



Austin Design Commission

Board/Commission Recommendation

20140127-003A

Letter of support for considering Reconnect Austin as a fourth alternative in studies prepared by TxDOT and considered by NEPA.

Unanimously approved by the Design Commission on a 7-0 vote.

March 4, 2014

Dear Council Members,

The City of Austin Design Commission, would like to voice our support for maximizing east/west connectivity across the I-35 corridor. Currently, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) CAIP Implementation Plan calls for removing a significant amount of the limited east/west connectivity we have today. We are very concerned that the current options being studied for “improvements” to the corridor are each significantly detrimental to the qualities of urban design that the Design Commission is charged with stewardship over. Among the troublesome aspects are, modifications to 6th Street such that it will no longer cross the corridor, severing an important entrance into downtown and one of Austin’s historic streets. We are also concerned about the closure of multiple central Austin east/west connections, in favor of turn around bridges that significantly decrease connectivity and increase VMT. The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan embodies the city’s collective vision for the compact and connected city we are all working toward. New infrastructural barriers that further sever our neighborhoods are not in keeping with either that adopted vision, or the adopted Urban Design Guidelines that the Design Commission uses as a touchstone for evaluating the quality of our urban environment.

The Design Commission supports Item 25 on the Council agenda for Thursday 3/6, which calls for, “directing the City Manager to consider the tenets of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, keep the community actively informed and engaged throughout the process, and keep as a priority improved east-west connectivity when discussing the potential alternatives for I-35 corridor improvements.”

TxDOT considers their priorities on this corridor to be national commerce and national defense. While those are important priorities for an interstate, we should be giving equal weight to the needs of the City of Austin. When TxDOT prioritizes the needs of long distance trips over the needs of the City of Austin, we live with the resulting noise, pollution, depressed property values, and poor urban fabric that I-35 creates.

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We can meet TxDOT's goals and also have world-class east/west connections across I-35. Our goals should be to maximize those connections, significantly improving the limited connectivity we have today, while healing a long-standing scar in our city.

The Design Commission has thoroughly reviewed, and advocates for, a depressed I-35 through downtown Austin, with multi-modal bridges, built to our Great Street standards, throughout the corridor as it passes through our City. TxDOT has made it clear that this will be the last significant investment they make along the I-35 corridor in Central Texas. That investment should be consistent with the needs of our community and adopted city policy. Our investments in I-35 should be focused on improving the quality and livability of our urban environment.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean J. Almy III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dean J. Almy III, AIA, FFUD
Chair, City of Austin Design Commission