

Business groups oppose call to delay I-35 central corridor reconstruction process

AUSTIN, TEXAS—Today, the Austin Area Research Organization, the Downtown Austin Alliance, the Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Opportunity Austin and the Real Estate Council of Austin announced their joint opposition to Item 45 at Thursday's Austin City Council meeting to delay the I-35 reconstruction process for the portion of the highway that runs through Central Austin.

"Pausing action on this highway improvement project, which will take years, will result in more of what we currently have: a highly congested, unsafe barrier between East and West Austin," Dewitt Peart, president and CEO of the Downtown Austin Alliance, said. "For years, our community has worked together on this process to reconnect Austin in a safe, sustainable and forward-looking manner."

As part of the I-35 Capital Express Central environmental study, TxDOT conducted a Carbon Monoxide Traffic Air Quality Analysis to assess whether the proposed project would adversely affect local air quality by contributing to CO levels. Analysis results for each alternative scenario indicate that CO concentrations are not expected to exceed the national standard, even assuming the worst-case condition. Adding managed lanes to I-35 will result in 20,000 people each day shifting modes from single occupancy vehicles to buses and carpools. Updated technology and increased use of electric vehicles will also be contributing factors in improving air quality.

TxDOT has stated that if additional air quality data becomes available, TxDOT will review the analysis to determine whether additional mitigation is needed.

The I-35 Capital Express Central project will also upgrade the current, decades-old stormwater collection system to 2023 standards. The construction of a drainage tunnel along I-35 between Airport Boulevard and Cesar Chavez Street and down Cesar Chavez Street to US 183 will provide relief to the existing Waller Creek and Boggy Creek drainage systems. None of these upgrades will happen without the project moving forward.

"Delaying this project is tantamount to not building it because the result of any delay will be ongoing congestion, unreliable routes for transit and emergency service vehicles, and 1960's water quality infrastructure," Michelle Adams Earley, chair of the Transportation Committee at the Austin Area Research Organization, said. "We have the opportunity to improve not just mobility through Austin, but also quality of life. Inaction is not an option. It will result in negative impacts to the environment and for residents."

Since the 1950s, the 10-mile portion of I-35 that runs through Central Austin has been one of Austin's biggest community barriers, dividing East and West Austin. TxDOT's proposal will lower the highway, remove the upper decks and make possible a community-driven vision for public spaces for Austin now and in the future. This is the result of TxDOT actively working in partnership with the community for much of the past decade to envision this project.

In addition to CapEx Central, TxDOT is working closely with the community on a variety of projects around Austin including Loop 360, FM 969 and Project Connect, which includes accommodating construction of Austin Light Rail across I-35 and multiple TxDOT rights of way.



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