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'TOD' district in Leander gets moving

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Editor's note: This is one of seven stories on large developments planned for Williamson County. See the others here.

It's been about a decade since Leander started touting TOD — transit-oriented development — around its train station that takes residents all the way to downtown Austin.

After a slow start, major tenants are bringing big buildings to life around the station — most notably Austin Community College and St. David's HealthCare, two powerhouses in the region.

There have been only smatterings of activity around Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority's MetroRail station — a new apartment complex just a stone's throw away being the most noticeable — but the projects proposed by ACC and St. David's may get the development dominoes dropping in earnest.

Over the summer, Austin Community College celebrated the topping out of its latest campus, a 100-acre project within the Leander TOD. Funded by a 2014 voter-approved bond, the ACC San Gabriel Campus will be the district's 12th campus.

The 106,000-square-foot LEED-proposed development — the first phase — is situated along San Gabriel Parkway, between the U.S. 183-A toll road and Mel Mathis Boulevard, at 640 Mel Mathis Blvd. It will have an initial capacity of 2,500 students and feature 17,500 square feet of classrooms, 4,800 square feet of science labs, space for a combined library, a learning lab, 8,600 square feet of administrative areas and 8,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor common areas. The San Gabriel Campus also will include the college's second ACCelerator learning center, a high-tech learning lab designed for individualized learning and small group sessions.

ACC is pouring about \$60 million into the project. It broke ground in May 2016 and is being built by American Constructors, which anticipates it will be completed in 2018. Pfluger Architects and SmithGroupJJR handled the design of the campus.

In May, St. David's put shovels into part of 52 acres it owns on the edge of the TOD that will eventually become a full-service hospital with 80 beds.

The first phase will yield a freestanding emergency center, which is expected to open in the first week of 2018.

The 11,200-square-foot emergency center will include a dozen rooms and advanced testing capabilities including radiological testing and a medical lab. It will be staffed by board-certified emergency medicine

physicians affiliated with St. David's HealthCare and nurses trained in emergency care.

During the emergency center's first year of operation, it is expected to hire 25 employees, including nurses, imaging personnel, laboratory personnel, registration staff and support personnel. With future construction of the 80-bed hospital, more than 200 jobs will be created.

The emergency center and hospital will serve as an extension of St. David's Round Rock Medical Center, which helped take that neighboring city's economy to new heights.