

Sidewalk Projects



Objective

Does the City build sidewalks in all council districts to make Austin safer and more accessible?

Background

Sidewalks help make Austin a safer and more accessible City. The 2016 Sidewalk Master Plan identified 2,400 miles of existing sidewalks across the City, but a need for 2,580 miles more.

The Master Plan gave each missing sidewalk a priority score based on how the sidewalk would increase pedestrian access and safety. The Master Plan recommended the City focus on building the highest priority sidewalks across all council districts.

Voters approved \$37.5 million as part of the 2016 local mobility bond to build new sidewalks over eight years. This bond funding is only enough to build 40 to 60 miles, addressing only 10% of the highest priority missing sidewalks or 3% of all missing sidewalks.

What We Found

Finding 1: The Sidewalks Division generally selected the highest priority locations to build sidewalks according to what each council district needs.

- The Sidewalks Division is spending 2016 bond funding on new sidewalk construction ahead of schedule but does not have enough money to address all of the missing sidewalks or even the highest priority ones.
- The Sidewalks Division can improve how they report progress toward meeting the City's needs and collect data on sidewalks built by other groups.

Finding 2: City inspectors generally made sure contractors built quality sidewalks, but inspectors need more guidance on how to document their post-construction inspections.

Finding 3: The City did not make sure all sidewalks built by City construction crews or designed by City engineers received required accessibility inspections.

- The Sidewalks Division spent a majority of funding on locations that received an accessibility inspection.
- If a sidewalk is designed or built by the City, it may not receive an accessibility inspection. 15% of funding was spent on locations that were not inspected.

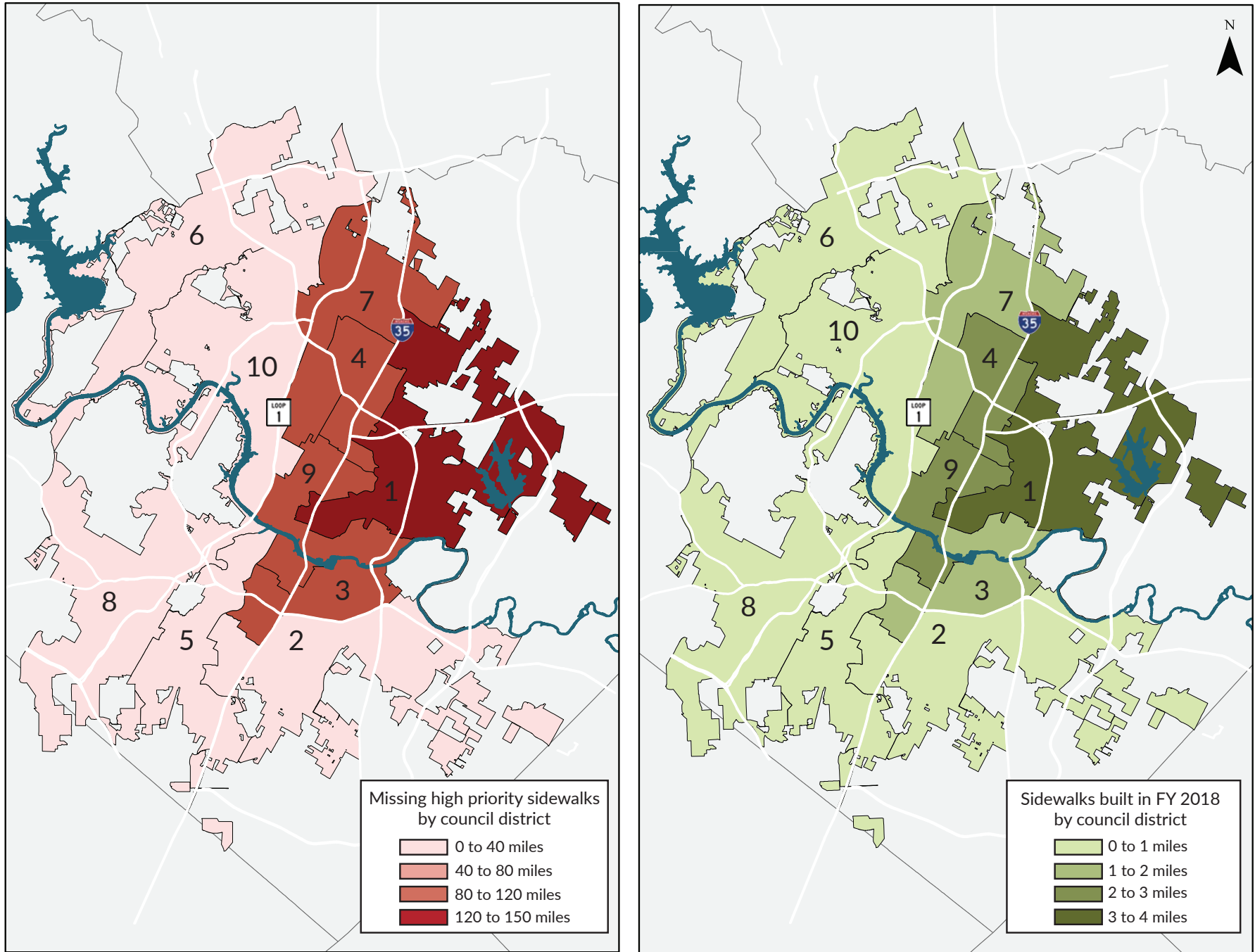
Additional Observation: The City is working on code changes to address vegetation obstruction of sidewalks.

What We Recommend

The Director of the Public Works Department should:

- develop a process to report on the Sidewalks Division's progress toward Sidewalk Master Plan goals and work with City departments and other entities to consistently collect information on sidewalks built in the City by other groups;
- update existing inspection policies for the type of contract used to build sidewalks and include a requirement for consistently documenting sidewalk inspections; and
- ensure sidewalk projects built by City crews or designed by City engineers receive required accessibility inspections.

Sidewalks built in 2018 in each district closely align with the highest priority missing sidewalks in each district identified by the Sidewalk Master Plan



SOURCE: OCA analysis of Sidewalk Master Plan and Sidewalks Division's 2018 built data for all funding sources, January 2019