

**Austin Pedestrian Advisory Council and Bicycle Advisory Council Joint
Recommendation:**

**Active Mobility Recommendations for the Texas Department of Transportation IH-
35 Capital Express Central Project Feedback on Modified Alternative 3
February 15, 2022**

Recommendation # 20220215-01

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 (TxDOT) is responsible for planning and executing the I-35 Capital Express Central project;

WHEREAS, on January 25, 2022 TxDOT released design changes to I-35 Cap Ex Central referred to as Modified Alternative 3;

WHEREAS, Modified Alternative 3 makes substantive changes to the project, much of that in response to over 9,000 public comments which TxDOT received during Scoping, including robust feedback from the BAC and PAC during all three public comment periods;

WHEREAS, the BAC and PAC reiterate all previous recommendations (publicly posted on City of Austin BAC and PAC webpages for December 2020 <https://tinyurl.com/5cy3vbkv>, April 2021 <https://tinyurl.com/449xh7ck>, and August 2021 <https://tinyurl.com/3z4vayb6>) and offer additional feedback here;

WHEREAS, each year approximately a quarter of all traffic-related deaths and serious injuries in Austin city limits occur in the I-35 corridor;

WHEREAS, I-35 through Austin causes further harms to the community on a daily basis, including by worsening air and noise pollution, inhibiting east-west travel, and reducing transportation choice;

WHEREAS, in at least 14 other Texas towns and cities, I-35 runs around and not through those places' central business districts, a practice common with highways across the US;

WHEREAS, running an interstate highway through Austin's center depresses property values and limits tax revenues;

WHEREAS, the BAC and PAC recognize I-35's origins as reflecting racially discriminatory practices, impacts that continue to have disproportionate impacts on communities of color;

WHEREAS, in 2014, four years after TxDOT had widened Houston's Katy Freeway to 23 lanes at a cost of \$2.8 billion, \$1.63 billion more than the original estimate of \$1.17 billion, afternoon commutes had increased by 55%;

WHEREAS, Transportation For America's "Congestion Con" report states "We added 30,511 new freeway lane-miles in the largest 100 urbanized areas between 1993 and 2017, an increase of 42 percent. That rate of expansion significantly outstripped the 32 percent growth in population in those regions over the same time period. Yet this strategy has utterly failed to "solve" congestion... We are spending billions to widen roads and seeing unimpressive, unpredictable results in return;"

WHEREAS, TxDOT staff, in a public briefing to Austin's City Council on 8/30/2021, clearly stated that they know this project will not relieve congestion;

WHEREAS, in resolution number 0210907-02A, the City of Austin Urban Transportation Commission (UTC) urges TxDOT "in the strongest possible way to abandon the I-35 Capital Express project";

WHEREAS, under the I-35 Capital Express Central project, TxDOT's proposals to expand I-35 will cause significant displacement of existing homes and local business;

WHEREAS, transportation is the single largest source of greenhouse gasses (GHG) in Austin;

WHEREAS, the RMI SHIFT (State Highway Frequency of Induced Travel) Calculator shows that the number of highway lane miles added with this project, 45 lane miles per TxDOT, will significantly contribute to an unfolding global climate crisis by generating 273 to 409 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) annually, generating millions of metric tons of carbon dioxide;

WHEREAS, this project will further entrench a car culture that disproportionately burdens low income communities of color; socially isolates community members; and perpetuates car-centric land use, practical, and cultural systems in which car ownership is necessary to fully access opportunities;

WHEREAS, adding more motor vehicle traffic to state and local streets in Central and South Austin, will result in:

- A poorer experience for all road users & residents, including those driving, walking, bicycling, taking transit, living at home, working at offices, living out-and-about, and others
- A less safe experience for those walking and bicycling on those streets;

WHEREAS, TxDOT has an obligation to adhere to adopted key provisions in every major City of Austin plan, including the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, City of Austin Vision Zero goals, Austin Street Design Guide, City of Austin Great Streets Master Plan, and Austin Climate Equity Plan (see Appendix A for specific provisions);

WHEREAS, transformative measures must be taken to address the multiple ways I-35 harms the local community;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the BAC and PAC recommend TxDOT add the following list of improvements to the modified Alternative 3, which we in no way intend to suggest approval of any expansion of single occupant vehicle lane miles in making these recommendations:

- Create a continuous boulevard, designed to NACTO Urban Street guidelines, from Cesar Chavez to Airport Blvd;
- Redesign all elements of this project, including bridges, intersections, crossings, caps, and stitches, based on that continuous boulevard;
- Vehicle travel lanes on all surface streets, including frontage roads and boulevards in urban areas, should be no wider than 11 ft. (as allowed in TxDOT's Roadway Design Manual (RDM));
- Where there is complete highway corridor reconstruction, crossings for people walking, biking, and using personal mobility devices must be at-grade, safe, ADA compliant, and comfortable in all areas;
- Where there is partial highway corridor reconstruction, e.g. north of 51st Street, bike/ped bridges should be added for safety;

- Connect all infrastructure for people walking, biking, and using personal mobility devices into the larger City of Austin connected active mobility network, such as allowing direct active travel between Willow and Spence street to the proposed shared-use path;
- Design fully protected intersections for people walking, biking, and using personal mobility devices, including: raised pedestrian tables, street trees, curb ramps, leading pedestrian/bike intervals, and bike signals at intersections;
- Identify a design alternative to the Single-Point Urban Interchange (SPUI) which better balances the needs of all roads users, putting less emphasis on high-speed vehicular movements and more priority on people walking, biking, and using personal mobility devices;
- Put the intersection of Airport Blvd. and the I-35 boulevard lanes (frontage road) below grade, in order to facilitate an at-grade pedestrian, bicycle, and urban friendly crossing and experience;
- Do not use free right turns along frontage roads or urban boulevards. There are alternative solutions that should be implemented, for large truck requiring radii, which are safer for people walking, biking, and using personal mobility devices;
- Plant street trees to provide shade and comfort, protect people from moving vehicles, and mitigate air pollution;
- Implement a roadway victims memorial along I-35, in consultation with the families of traffic victims;
- Provide mitigation funding to be used for active transportation projects nearby but away from the project corridor, in order to mitigate the increased motor vehicle volume resulting from the project;
- Continue to include car-free crossings for the Red Line Parkway at both locations (4th St. and near 43rd St.);
- Do not use clear zones along frontage roads or urban boulevards at the surface;
- Design all surface elements of the project as multimodal urban streets matching the design speed of connecting City of Austin streets, including 25mph for all sections of the Cap Ex central project;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the BAC and PAC urge Austin City Council and the Travis County Commissioner's Court to call for a thorough study of better using existing facilities, such as SH-130, to incentivize non-local motor-vehicle traffic, including heavy trucks with low-visibility and longer reaction times, to travel around, rather than through, central Austin;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the BAC and PAC would like to see TxDOT's detailed plans to reroute traffic during construction, before a final design is identified;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the BAC and PAC urge Austin City Council and City staff and TxDOT to work together to fully evaluate the community alternatives to I-35 expansion, including Reconnect Austin and Rethink35.

APPENDIX A: Excerpts from key City of Austin plans

Austin Strategic Mobility Plan

- Mode split goals by 2039: 50% drive alone, 16% transit, 14% telework, 11% carpool/taxicab/other, 5% bicycle, 4% walk
- Reduce the amount of time workers spend traveling between home and work
- Build a transportation network that encourages social interaction
- Promote a balanced transportation network
- Promote economic growth for individuals and the city through strategic investments in transportation networks
- Lower the cost of traveling in Austin by providing affordable travel options
- Lower the risk of travel-related injury and promoting public health
- Draw inspiration from forward-looking cities around the world, change the way we think about what's possible, and set an example for the rest of the country

City of Austin Vision Zero goals

- Zero annual vehicular-related deaths and serious injuries within Austin city limits
- Prioritize the protection of human life over all else in the planning, design, and operation of Austin's transportation network
- Recognize the expanding needs of different users and modes on the transportation network
- Manage for safe speeds
- Minimize the safety risks of highways

Austin Street Design Guide

- All project elements that are not controlled access facilities should be designed as safe, multimodal facilities with target, posted, and design speeds of 35mph or less

- NACTO guides, such as the Urban Street Design Guide, should also be used as additional design guidance for all elements of the project that are not controlled access facilities
- All controlled access facilities should be designed with similar up to date design guidance, including the most recent AASHTO Green Book, with sufficiently low target, posted, and design speeds for a dense urban context and to allow seamless and safe integration with a safe, multimodal urban street grid

Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan

- Public and private sectors work together to improve our air quality
- Support public transit and a variety of transportation choices, while reducing sprawl, congestion, travel times, and negative impacts on existing neighborhoods
- Safe bicycle and pedestrian access with well-designed routes that provide connectivity throughout the greater Austin area
- Ensure that growth is both fiscally sound and environmentally sustainable

City of Austin Great Streets Master Plan

- Create an environment that is safe, generous enough for multi-purpose use, and sheltered from the elements
- Calm traffic movement in downtown; accommodate automobile traffic to downtown and discourage traffic through downtown
- Recognize the primacy of the grid in the downtown and optimize its use

Austin Climate Equity Plan

- Reach net zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, equitably
- Reduce the carbon and pollution impacts of vehicles by helping as many community members as possible to move around Austin without cars
- Create low-carbon or people-powered options by increasing access to transit and improving our bicycle network, sidewalks, and street crossings
- Protect our existing trees, identify opportunities for more tree plantings, and provide for our urban forest's long-term health and resilience

Date: February 15th 2022

Vote: 14-0 with Johansen, Rosenbloom, Gros, Case and Riegel absent

Attest: Christopher Parks, Staff Liaison *Christopher Parks*



Curtis Rogers
BAC Chair



Katherine Cox
PAC Chair



Chris Anderson
PAC Vice Chair