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**Sent:** Wednesday, November 29, 2017 8:36 AM

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**Subject:** Texas Capitol Complex Master Plan 2018 Update - Traffic Congestion on MLK Jr. Blvd and 15th Streets

**Importance:** High

Councilmember Houston,

Thank you for your question regarding the Texas Capitol Complex Master Plan 2018 Update and the upcoming consideration by Council of an inter-local agreement with the State. Specifically, you asked if anyone at the Austin Transportation Department (ATD) had taken counts of traffic on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd (MLK Jr. Blvd.) and on 15<sup>th</sup> Street to look at the potential impacts of the development on these east-west corridors. Assistant City Manager Robert Goode and I discussed your questions and I am responding on his behalf. I am also requesting that a copy of this e-mail be included in backup to the anticipated action on December 7<sup>th</sup>.

The State has voluntarily completed a Transportation Impact Analysis (TIA), although they maintain they are not obligated to do so since they do not require zoning changes (state land is not zoned) and they do not require building permits from the City (the State can serve as its own permitting agency). As part of the TIA, traffic counts and traffic impacts have been evaluated for both MLK Jr. Blvd and for 15<sup>th</sup> Street. The Austin Transportation Department (ATD) provided comment on the TIA to the developer's engineer as well as to the Development Services Department to be incorporated in the backup materials for the inter-local agreement being considered by Council on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

We know today, that MLK Jr. Blvd and 15<sup>th</sup> St are both heavily congested during the peak commuting periods, reaching saturation levels at the peak of the peak. It is highly likely that these two corridors will remain saturated in the future with or without the additional travel demand anticipated from the State project. We also know that along these critical corridors, there is little that can be done to provide significant new capacity – new continuous arterial lanes are unlikely to be added because of existing adjacent land uses and that most existing signals on the affected corridors are optimized for peak period saturation traffic flows. The State has agreed to make intersection improvements such as the installation of new signals and protected turn lanes along their perimeter where required and to construct access management along MLK Jr. Blvd. These improvements will improve metering of traffic onto and off of the grid and provide greater safety for pedestrians.

TxDOT has announced that they are moving forward with a plan to reconstruct IH 35 and that they are actively working on a funding plan. The IH 35 improvement project, largely based on a concept first developed by ATD, will improve transit and commuter access into downtown Austin. This plan, anticipated to start construction in the year 2020/21, will provide direct transit access into the north-end of downtown and the Capitol Complex. The plan will also improve access onto and off of IH 35 at key locations such as 15<sup>th</sup> Street and MLK Jr. Blvd. Much of the congestion in central downtown is caused by backups from IH 35 and its inability to adequately feed the connecting arterials today.

In conversations with the State Facilities Commission (the entity responsible for leading the Capitol Complex Redevelopment), ATD has recommended that they consider Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and incentivize the use of transit to reduce congestion impacts. The State has indicated that decisions to pursue TDM and to incentivize transit are a department-by-department human resource decision and that the State Facilities Commission does not have the statutory ability to commit to such actions on behalf of the individual agencies that will be co-located at the Capitol Complex in the future.

ATD believes that the greatest congestion impact from an expanded complex will be on the employees of the State agencies themselves. We believe that these new employees will naturally encourage or demand that Agency Directors pursue TDM measures as a benefit. We believe it will be difficult for the state to attract and retain a strong employee base if they do not increasingly promote TDM concepts. There are a number of TDM actions that individual agencies could pursue in partnership with regional transportation providers, including:

- participation in Movability, the Transportation Management Association for Central Texas, this organization provides commuter resources to companies to expand the use of alternative modes;
- shifting start/end times for employees at different agencies so that the peak of the peak traffic impacts are spread to the shoulders of the peak period;
- provide free access to transit on a per ride basis, similar to the benefit provided by the City to its employees to encourage alternate modal choices;
- participation in the regional ride-match and ride-share programs, with incentives for employees who use the services such as preferential vanpool/carpool parking;
- provision of subscription transit service - in this scenario, the State would provide dedicated bus service from areas where a number of their employees live such as Pflugerville that is outside the traditional Capital Metro service area – similar to the UT Shuttle System that provides basic mobility for students of a State university.