



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Gina Fiandaca
Assistant City Manager for Mobility at City of Austin

Tucker Ferguson, P.E.
TxDOT Austin District Engineer

DATE: June 9, 2022

SUBJECT: City of Austin and TxDOT Update for the I-35 Capital Express Central Project

TxDOT and the City of Austin continue to meet weekly to ensure the I-35 Capital Express Central project:

- Improves safety and mobility for all modes of transportation.
- Operates efficiently for local and through traffic.
- Increases connectivity within Austin.
- Reflects community values.

The federal Environmental Impact Statement is evaluating alternative 2, modified alternative 3 and the no-build option.

The technical team is currently conducting studies on potential impacts or improvements to water resources, climate change, air quality, traffic noise, the community, vegetation and wildlife, threatened and endangered species, indirect and cumulative impacts, historical/archeological resources, hazardous material sites, land use, and parkland.

Volunteer Opportunity in Community Engagement (VOICE) Bike/Pedestrian Meeting

TxDOT hosted the seventh VOICE (Volunteer Opportunity in Community Engagement) meeting on April 12, 2022. This meeting was held at Huston-Tillotson University to gather community suggestions on how people can walk and bike through the corridor. Approximately 60 people were in attendance.

As a reminder, the alternatives include:

- More than 18 miles of new shared-use paths going north and south on both sides of I-35.
- Vehicle bypass lanes to reduce through car traffic at intersections.
- 13 connections to urban trail and bicycle networks.
- Widening of 13 existing east-west crossings to 30 feet on each side for a total of 60 feet for those that walk and bike.

- Construction of new bicycle-pedestrian crossings at 4th Street, 51st Street, Red Line at Airport Boulevard and Lady Bird Lake.
- Additional bicycle-pedestrian crossings at 3rd Street and 15th Street proposed in modified alternative 3.

What we heard:

- Separate bikes from pedestrians.
- Build stairs to pedestrian bridges and bicycle access ramps for stairways.
- Add shade structures on the bridges.
- Construct a barrier (greenery, bollards, bumps) between the road and those that bike and walk.
- Include smart lights at signals and areas under bridges.
- Eliminate free right turns.
- Add pedestrian hybrid beacons at locations where there isn't a signal on single-point urban interchanges.
- Avoid pedestrian tunnels.

TxDOT and the city will work together over the summer to refine the alternatives and incorporate this feedback into the alternatives, where reasonable and responsible.

Community Pop-up Events

TxDOT is meeting with underserved and diverse groups of Austinites in high-traffic areas through community pop-up events. Tables are set up to provide information about the updated alternatives, gather input and document concerns. In addition, design consultants are available to discuss the project's aesthetic elements, such as shade structures, landscaping and areas for possible murals or panels. Translators are on hand to share this information with our Spanish-speaking community.

Details for these pop-up events follow:

- Locations / Dates
 - Citi Trends – March 22, 2022.
 - Goodwill Central Texas, Riverside Location – March 23, 2022.
 - Goodwill Central Texas, Airport Location – March 24, 2022.
 - Mueller Farmer's Market – April 10, 2022.
 - Spring Fling at Branch Park Pavilion – April 23, 2022.
 - The Future of Downtown at Waterloo Amphitheater – June 1, 2022.
- Statistics
 - 143 people reached, including many not previously aware of the project.
- Future Pop-up Events
 - Juneteenth - June 18, 2022.

Secretary Buttigieg's Visit to Austin

During the March 16, 2022, meeting with U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, TxDOT, the city and CapMetro discussed Project Connect, the I-35 Capital Express Program and the opportunity to build deck plazas to reunite east and west Austin. His visit provided a chance to highlight local support for needed transportation enhancements and the need for federal support for our major

infrastructure projects. This meeting also highlighted the partnerships between our local agencies to address safety, population growth and aging infrastructure in the metro area.

Klyde Warren Park and Southern Gateway Tour

The Downtown Austin Alliance arranged for the city, TxDOT and Waterloo Greenway staff to visit both deck plaza projects in Dallas on April 11, 2022. The trip allowed the various teams to get first-hand knowledge of the collaboration efforts between the City of Dallas, TxDOT and private foundations.

Klyde Warren Park is a 5.2-acre public park built over the Woodall Rogers Freeway to revitalize downtown Dallas. It opened in 2012 and was funded through federal, regional and city funds as well as private donations. More than half of the funds for construction and development of the park came from private donations. The park is operated by the private Klyde Warren Park Foundation.

Southern Gateway deck plaza Phase 1 is currently under construction. The park is a public/private project between the City of Dallas, North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), TxDOT and the Southern Gateway Public Green Foundation. The future 2.8-acre deck park will span I-35E in southern Dallas, adjacent to the Dallas Zoo and reconnect historic Oak Cliff. It is hoped that the park will generate economic investment in the surrounding low-income area. The park is expected to open in 2024.

A major take away from the tour is the importance of programming the areas for Austin's Cap and Stitch project as part of preliminary design. Any water features, restrooms, food truck parking or buildings must be designed, and weight loads calculated for each of the beams along the corridor where a cap will be placed, before construction begins.

The city has recently hired the firm Arup to further develop the programming, concepts and design of the highway cap and stitch improvements. Working in conjunction with TxDOT, Downtown Austin Alliance and the community, the city and Arup will develop the cap and stitch project to 30% design in anticipation of including structures design into the TxDOT design build contract for the I-35 Capital Express Central project. TxDOT is including the deck plaza location in the environmental clearance process. If the I-35 Capital Express Central project moves forward with one of the two build alternatives, the design-build contract will go out for bid in 2024. The city is also working on a funding strategy for the deck plazas that will include pursuit of funding opportunities that are part of the recently passed bipartisan infrastructure bill.

The TxDOT and city project teams have identified approximately 14.5 acres of space where deck plazas could be constructed, given recent analysis of modified alternative 3; the area of opportunity decreases in alternative 2, particularly in the area from Cesar Chavez to 5th Street.

TxDOT has identified additional deck plaza feasibility near the University of Texas (UT) campus. Both the TxDOT and city teams are coordinating with UT campus leadership on these potential opportunities.

Alternative 2 – Possible Deck Plaza Exhibit: https://my35capex.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/M35-CapEx-C-ALT2-Deck-Plaza-Exhibit_20220125-1.pdf

Alternative 3 – Possible Deck Plaza Exhibit: <https://my35capex.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CapEx-Central-B-RD-Alt3-MOD-DP-ST-Exhibit-Complete.pdf>

Next Steps for TxDOT, include:

- Hosting additional VOICE meetings and pop-up events.
- Continuing on-going technical focus workshops with the City of Austin.
- Developing various environmental studies proposed to be completed by the end of the year.
- Completing the visual improvement package (aesthetics) this summer.
- Presenting a preferred alternative in winter 2022/2023 at a public hearing.
- Presenting the selected alternative in the combined final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision, anticipated summer 2023.

Next Steps for City of Austin include:

- Public kickoff of next phase of preliminary engineering and design with the Arup team in summer 2022.
- Kickoff of “Connecting Equitably” economic analysis and community benefits study with the Austin Economic Development Corporation in summer 2022.
- Continued coordination with TxDOT and partner agencies on the I-35 Capital Express Central project and Cap and Stitch/Deck Plazas projects design and alternatives analysis.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager, City of Austin

Diann Hodges, Southwest Texas Communications Director, Texas Department of Transportation