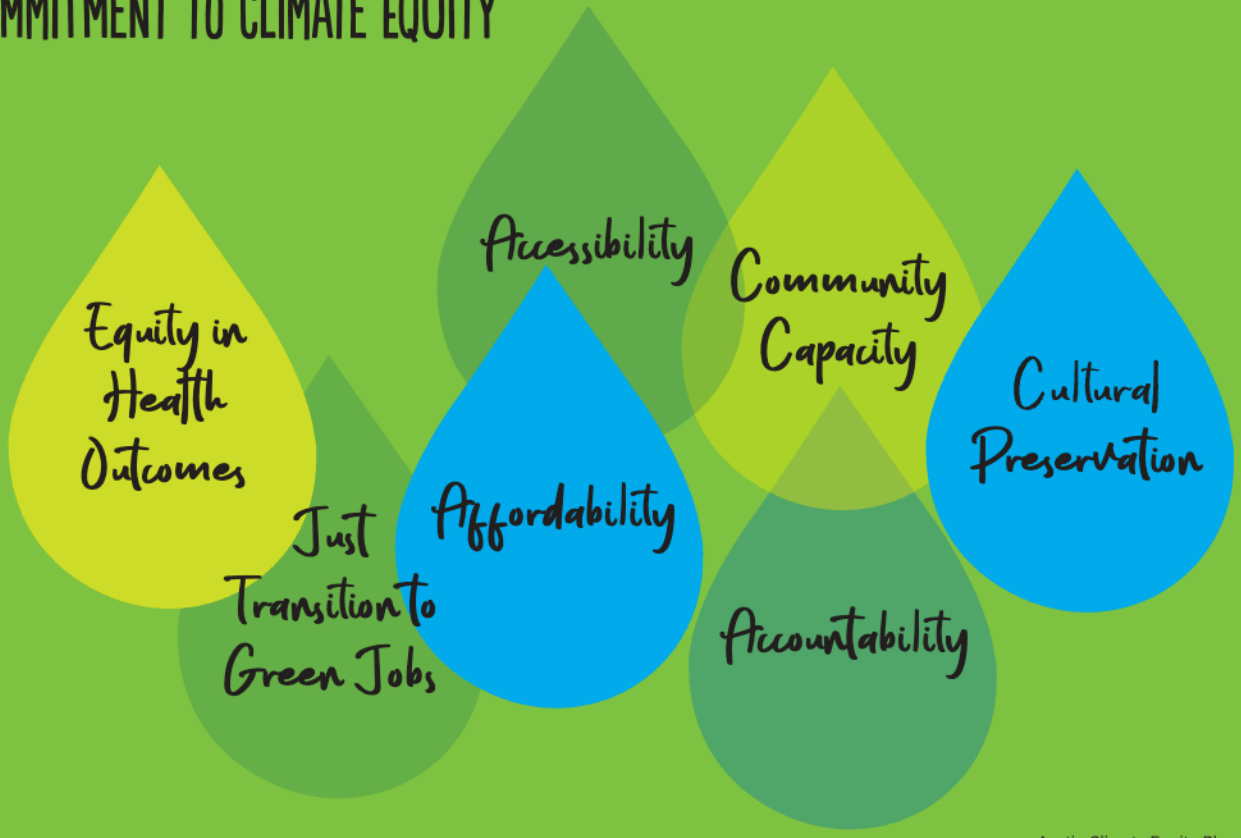
GROUNDING CLIMATE ACTION IN RACIAL EQUITY

Climate change affects everyone, but around the world—and right here in Austin—the impacts are not felt equally among all communities. Communities of color and other marginalized groups are particularly vulnerable due to systemic racism and environmental injustice.

In 1928, Austin created a master plan that racially segregated the city using a practice called redlining. Redlining forcibly displaced and sectioned off primarily Black and Hispanic/Latinx residents into specific, undesirable areas. It was achieved by denying City services and inflicting white supremacist violence on any person of color who tried to live elsewhere. This violent practice forced Black and Hispanic/Latinx residents to live east of IH-35 or outside the city limits and still impacts our community today. Industrial zoning in East Austin intentionally forced communities of color to live in polluted areas with hazardous, environmentally damaging infrastructure. The Holly Street Power Plant and the East Austin fuel tank farms, now decommissioned, are recent examples.

We recognize that solving climate change is impossible without addressing the injustices that have occurred in our community. In developing the strategies that will help us reach our climate goals, we set out to create a more inclusive, healthy, affordable, and accessible plan for our city. Each of the plan's goals and strategies was carefully evaluated to ensure that it would lower greenhouse gas emissions while also addressing racial equity.

COMMITMENT TO CLIMATE EQUITY



SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS

Buildings in Austin are responsible for about 50% of our emissions. We can make strides in reducing our building-related emissions by decarbonizing buildings, addressing refrigerant use and leakage, and more sustainably managing construction materials. But improving our buildings isn't just about reducing emissions. It's also important to address indoor air quality and the energy cost of using our homes and commercial spaces.



PHOTO CREDIT: Andrea Calo

"[We should] implement special programs for Black-, Indigenous-, and People of Color-owned businesses that may want to renovate [and] make their buildings more sustainable."

–Austin community member



Impact

If we implemented all the sustainable buildings goals in this plan and reached the goals in Austin Energy's Generation Plan, we could reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions 34% by 2030.

The following 2030 goals are intended to make buildings more sustainable in Austin while increasing equity.

ALL NEW BUILDINGS ARE NET-ZERO CARBON, EMISSIONS FROM EXISTING BUILDINGS ARE REDUCED BY 25%, AND NATURAL GAS-RELATED EMISSIONS ARE REDUCED BY 30%.

A net-zero carbon building is highly efficient and powered entirely by on- or off-site renewable energy. As a growing city, we must ensure new buildings are carbon neutral and continue to reduce the impacts of our existing buildings. Aside from moving toward clean electricity, we can adopt codes that support high standards for new buildings and ensure residents and organizations can lower their energy costs.

COMMUNITY-WIDE EMISSIONS FROM REFRIGERANT LEAKAGE ARE REDUCED BY 25%.

Refrigerants have played a critical role in modern life, enabling the comforts of air conditioning and refrigeration. Unfortunately, they have also made significant contributions to our carbon footprint. Reducing refrigerant emissions will require designing more efficient buildings, incentivizing leak reduction, capturing and destroying old refrigerants, training HVAC service providers in best practices, and transitioning to lower-impact options as they become available and safe to use.

THE EMBODIED CARBON FOOTPRINT OF BUILDING MATERIALS IN LOCAL CONSTRUCTION IS REDUCED BY 40%.

The embodied carbon of buildings represents all of the emissions associated with extraction, manufacturing, transport, construction and maintenance, demolition, and disposal or reuse of materials. We can reduce these emissions by encouraging the deconstruction of buildings and the use of salvaged and lower-carbon building materials.

A COMMUNITY-WIDE WATER DEMAND OF 152,000 ACRE-FEET PER YEAR IS EQUITABLY ACHIEVED.

Austin is a drought-prone, rapidly growing region, so sustainably managing our water is essential. To include more residents in water use and reduction initiatives, building-focused strategies should promote representative and equitable community engagement and reduce barriers to participation. Energy efficiency and optimization in utility operations are also key tools in reducing the water system's environmental footprint.

Impact

If we reached all the transportation and land use goals in this plan and implemented Capital Metro's Project Connect, we could reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions 3% by 2030.



"I'm concerned that the low-income and marginalized communities in Austin are being pushed out, reducing the vibrancy and diversity of our city."

-Austin community member

TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE

Where our residents live, work, and play and how they move around our city greatly impact our community-wide emissions. Coordinated transportation and land use strategies combined with intentional anti-displacement strategies can improve access to greener forms of transportation, create more affordable housing, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions while supporting diverse communities. Our vision is to cultivate a person-centered mobility network that meets the needs of low-income communities and communities of color of all ages and abilities.

80% OF NEW NON-RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IS LOCATED WITHIN THE CITY'S ACTIVITY CENTERS.

Growing our city sustainably can reduce our dependence on cars. By providing more transportation options and working with employers to incentivize employees not to drive, commuters will more readily pick cleaner ways to get around. Employers should help by making biking, walking, transit, and other forms of shared mobility more accessible to their employees and customers.

135,000 HOUSING UNITS ARE PRESERVED AND PRODUCED, INCLUDING 60,000 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS, AND 75% OF NEW HOUSING IS LOCATED WITHIN A HALF MILE OF THE CITY'S ACTIVITY CENTERS.

Housing and climate are inseparable. If people live far from necessary services such as grocery stores, banks, healthcare services, and schools, they cannot use mobility options like public transit, walking, and biking. Housing is also becoming increasingly unaffordable, which has displaced low-income people, people with disabilities, and communities of color, while large parts of East Austin face significant barriers to accessing healthy, affordable food. Immediate affordable housing in central locations is needed to help stop displacement, lower transportation emissions, and ensure more housing is available for those who need it.

50% OF TRIPS IN AUSTIN ARE MADE USING PUBLIC TRANSIT, BIKING, WALKING, CARPOOLING, OR AVOIDED ALTOGETHER BY WORKING FROM HOME.

To reduce the carbon and pollution impacts of vehicles, we must help as many community members as possible to move around Austin without cars. When combined with anti-displacement strategies to help low-income communities and communities of color, public transit is a core element of an equitable, low-carbon city. We need to take steps to modify existing routes and create new routes for increased reliability, frequency, speed, and efficiency. We must also improve transit safety and reliability on routes that serve historically excluded communities and reduce transit costs to serve more people.

Leading with equity also means cultivating a person-centered network that makes it as easy as possible for residents to use low-carbon or people-powered options by increasing access to transit and improving our bicycle network, sidewalks, and street crossings.

Impact

If we reached all the transportation electrification goals in this plan, we could reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 16%.



TRANSPORTATION ELECTRIFICATION

In Austin, our transportation system will soon become the largest emitter of greenhouse gases and is already the primary source of local air pollution. The vast majority of these transportation-related emissions are caused by private cars and trucks. This means that to meet our emissions reduction targets, we will need to have more people using sustainable forms of transportation, including private vehicles powered by renewable energy. The good news is that electric vehicles (EVs) are becoming more affordable and have a longer range, and more charging options are available. The following goals for 2030 aim to increase community adoption of EVs.

40% OF TOTAL VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED IN AUSTIN ARE ELECTRIFIED, AND EV OWNERSHIP IS CULTURALLY, GEOGRAPHICALLY, AND ECONOMICALLY DIVERSE.

EVs powered by renewable energy can be one of the primary ways to reduce local air pollution and climate-related emissions. But this won't happen overnight. The City will need to support residents and work with businesses to make this transition by listening to community needs, offering incentives, and collaborating on solutions that are cheaper, easier, and better for the environment.

AUSTIN HAS AN EQUITABLY DISTRIBUTED MIX OF LEVEL 1, 2, AND DC FAST-CHARGING STATIONS TO SUPPORT MORE EVS ON THE ROAD.

Buying an EV is a big step, but you also need a place to plug in. As the owner of Austin Energy, the City has a big role to play in making car charging simple, affordable, and accessible to all. This means continuing to equitably build Austin's charging network to enable the switch to EVs while ensuring that anti-displacement strategies are implemented. If done right, our electric utility, residents, and environment all benefit.

THE AUSTIN-ROUND ROCK-SAN MARCOS AREA IS A LEADER IN TRANSPORTATION ELECTRIFICATION THROUGH POLICIES AND TECHNOLOGIES THAT SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THIS EMERGING INDUSTRY.

Every day, Austin area residents drive across city and county lines for work, school, and play. This means we need EVs to be supported by our neighboring communities to maximize the benefits and ensure equitable access for everyone in our community. The switch to EVs carries a huge business opportunity along with it, and we want to make sure our entire region is at the forefront of that change.

"Three years of electric car ownership has convinced me that we are entering an exciting new era."

-Nhat Ho, local electric vehicle driver

Fact

Austinites throw away 58,000 tons of recyclables that end up in the landfill each year. That's enough to fill the UT Tower 29 times annually! *



PHOTO CREDIT: Nora Chovanec for Texas Farmers' Market

"A fair city is one where our excesses are reused to help amplify the lives of our most vulnerable."

-Austin community member

FOOD AND PRODUCT CONSUMPTION

To fully account for the emissions of the food and products we consume, we need to consider the raw material extraction, consumption, and eventual disposal or reuse of a product—regardless of where those activities occur. Many of the products we consume locally have a global emissions impact. When it comes to the goods and foods we consume, we can create more efficient, circular processes that improve quality of life and restore human and planetary health. The following goals are meant to get us closer to this vision by 2030.

ALL AUSTINITES CAN ACCESS A FOOD SYSTEM THAT IS COMMUNITY-DRIVEN, ADDRESSES FOOD INSECURITY, PRIORITIZES REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE, SUPPORTS DIETARY AND HEALTH AGENCY, PREFERS PLANT-BASED FOODS, AND MINIMIZES FOOD WASTE.

In Travis County, 15% of our population is food insecure, and less than 1% of our food supply is produced locally. We also waste far too much food as a community. To help address these issues, collaboration will be needed with local food growers, large food purchasers, retail providers, and organizations that connect with individuals and families to make culturally relevant plant-based food desirable, easy, and affordable. Better understanding why food is wasted will be key to making sure food gets eaten and not thrown away.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM INSTITUTIONAL, COMMERCIAL, AND GOVERNMENT PURCHASING ARE REDUCED BY AT LEAST 50%.

Systemic change will begin with the City's purchasing practices, followed by recruiting organizations of all types to adopt shared sustainable purchasing standards or guidelines. Continuing to enhance the City's Circular Economy program through incentives, education, and training opportunities while tracking our emissions reduction progress will help us reach this goal.

WASTE REDUCTION, ORGANICS COMPOSTING, AND RECYCLING ARE AGGRESSIVELY PURSUED TO ACHIEVE THE WASTE REDUCTION GOALS IN THE 2023 AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

Reaching the City's zero-waste goal means empowering community members through awareness campaigns, neighborhood "Eco-hubs" for sharing and repairing items, training and workforce development opportunities, financial incentives, and updating bulk pickup programs and policies. These efforts will need to support and prioritize the needs of low-income communities, youth, and communities of color.

*Source: Austin's 2015 City-Serviced Residential Waste Characterization Study

Impact

If all the recommendations outlined in this section are implemented, the natural systems in and around Austin could sequester an additional 5% of the city's total carbon emissions.



NATURAL SYSTEMS

Natural systems are all around us. They are the plants, soils, hydrology, geology, weather patterns, and animals that are interlinked to ensure the overall health of our ecosystem. Natural systems also perform the important job of removing carbon from the atmosphere, known as carbon sequestration. They offer a multitude of health and quality of life benefits for our residents. Protecting and preserving our natural systems is an investment in our community's health, livelihood, and culture.

20,000 ADDITIONAL ACRES OF CARBON POOLS ON NATURAL LANDS ARE PROTECTED, AND ALL NATURAL AREAS ARE MANAGED WITH A FOCUS ON RESILIENCE.

When managed properly, natural lands show some of the best potential for removing carbon from the atmosphere. However, these areas can release more carbon than they take in when disturbed, becoming a carbon source rather than a carbon sink. We must preserve natural lands and manage them for resilience in the face of climate impacts such as heat, drought, flood, and wildfire, while also ensuring that all residents have access to, feel welcomed in, and reap the benefits of these natural spaces.

500,000 ACRES OF FARMLAND IN THE FIVE-COUNTY REGION ARE PROTECTED THROUGH LEGAL CONSERVATION OR REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS.

When managed through sustainable or regenerative farming practices, working lands show great potential for carbon sequestration. However, prime farmland is often prime land for development, meaning many small-scale farms are facing major pressure. Protecting prime farmland from development, incentivizing sustainable farming practices, and providing support for small-scale, local farmers will be important to achieving this goal.

AT LEAST 50% TREE CANOPY COVER IS ACHIEVED CITYWIDE BY 2050, WITH A FOCUS ON INCREASING CANOPY COVER EQUITABLY.

Urban trees and increased tree canopy cover capture carbon from the atmosphere, provide shade, reduce the heat island effect, and improve air quality, health, and quality of life outcomes. However, like natural lands, trees face many threats due to climate change. We must protect our existing trees, identify opportunities for more tree plantings, and provide for our urban forest's long-term health and resilience.

ALL CITY-OWNED LANDS ARE INCLUDED UNDER A MANAGEMENT PLAN THAT RESULTS IN NEUTRAL OR NEGATIVE CARBON EMISSIONS AND MAXIMIZES COMMUNITY BENEFITS.

Public lands provide essential benefits to our residents. They offer community access to green spaces, reduce extreme temperatures, and offer many health and quality of life benefits. To reach this goal, we must focus on acquiring and managing more natural areas and promoting community stewardship on public lands.

I'm helping to make Austin Net-Zero

painting murals

idea idea idea

vacant lot projects

I ♥ GETTING Creative

Always create

IDEAS

Organizing neighborhood CLEAN-UPS

CREATING COMMUNITY GARDENS



I beautify communities

Net-Zero Hero Raasin McIntosh

Raasin McIntosh is an Olympic and collegiate athlete and founder of the nonprofit organization Raasin in the Sun. Rooted in East Austin, Raasin in the Sun works to beautify urban communities through projects that encourage volunteers to come together and create green spaces where they can gather, grow healthy food, and create strong bonds.

"I created Raasin in the Sun to have a platform for creating various types of beautification projects ranging from building community gardens, organizing community clean-ups, painting murals, and restoring residential and vacant lots. I'm so inspired when I'm working collaboratively to transform unused places into areas of community pride where people can gather, grow healthy food, and enjoy greener and unique spaces. Bringing together volunteers to do the shared work of beautification means creating strong bonds through tackling problems together creatively."

–Raasin McIntosh

WHAT'S NEXT

The City government can do a lot to reach our climate goals, but we can't do it alone. This plan will only be as successful as the commitment and follow-through from the entire community. To bring this plan to life, we'll need to build a representative partner coalition to strategize on how to build inclusive and equitable community engagement and reach the goals outlined in Austin's Climate Equity Plan.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Be a net-zero hero in your community! Individual actions like taking sustainable transportation and using less energy at home will have the biggest impact on your personal carbon footprint. Speaking up about climate-related issues you care about and showing up to vote are other important ways to make a difference.

Read the full Austin Climate Equity Plan and learn more about how to take action at **austintexas.gov/climateplan.**

TOGETHER, WE'LL BUILD A HEALTHY AND EQUITABLE AUSTIN.

