



North Loop Neighborhood Association

<https://northloopatx.org>

To our Fellow Citizens, the Mayor, and City Council of Austin, Texas:

**The members of the North Loop Neighborhood Association along with our friends in the Skyview and Ridgetop neighborhoods support the draft resolution sponsored by our neighborhood Council Members Vela and Qadri, along with their colleagues Council Members Fuentes, Velasquez, and Alter, regarding TXDOT's proposed expansion to I-35 adjacent to our neighborhoods in North-Central Austin.**

We previously provided TXDOT with our comments to the proposed expansion alternatives during TXDOT's brief notice and comment period in 2021. In that letter, we expressed concerns that the favored build alternatives would radically reduce our quality of life while expanding the many east-west divides in our city. As the draft resolution recognizes, TXDOT's adopted plan does not fully address these concerns.

It is difficult for our community to support a proposal to expand a highway that has a deep history of dividing the city without providing significant and meaningful improvements in connections across it. Capping the highway downtown does offer a monumental opportunity to reconnect our urban fabric and to symbolically unite the geographic division that began with the 1928 master plan. However, the downtown effort alone does not adequately address the wide-spread east-west barriers that I-35 represents today. In fact, the planned expansion erects new barriers outside the downtown core. For example, 51<sup>st</sup> Street is currently the only crossing in our area between Airport Blvd. and U.S. 290, a distance of 1.5 miles. Although adequate when I-35 was originally planned, it is no longer sufficient due to the development of Mueller community and anticipated growth along the Airport and Cameron Road corridors.

These neighborhoods and communities—North Loop, Ridgetop, Skyview, Highland, Mueller, Windsor Park, St. John's, and so many others—are precisely where lower and middle income residents have congregated in search of affordable housing in the new central city. We depend on adequate east-west crossings to reach essentials, such as employment, education, healthcare, and food. We rely on these crossings to connect with our families, friends, and neighbors. Our choices with respect to I-35 must not come at the cost of those in our city who are the most vulnerable, those who we have been pushed out and forgotten. This would be an unfortunate repeat of mistakes of the past that make this highway so divisive.

Thankfully, the draft resolution before you, at its heart, is focused on a substantial increase in east-west connections while allowing for even more significant efforts in the future as the means and abilities of our city grow along with our population. We wish to emphasize this focus in our support for this resolution and appreciate that the resolution extends these ambitions to include not only the central city corridor but also the already-approved sections to the north and the south.

For better or worse, this highway is part of our neighborhood and traveling on, across or along I-35 is a daily reality for residents in our community. As some of the stakeholders most personally and directly impacted by this project, we are willing to work with the City and TXDOT on a more aspirational vision for this roadway. One that emphasizes the health and safety of the residents who live along its borders, one that makes space for an expanding new public transportation system, one that does not cement into the earth the fossil fuel-based transportation of the last century but is flexible enough to anticipate the technologies of the next generation. We view this highway expansion as much more than a simple roadway – and hope that you do as well.

We encourage the Mayor and the rest of Council to vote to adopt this resolution unanimously and hope and trust that our support will allow our representatives to amplify our voice to those who need to hear it.

Sincerely,

**The members of the North Loop Neighborhood Association and our friends in Skyview and Ridgetop.**