



Austin Design Commission

September 30, 2016

To: Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)
From: Austin Design Commission

Re: Public Feedback for I-35 Central 7 Mile Project (US 183 to Riverside Dr.)

Meeting date: September 30, 2016

Motion by: B. Whatley Seconded By: M. Gonzalez

Approved by a vote of 8-0-2, A. Coleman absent, B. Luckens recused.

The City of Austin Design Commission would like to voice support for lowering I-35 through downtown Austin (Holly St. to Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd). Lowering I-35 will provide the City with future opportunities not afforded by the elevated alternative currently being reviewed. Lowering I-35 below grade will allow the City to consider future connections across the corridor, including a future cap.

The Design Commission has previously expressed support for a design alternative that reflects the tenets of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. As stated in our letter of March 4, 2014:

“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 corridor in Central Texas. That investment should be consistent with the needs of our community and adopted by city policy. Our investments in I-35 should be focused on improving the quality and livability of our urban environment.”

We realize that your I-35 plan is a transportation solution for Central Texas, however the frontage roads between US 183 and Riverside Dr. are part of Austin’s urban core; there is a great deal of interaction with local communities in these areas. City of Austin residents currently live with the noise, pollution, depressed property values, and poor urban fabric that I-35 creates. Important details must be considered if the I-35 corridor, as it slices through the City of Austin, is to be a better neighbor to the City.

Please respond to the Design Commission, in writing, regarding our following concerns:

- Frontage road design speeds should prioritize safety for all road users. Frontage road with a maximum design speed of 35 mph, and a target speed of 30 mph are appropriate within the city limits. Speed in excess of these limits are deadly for the many people living and working along I-35 frontage roads. Describe frontage road design speeds and how they meet City of Austin Vision Zero Action Plan targets.

- Currently designed surface-level streets – frontage roads, bridges, and under-

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passes – are not designed to City of Austin adopted Complete Streets policies and design standards. Downtown, surface-level streets – frontage roads, bridges, and underpasses - are not designed to City of Austin adopted Great Streets Master Plan design standards (which apply in the downtown area and typically exceed Complete Streets standards). Describe how this project meets adopted City of Austin Complete and Great Streets standards.

- Currently designed surface-level streets and intersections are not designed for all ages, all abilities, and all modes of transportation. Surface level streets and intersections should accommodate each user safely and comfortably through a more equitable distribution of right-of-way for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit. This is important to the quality of the urban environment and can be accomplished through including narrower vehicular lanes, wider sidewalks, protected bike lanes, dedicated transit lanes, streetscape elements that provide appropriate traffic calming and comfort for pedestrians (street trees, benches, lighting, wayfinding signage, shorter crosswalks, etc.). Describe specifically how this project will address all modes of transportation in a safe and equitable way.
- As currently designed, this project does not support a robust mass transit network, including dedicated transit lanes on surface-level streets in the corridor, expanded park-and-ride facilities, safe transfers between routes, pedestrian access to all routes, and appropriate height clearances for high-capacity transit vehicles that will operate below-grade. Describe all transit network goals and how these will be achieved. A robust transit / pedestrian network is critical to the quality of the urban environment.
- The City of Austin has set ambitious goals to reduce Austin’s community-wide greenhouse emissions to zero by 2050. Describe specifically how this project will impact air quality, noise pollution, watershed protection, wildlife habitats, urban heat islands, reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, and water supplies.
- The City of Austin’s adopted comprehensive plan, Imagine Austin, calls for a compact and connected city. Describe how this project will support all eight priority programs of Imagine Austin: Compact and Connected, Healthy Austin, Creative Economy, CodeNext, Water, Environment, Affordability, and Workforce.
- The City of Austin has adopted Urban Design Guidelines. Describe how these guidelines will be met by this project.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Respectfully,



Evan K. Taniguchi, AIA
Chair