

Austin Pedestrian Advisory Council and Bicycle Advisory Council Joint Recommendation:

Active Mobility Recommendations for Texas Department of Transportation
IH-35 Capital Express Central Virtual Public Scoping Meeting #2

Recommendation - 20210405-001

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Austin Bicycle Advisory Council (BAC) is to advise the City of Austin and other jurisdictions on all matters relating to the use of the bicycle, bicycle infrastructure, and individuals of all ages and abilities who utilize bicycles;

WHEREAS, the Austin Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) advises the City of Austin and other government entities on planning, policy, design, funding, education, and enforcement regarding creating, maintaining, and operating pedestrian facilities;

WHEREAS, the Texas Department of Transportation (hereafter "TxDOT") is responsible for the planning and execution of the My35 Capital Express Central project;

Coordination Plan and Schedule

WHEREAS, TxDOT received over 2,300 comments in December 2020, from the general public, several working groups, neighborhood groups, local non-profits, Austin City Council, and City of Austin staff as a result of presentations to the public;

WHEREAS, there is plentiful research, published information, and documentation on how highways and lack of safe, easy access by all modes have impacted communities of color, people with disabilities, and working class populations;

Project Purpose and Need

WHEREAS, TxDOT has amended the Project Purpose and Need statement to emphasize enhancing safety within the corridor;

WHEREAS, TxDOT has included a presumption of increased travel time and has already projected for expansion, which negates the commitments to reduce travel time, the Road to Zero Initiative, and Vision Zero;

WHEREAS, TxDOT has stated 86% of the vehicles on I-35 are local travelers;

WHEREAS, the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan calls for improving air quality, and supporting public transit and a variety of transportation choices; reducing sprawl, congestion, travel times, and negative impacts of transportation on existing neighborhoods; safe bicycle and pedestrian access with well-designed routes that provide connectivity throughout the greater Austin area; and fiscally sound and environmentally sustainable growth;

WHEREAS, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) sets a goal of 50/50 mode share by 2039;

WHEREAS, Austin City Council Resolution 20140410-024 calls for net zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2050;

WHEREAS, the City of Austin adopted Sidewalk Master Plan / ADA Transition Plan, calls for ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) access citywide, yet ADA access is still not addressed in the revised Purpose and Need;

WHEREAS, the project traverses an urban environment;

WHEREAS, many studies, including Transportation For America's Congestion Con report, affirm that widening highways merely induces more driving and offsets short term congestion gains while impacting safety, air quality, noise, and other environmental and quality of life aspects and is therefore not an effective transportation measure;

Range of Alternatives

WHEREAS, TxDOT has publicly released the proposed designs and criteria under which all designs will be evaluated;

WHEREAS, TxDOT has not included meaningful design alternatives that would fully bury or dismantle the highway through downtown, despite plentiful data on adverse impacts on pedestrian and cyclist safety, as well as how highways have been used for segregation;

WHEREAS, TxDOT's environmental and design process give an opportunity to incorporate the most up to date safe design approach including incorporating the following elements:

- TxDOT has begun reconsidering the 85th percentile method of assigning speed limits;
- the Texas Strategic Highway Safety Plan calls for determining target speeds based upon context and using that target speed for design speed and posted speed;
- any elements of the project that are not controlled access freeways should be designed as safe multimodal urban streets that assume pedestrians will be present;
- the City of Austin speed management program includes safety proposals to use speed limits and design speeds appropriate to context;

How Alternatives will be Analyzed

WHEREAS, the project alternatives evaluation criteria includes the annual cost of delay but does not include the annual cost of traffic crashes;

WHEREAS, the project Alternatives Evaluation Criteria does not include climate change, even when transportation is the largest sector of greenhouse gas emissions;

WHEREAS, TxDOT's environmental considerations and alternatives evaluation criteria have not included air quality, and have oversimplified the evaluation of noise pollution;

WHEREAS, property values are slated to increase in proximity to the corridor as well as improvement to the crossings, and would increase the probabilities of displacement, racial displacement, and homelessness due to said improvements;

WHEREAS, all of the alternatives proposed by TxDOT, including the No-Build alternative, have significant externalities that will require extensive mitigation;

WHEREAS, the quality of ADA access needs to be evaluated and prioritized;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Bicycle Advisory Council (BAC) and Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) recommend that the following considerations be incorporated into the I-35 Cap Ex Central project:

Coordination Plan and Schedule

BE IT RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT actively collaborate with academics from Texas universities, such as Dr. Andrea Roberts at Texas A&M, with expertise in the reduction of racial impacts, destruction of historic properties, archeological sites, and cemeteries;

BE IT RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC request that TxDOT continue to work with the PAC and BAC on the project, including its more detailed aspects ;

Project Purpose and Need

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT rewrite the Project Purpose & Need to realize its commitments to the Road to Zero, Vision Zero, and ASMP plans implemented by the City of Austin, recognizing the need to reduce local usage, which comprises 86% of traffic on I-35;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT rewrite the Project Purpose & Need to state that every aspect of the project is designed and built with an inclusive access philosophy seeking to maximize safe, convenient, and enjoyable access for people with disabilities, while complying with state and federal requirements to ensure ADA access;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT include urban streetscape and human-centric design needs within the Project Purpose and Need. Design approaches should include, but are not limited to:

- Make use of the dead pocket spaces in and around the highway and under the bridges;
- Convert these non-functional spaces into quality and functional urban spaces;
- For smaller dead areas, add landscaping and for slightly bigger ones, create pocket parks that add facilities to pedestrians or bicyclists like bike parking, benches to rest, water fountains, wayfinding signs, dog waste stations;
- For cases where there is extra space around the frontage roads, instead of widening the street's width, add landscape or use space to protect the shared use paths;
- Plant trees every 20 ft. back of curb to protect vulnerable road users on shared use paths and provide shade;
- Create safe pedestrian crossings every ¼ mile;
- Minimize driveways that cross the shared use paths and combine existing driveway access where possible to help achieve this;
- All turning movements should be designed to slow vehicles and maximize the visibility and safety of vulnerable road users. Do not use slip lanes;
- Install raised pedestrian crossings.;
- Use leading pedestrian/bike intervals at every traffic light;
- Use pedestrian hybrid beacons to create signalized crossings of frontage roads mid-block;

Range of Alternatives

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT commit to a full and honest consideration of alternatives to the current proposed design, up to and including fully burying the highway

through downtown or dismantling and redesignating I-35 along another existing highway, e.g. US 183 or SH 130, to enable the City of Austin to reconnect its street grid and repair the divide that presently separates it;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT fully consider, and conduct engineering reviews for, alternatives proposed by Our Future 35, Reconnect Austin, and Rethink35 in furtherance of this goal;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT provide alternatives that preserve all existing street crossings plus restore or create new east-west street crossings, including, but not limited to, at 46th St. to Bentwood Rd., 41st St. to Wilshire Blvd., Concordia Ave., 9th St., 5th St., 3rd St., 2nd St., Driskill St. to Willow St., Holly St., East Ave. (just north of Colorado River), Reagan Terrace, Taylor Gaines St., and Mariposa Dr.;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT provide alternatives that include car-free crossings (i.e. all motor vehicles travel lanes go below the surface) at the Red Line rail & trail at 4th St., the Red Line rail & trail near 43rd St., and at Airport Blvd.;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend that TxDOT use city streets design standards based upon a maximum of 35mph design speed, and no higher than connecting urban streets, and that any feeder lanes or boulevards contain no more than two through lanes in each direction;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend that TxDOT prioritize minimizing the horizontal right of way of any roadway, and use tunnels and depressed roadways for controlled access lanes as much as possible;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend that any new lanes be dynamically tolled, which will help fund ongoing maintenance for this project, and result in higher utilization than the proposed HOV lanes, as well as fewer law enforcement officers needed to monitor compliance.

How Alternatives will be Analyzed

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT assign the highest weights to these alternative evaluation criteria:

- Safety, especially for the most vulnerable users of the road, such as pedestrians and cyclists;
- Enhancing bicycle, pedestrian and transit options;
- Improving east-west connectivity and compatibility with existing neighborhoods;
- Minimizing the disparate impact of highways on the built environment;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT assign the lowest weights to these alternative evaluation criteria:

- Increasing capacity for single occupancy motor vehicles;
- Decreasing travel time for single occupancy motor vehicles;
- Minimizing construction costs in avoidance of any of the high priority criteria above;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT recognize climate change is a critical component of public safety, and the reduction of single occupancy motor vehicle traffic is necessary to mitigate climate change, and the range of alternatives and the alternatives evaluation criteria should maximize opportunities to reduce single occupancy vehicle use and to increase other modes like transit, bicycling, and walking;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend all criteria used to measure displacement be transparent and available to the public in a timely manner;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT design all projects to allow for controlled access facilities to be designed with modern design guidance, including the most recent AASHTO Green Book, using target speeds, design speeds, and posted speeds appropriate for a dense urban context and to allow seamless and safe integration with a safe, multimodal urban street grid;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT include the annual cost of traffic crashes in the alternatives evaluation criteria;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT include an assessment of the extensive mitigation needed for each of the alternatives proposed by TxDOT, including the No Build alternative, to address significant externalities, e.g. environmental, racial justice, additional motor vehicle traffic induced onto local streets, public health, traffic injuries and fatalities, conversion of rural agricultural and natural land to developed land;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend TxDOT evaluate the alternatives based on the quality of ADA access, with the understanding that any alternative must meet minimum ADA access federal and state minimums;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC and BAC recommend that if the No-Build option is chosen, that TxDOT implement complete ADA access through the project corridor;

Date: April 5, 2021

Vote: 6-9 Boone, Selvaggio and Smith Absent (Bicycle Advisory Council)

7-0 Cox and Stratton Absent (Pedestrian Advisory Council)

Attest: Briana Cohen, Chair Bicycle Advisory Council and Kimberly Levinson, Chair Pedestrian Advisory Council

Briana Cohen

Kimberly Levinson