

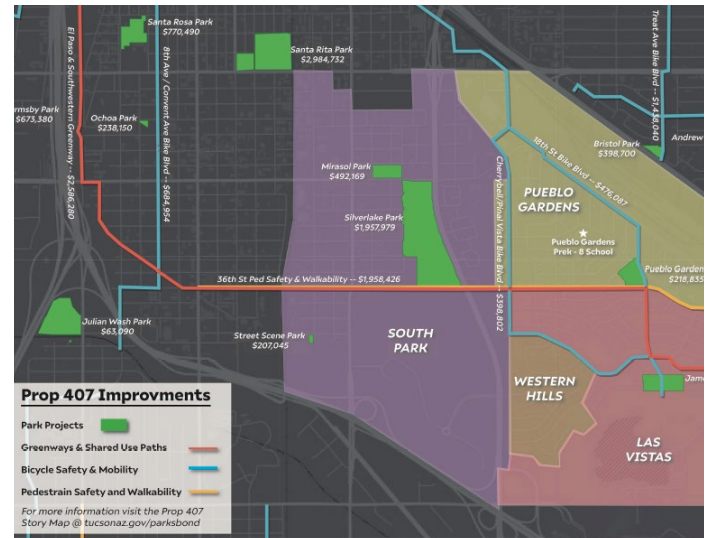
# Ready, Set, GO Bonds for Park Access

*Infrastructure for walking and biking can be seriously expensive. This fact sheet tells the story of two cities' approach to paying for parks and connections to green space: general obligation bonds.*

**General obligation bonds, or “GO bonds”** (pronounced G-O, not “go”) are essentially loans backed by the “full faith and credit” of the issuing government. General obligation bonds are a useful financing tool because once the bonds are purchased, local governments receive a large amount of funding upfront that they can then use to pay for large projects such as a park, trail, and active transportation infrastructure. Repayment is then spread over the following years.<sup>1</sup> In many states, bonds have to be approved by voters, so community support is essential. The issuing government pledges to pay back the debt from its general fund, which acquires revenue from property taxes, income taxes, sales taxes, and more. For more details on how bonds work, read ["But How Will We Pay For It?" Active Transportation Funding Mechanisms: Municipal Bonds 101](#).


## Building Parks and Park Connections - General Obligation Bond Packages in Action

**Target the right projects in a bond package:** In 2018, the City of Tucson, Arizona passed Proposition 407: Parks + Connections, a \$225 Million General Obligation bond package to fund parks and the connections to them. It started in 2015 when Living Streets Alliance, an active transportation nonprofit in Tucson, helped prepare a project list of neighborhood walkability improvements for a county bond measure. The bond measure failed, but the numbers showed significant support in the city of Tucson. In 2018, bonds held by the city were paid off so the city could replace them with new bonds and keep taxes at their same level. Parks were the priority and, during the most recent parks master planning process, a comprehensive survey indicated that biking and walking was the number two issue concerning parks. In addition to the walkability projects selected for the original bond package, many of the connection projects included in proposition 407 were identified from the Bicycle Boulevard Master Plan to connect people to everyday destinations. Put into action, that means new sidewalks, safer crossings on major streets, off-street biking and walking paths, shade trees, and traffic calming on residential streets. For more details on the project list, explore this [story map](#). The program will be implemented over 10 years (2019 to 2028).



**Build a broad coalition of partners:** In November 2020, voters in Austin, Texas approved a \$460 million General Obligation bond to support transportation improvements in the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan. This includes funding for sidewalks, urban trails, bikeways, safety improvements, Safe Routes to School, transit enhancements, and three large capital projects.<sup>2</sup> The plan includes equity guidance as well as targets such as increasing the amount of mobility funding in historically underserved areas.<sup>3</sup> Since 1992, an informal but consistent coalition of parks and trails nonprofits have been collaborating on safe and connected mobility and access to nature in Austin. Ted Siff, Board Member of Austin Outside and former Executive Director of the Austin Parks Foundation, noted that the key to their success was collaboration between many community partners to achieve clear, shared goals. His advice to other advocates looking to undertake a similar effort was to clearly define your interests and identify the many stakeholders who could benefit from achieving those interests, even if they are outside of your traditional partners.

Preparing and advocating for a bond measure is a big lift, but that work can have a huge pay-off. Consider what is feasible in your local context, and partner up to build a strong network of support. Investigate past and current bond measures in your community. What were they for? Were voters supportive, and why or why not? Is there significant public support for investing in specific issues that could connect to park access? Connect with your local parks and recreation, transportation, and/or public works department to understand their perspective on projects that could be included in a future bond package. Ultimately, that work can have a tremendous pay-off and support safer and more equitable park access for your community.

**Vote Yes on Prop B**

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Our children deserve to be safe when walking or riding to school.

— JACQUELYN, AUSTIN  
RESIDENT, DISTRICT 9

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## References

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- 2 City of Austin. 2020 Mobility Elections Proposition B, Accessed June 4, 2021. <https://austintexas.gov/2020PropB>.
- 3 Austin Transportation Department. (2019). Supporting Our Community. In Austin Strategic Mobility Plan. [https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Transportation/ASMP/ASMP\\_Chapters/AdoptedASMP\\_Chapter6\\_Community.pdf](https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Transportation/ASMP/ASMP_Chapters/AdoptedASMP_Chapter6_Community.pdf)