



Recommendation for Action

File #: 22-2923, **Agenda Item #:** 59.

9/29/2022

Posting Language

Approve a resolution authorizing the submittal of the Our Future 35: Connecting Equitably Study as a candidate for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot program, administered by the United States Department of Transportation, for funding and planning needs associated with the I-35 Cap and Stitch initiative.

Lead Department:

Corridor Program Office.

Fiscal Note:

This item has no fiscal impact. A city funding match (20%) is required and available from the Austin Transportation Department operating funds, fiscal year 2023.

For More Information:

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Additional Backup Information:

The City seeks funding for planning needs associated with the I-35 Cap and Stitch initiative, in the form of the Our Future 35: Connecting Equitably Study, from the United States Department of Transportation's (US DOT) Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) program. The RCP program is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the most significant federal transportation investment made in decades, that provides discretionary funding for planning and capital construction. Funds for the Fiscal Year 2022 RCP Program planning grants are to be awarded on a competitive basis for projects that reconnect communities by removing, retrofitting, or mitigating highways or other transportation facilities that create barriers to community connectivity, including mobility, access, or economic development. \$50 million is available to be awarded by the US DOT for RCP program planning grants, with the award size not to be greater than \$2 million.

Per the resolution under consideration for this item, Council authorizes the City Manager to submit an application for planning grant funding for the Our Future 35: Connecting Equitably Study.

Austin's Our Future 35 is a community-centered plan to co-create new community spaces over I-35 that connect downtown, improve mobility, and provide community amenities. With the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) proposing to lower I-35 with their Capital Express Central Project, Austin has a unique opportunity to re-stitch our community by creating community benefits for those who past decisions have harmed most.

Our Future 35 consists of three interrelated components:

- I-35 Capital Express Central project (TxDOT)
- I-35 Cap & Stitch structures over the highway (COA)
- Policy and Planning studies for the surrounding communities affected by past infrastructure in the I-35

central corridor (COA)

Our Future 35 will assist in making significant strides toward unifying and mending the divide created with the original construction of I-35 by replacing it with amenities that celebrate and connect all Austinites in the form of new east to west connections (stitches) and large decks (caps) through downtown Austin. The Our Future 35: Connecting Equitably Study will ensure that new infrastructure over I-35 connects seamlessly to surrounding cultural and transportation networks. This mobility study will identify infrastructure improvements needed to connect our cultural assets, city and social services, parks, historical sites and housing to the new public spaces over I-35.

The Our Future 35: Connecting Equitably Study will identify discrete, strategic actions and recommendations for improvements including, but not limited to, the following:

- Identify how new caps and stitches will tie into surrounding multimodal transportation networks (including vehicular, transit, bike, pedestrian, and recreational networks) to provide equitable mobility options and unlock access for people in a historically underserved area to safely access transit, schools, employment centers, and other vital destinations.
- Work alongside our recently initiated Developing Equitably Study to identify supportive mobility improvements to affordable housing, local businesses, other community benefits and anti-displacement efforts.
- Extend our understanding of transit needs and priorities for serving the new destinations created with caps and stitch amenities.
- Evaluate the environmental justice and health impacts of proposed transportation investments on residents, including improved air quality, increased shade, easy access to transportation options, and connectivity to healthy food options.

The Our Future 35: Connecting Equitably Study project limits coincide with TxDOT's Capital Express Central segment between SH 71 (Ben White Boulevard) and US 290 East and a focus on the segment between Lady Bird Lake and Airport Boulevard.

The proposed planning study is located in Council Districts #1, 2, 3, 4, and 9 with an estimated cost of \$1.4 million. The award of any grant funds will require the City to match funding by entering into an Agreement for Award with the US DOT or its designee. Final grant applications are due on October 13, 2022.

Strategic Outcome(s):

Mobility, Economic Opportunity and Affordability, Health and Environment, Culture and Lifelong Learning.