

Hyde Park Neighborhood Association

P.O. Box 49427 • Austin, TX 78765 • www.austinhdepark.org

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VIA EMAIL AND USPS

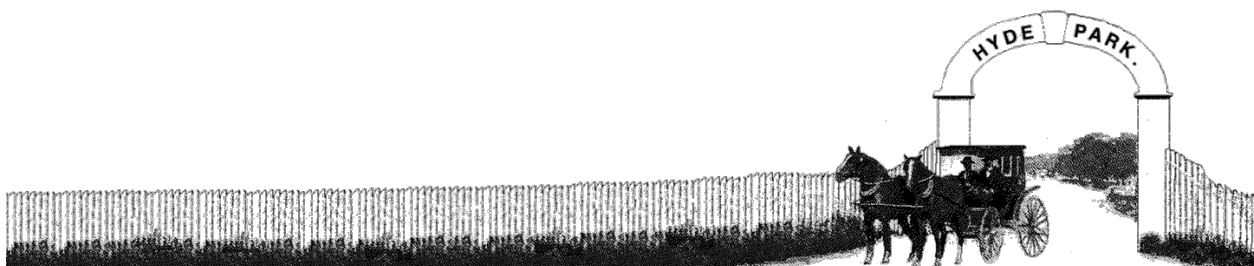
XX February 2023

Dear Mr. Williams, Mr. Abrego, Mr. Ferguson, and Mrs. Ashley-Nguyen,

The Hyde Park Neighborhood Association (HPNA) submits the following feedback on the Texas Department of Transportation's I-35 Capital Express Central Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Decades of uncertainty over the future of Interregional Highway 35 (I-35) have blighted and disconnected neighborhoods along it; impeded east-west travel and imperiled the safety of people traveling on foot, by bicycle, and in cars; and left residents concerned for the long-term health of their families and communities. A renovation is long overdue.

But expanding the Central Segment of I-35 is not the answer. We can reasonably agree that improvements to I-35 are badly needed, but we also recognize that when TxDOT expands capacity on our roadways more vehicle traffic follows, congestion worsens, and the roadways become more dangerous. Neighborhoods through which TxDOT has chosen to expand highways disproportionately bear the brunt of increased pollution, negative financial impacts, and years of construction disruption.



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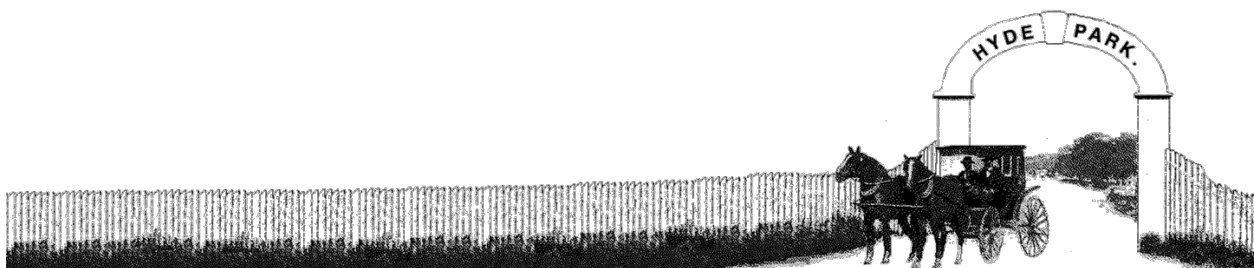
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As a pragmatic response to the DEIS, HPNA recognizes that TxDOT possesses the directive and funding to expand the physical footprint of I-35 as part of its Capital Express Central project; and, despite growing concerns that previous community comments are not sufficiently reflected in current design alternatives, we accept the need to work with TxDOT in this current project to minimize the many negative outcomes for human health and vibrancy in central Austin neighborhoods.

For almost 50 years, HPNA has fostered a closer, more genuine community of neighbors and to preserve and improve the historic and unique character, amenities, and ecology of the neighborhood. The current I-35 expansion proposal is incompatible with our shared goals of creating a healthy neighborhood and represents a potential permanent barrier to accomplishing them in the future.

Therefore, HPNA calls for revisions to TxDOT's Preferred Alternative "Modified Alternative 3" and conditions any future support for TxDOT's expansion of I-35 upon TxDOT and the City of Austin committing to the following design elements for the entire Central Segment:

- **Increase the total number and frequency of at-grade crossings.** I-35 severely limits east and west access between neighborhoods and creates unnecessary obstacles to travel. Modified Alternative 3 does not provide badly-needed additional crossing opportunities, maintaining disconnection between neighborhoods. At a minimum, TxDOT should provide a fully accessible crossing at least every half mile on I-35 and pedestrians and bicyclists should never be relegated to tunnels or raised crossings simply to cross the street.
- **Enable covering I-35 in north central Austin and other locations not previously supplied by TxDOT.** "Decking" or "capping" over the highway provides clear community benefit by removing noise and air pollution from neighborhoods and creating new shared public spaces. TxDOT should commit to designing for future covering of I-35 through residential neighborhoods along I-35, not just in central business districts as currently proposed. Trade-offs such as removal of ramps should be weighed against other community benefits that may be achieved through additional covering of I-35.



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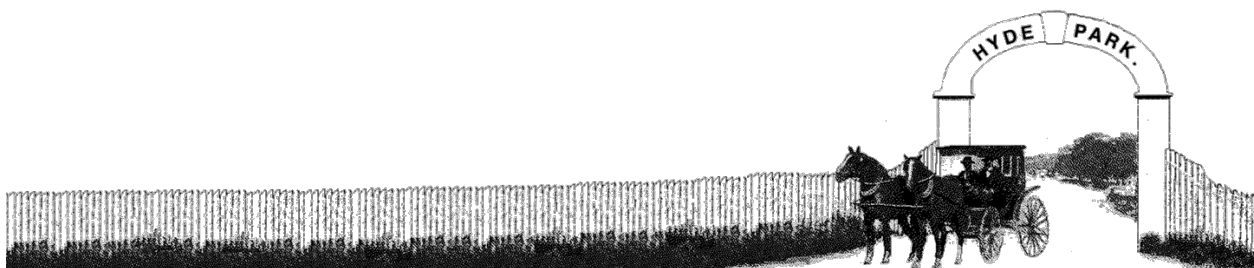
- **Reduce the physical impact of I-35 on surrounding neighborhoods.** Surface streets should reflect City of Austin standards, including street trees and designs that are compatible with urban neighborhoods. The current plans do not sufficiently support the safety, comfort, and health of all users. TxDOT has demonstrated the ability to work within areas of limited right-of-way width in this project; this innovation should be employed more extensively to reduce crossing distances and additional property purchases needed for the project, designed to 30 mph speeds or less, and be limited to no more than two lanes in each direction.
- **Reduce through-traffic in the city center.** Incentives to direct through-traffic to SH130, especially freight traffic, should be prioritized over an expansion of I-35 that accommodates more vehicles moving through the center of Austin. Expanded capacity of I-35 will compound environmental and human health damage on nearby residents. Encouraging traffic to shift to SH130 may also help reduce overall project costs. This project should include means to reduce the traffic volume in central Austin, not encourage more traffic.

We also call on City Council and the City of Austin to support the health of residents and neighborhoods—who are affected daily by I-35 and face the harm of increased air, water and noise pollution, health impacts such as asthma, particularly in children, and who will live with nearly a decade of construction impacts if this project moves forward—by identifying and supporting revisions to Modified Alternative 3 that further common goals of health, access, and community strength.

Each time TxDOT has acted on community input on I-35, a better version of the project has followed. The current design will benefit from greater, deliberate engagement with HPNA and its close neighbors, and we look forward to seeing revisions to put this project on a path toward better supporting the needs of travelers and commuters as well as the communities who live with I-35 every day.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Heyburn, HPNA President
On behalf of the Hyde Park Neighborhood Association



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CC: Congressman Lloyd Doggett, District 37
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Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14
Representative Gina Hinojosa, District 46
Representative Sheryl Cole, District 49
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