



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Joint Sustainability Committee

Recommendation Number 20250423-006: I-35 Cap-and-Stitch

WHEREAS, the Joint Sustainability Committee and the Office of Climate Action and Resilience have identified billions of dollars of needed investments to meet the goals of the Austin Climate Equity Plan; and

WHEREAS, there is not currently sufficient funding from taxes, financing, grants or other sources to meet all needed local climate investment needs; and

WHEREAS, climate investments will already be competing with all other community needs (such as pools, senior centers, and libraries) when bonds are put forward to voters in 2026; and

WHEREAS, capping and stitching segments of I-35 won't advance the goals of the Austin Climate Equity Plan because this strategy won't reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and

WHEREAS, capping and stitching segments of I-35 won't reduce local air pollution at the regional or neighborhood level;¹ and

WHEREAS, capping and stitching segments of I-35 will require a tremendous amount of concrete and steel, both of which contain embedded greenhouse gas emissions from their production, resulting in increase in Austin greenhouse gas footprint; and

WHEREAS, the large fans that will be installed to run when traffic is stopped under the caps (which is likely to be often), will require energy to run and will increase the city's greenhouse gas footprint; and

WHEREAS, the ongoing cost of maintaining the caps will be a perpetual drain on already-tight city finances, forcing more trade-offs that will likely reduce funding availability for climate projects; and

¹ Neighborhood level air pollution could be improved if longer sections of the highway were capped and the air from inside the tunnel was captured and vented high into the air, but this would still contribute to the region's air pollution.

WHEREAS, air pollution is well-known to be elevated beyond healthy levels within 500-1,000 feet of major roadways, especially busy highways like I-35; and

WHEREAS, the “park” resulting from capping the segment of I-35 between Cesar Chavez St and 4th St would be adjacent to 8 lanes of traffic on one side and 20 lanes on either end, making this a high-risk area for children, the elderly and anyone with respiratory or cardiac conditions; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin owns or can purchase better quality and better situated land at a more affordable price that will better suit the needs of the community, compared to capping and stitching segments of I-35;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Joint Sustainability Committee recommends against funding I-35 cap and stitch projects and for reserving limited funding for climate investments and other more pressing needs in the Austin community.