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*VIA EMAIL*

07 March 2023

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

On behalf of the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC), I am writing to provide formal feedback on TxDOT's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to be included in the official record for the project.

For over twenty years, NCINC has advocated for better outcomes for neighbors who live with I-35 on a daily basis. Our twelve Member Neighborhood Associations (Blackland, Cherrywood, Delwood II, Eastwoods, Hancock, Holy Cross, Hyde Park, Mueller, North Loop, Ridgetop, Schieffer-Willowbrook, Wilshire Wood/Delwood I, and Windsor Park) cover more than 7 square miles in central Austin and are bordered by more than 3 miles of I-35. There is no population in Austin that will be more profoundly affected by the reach of this project than we are.

As provided in our previous responses to the I-35 Capital Express Central Project, NCINC commends TxDOT for its commitment to removing the upper decks and lowering main lanes through much of the project area. We concur with TxDOT that a reconstruction of I-35 to implement modern safety standards and improve operations has the potential to bring community value.

However, we restate our concerns over TxDOT's process and the agency's preferred design ("Modified Alternative 3"). Broadly speaking, this project will massively and unnecessarily expand the footprint of I-35 into north-central neighborhoods without offering commensurate community benefits, such as strengthening connections between neighborhoods and offsetting the negative physical and psychological impacts of the highway on residents and communities.

NCINC does not speak on specific behalf of any of its member neighborhoods, but we stand in support of each of their concerns. Several member neighborhood letters are attached herein. Comments included in the attached neighborhood association statements should be construed to be part of NCINC's formal comment on the DEIS.

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While the following comments are by no means comprehensive, they reflect our minimum expected level of revisions needed to TxDOT's current plans:

**Comment #1: Revise modeling for the "No Build" scenario and travel time reduction and introduce alternative means of traffic reduction, including diversion to SH 130 and high-capacity transit.**

The traffic data provided in the DEIS do not justify an increase in highway capacity or additional lane capacity. Publicly available data provided by TxDOT show a nearly flat historic trend line in average annual daily traffic (AADT) over the last twenty years of data collecting. We protest TxDOT's use of a methodology that shows a linear rate of traffic increase for the "No Build" scenario and call for the DEIS to be revised to use 20-year historical trends for AADT.

NCINC further questions how accommodating a 50% expansion of daily traffic meets the project's stated Purpose and Need of Travel Time Reduction, when TxDOT's models show that I-35, if expanded, would see functional capacity (and corresponding congestion) by 2045. At a minimum, TxDOT should provide an accounting of modeled travel time saved between 2025 and 2045 that is offset by the travel time increases that will result from nearly a decade of construction disruption.

*Specifically, we call for TxDOT to demonstrate consideration of:*

- *Revising modeling for "No Build" scenario to utilize historical AADT and revising models for impacts to emissions, greenhouse gasses (GHG), and vehicle miles traveled.*
- *Revisiting traffic demand management options and providing alternatives other than expansion of I-35 capacity through central Austin, including incentives to move through-traffic and freight to SH 130, incorporating right-of-way for future high-capacity transit, and a full study of alternatives including a downtown bypass and a relocation of I-35.*

**Comment #2: Increase the total number and frequency of east-west crossings and provide at-grade pedestrian and bicycle access at all intersections.**

NCINC has consistently called for TxDOT to prioritize improvements to east-west connectivity between its constituent neighborhoods. We commend the decision to provide a Wilshire Boulevard/E. 41st Street crossing and applaud TxDOT's commitment to providing "enhanced" crossings that offer increased space between pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.

TxDOT's project, however, does not provide any additional new crossing opportunities in the north-central area that meet minimum standards for safety, comfort, and access for all users. Improving existing crossings is an insufficient means to improve overall neighborhood connectivity, a long-stated priority of NCINC. Further, the project should not subject pedestrians and bicyclists – especially children, the elderly, and persons with mobility impairments – to unreasonable crossing lengths or grade changes, including elevated pedestrian crossings, crossing tunnels, switchback ramps, and stairs.

*Specifically, we call for TxDOT to demonstrate consideration of:*

- *Replacing the Airport Boulevard "single point urban interchange" with a conventional intersection (such as the E. Riverside Drive design in Alternative 2) to allow for at-grade pedestrian movements in all directions.*
- *Fully reconstructing the 51st Street interchange to provide "enhanced crossing."*
- *Replacing the Capital Plaza elevated crossing with an at-grade crossing for all modes of travel at or near this location.*
- *Providing a feasibility study of additional east-west crossings between Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Highway 290, including considerations such as removing or relocating ramps. (NCINC has not taken a position on specific locations for additional crossings; however, the intersections of Concordia Avenue, Philomena Street, and 53rd ½ Street offer logical starting points for the study of additional crossings.)*

**Comment #3: Design for future covering or "capping" through the entire central segment.**

We are disappointed to see TxDOT fail to provide north-central neighborhoods with commensurate levels of innovation and problem-solving as the agency has demonstrated in other portions of the central segment. This oversight includes the potential for covering or "capping" in downtown and the boulevard concept within the constrained right-of-way between the University of Texas and Mt. Calvary Cemetery.

NCINC supports the Cherrywood and Hancock Neighborhood Associations' call for capping, at a minimum, between 32nd Street and 38 ½ Street; beyond this, we call for TxDOT to conduct a complete feasibility analysis of capping as much of the central segment as possible, including between E. Dean Keeton Street and E. 53rd ½ Street, to include considerations such as removing or relocating ramps. The absence of schematic and cost estimates for future cap options in north-central is an arbitrary omission and prevents the City of Austin and other interested parties from estimating cost and value of these options.

*Specifically, we call for TxDOT to demonstrate consideration of:*

- *Modeling for ramping revisions necessary for future covering or “capping” between E. Dean Keeton Street and E. 53rd ½ Street.*
- *Feasibility of expanding “stitch” locations into full “caps.”*
- *Reconfiguring or removal of design elements – including managed lane direct ramps and “Texas Turn-around” lanes – that interfere with potential future covering or “capping.”*
- *Modeling of the relocation of direct access ramps from E. 32nd Street to Dean Keeton Boulevard, which is a major transit corridor.*

**Comment #4: Redouble efforts to work within existing TxDOT right-of-way.**

The overwhelming majority of this project’s land purchases are proposed between Dean Keeton Street and the Red Line. I-35 has long represented a divide in central Austin communities; this project proposes to widen that divide by more than 100 feet through the north-central section. This approach will substantially increase crossing distances, undermine visual connectivity, discourage walking and active lifestyles, consume valuable central Austin land and neighborhood amenities, and subject thousands of current and future central Austin residents to a dangerous, loud, and inhospitable environment.

TxDOT has shown they possess the innovation to work within areas of limited right-of-way, as displayed by placing frontage road lanes over main lanes through the constrained section of I-35 between Manor Road and Dean Keeton Street. NCINC believes that north-central residents deserve the same level of innovation and mitigation as is applied elsewhere. The arbitrary omission of traffic modeling outcomes for specific scenarios of ramp locations and other right-of-way reducing features in the preferred alternative prevents the City of Austin and other interested parties from estimating cost and value of these options.

*Specifically, we call for TxDOT to demonstrate consideration of:*

- *Modeling the removal of 38th ½ Street ramp.*
- *Revising frontage road configuration between Dean Keeton Street and Airport Boulevard to place frontage road lanes vertically over main lanes and/or utilizing the “boulevard” frontage road concept employed between downtown and Dean Keeton Street.*
- *Coordinating with other State agencies or local partners to return all or portions of land acquired for project to community uses, including parkland, commercial development, and residential development.*

**Comment #5: Treat all frontage roads as part of the neighborhood street grid and employ designs appropriate to residential context.**

NCINC has long advocated for the removal of the physical and psychological barriers of I-35, in particular its inhospitality to bicyclists and pedestrians – especially children, the elderly, and users with mobility impairments. We envision frontage roads that function as part of the local street network and provide a commensurate level of comfort and access reflective of their proximity to residential neighborhoods.

We appreciate TxDOT's inclusion of shared-use paths as part of this project; however, without substantial improvements to frontage road design, the project as shown does not provide the community a minimum level of comfort and safety befitting neighborhood streets. In some cases, it promotes designs that will encourage higher-speed traffic entering residential areas than currently exists. Lower design and posted speeds are warranted for neighborhood safety and call for maximum 30 mph design speeds for the central segment, including frontage roads north of Airport Boulevard. Additionally, bikeways, sidewalks, and shared-use paths should employ the most direct routes possible and avoid "meandering" movements that increase travel distances.

Creating safe frontage roads comes down to design. NCINC supports the inclusion of best-practice designs supported by the City of Austin, including reduced turning radii at intersections; inclusion of on-street parking, shade trees, and plantings; site furnishings such as seating; raised pedestrian crossings, speed bumps, and pedestrian-activated signals at mid-block crossings, among others.

*Specifically, we call for TxDOT to demonstrate consideration of:*

- *Providing posted and design speeds of 30 mph or lower on frontage roads (at a minimum, TxDOT should ensure frontage road speeds are no greater than 35 mph through the entire central segment, including the area north of Airport Boulevard).*
- *Providing street trees and a minimum standard of a 7-foot planting area between frontage road and shared-use paths.*
- *Providing separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities, implementing shared-use paths only in specific areas of constraint.*
- *Providing visual barriers between frontage roads and main lanes, such as the low walls TxDOT has indicated would be design features at "enhanced intersections."*

**Comment #6: Provide clear information on construction disruption.**

North-central neighbors will have to live with nearly a decade of construction disruptions as a result of this project; they deserve to have better information available to them about what these disruptions will entail. TxDOT has failed to recognize that its proposed construction schedule, now beginning in 2024, overlaps both with the City of Austin's corridor reconstruction program on major streets including Airport Boulevard and with the transformational Project Connect light rail investment, set to begin construction in 2025.

TxDOT has not performed a suitable equity analysis of construction disruptions beyond displacements from land acquisition. The absence of a study of the disruptive impact of the construction phase on transit users means TxDOT's analysis of the overall modeled equity impacts is insufficient and capricious. Additional mitigation and coordination with CapMetro should be pursued and made public before construction begins.

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In closing, we have higher expectations for this project than we have seen to date from TxDOT. The current design is unacceptable as proposed in the DEIS. We do not support Modified Alternative 3 in its current form.

We look forward to continued outreach from TxDOT and coordination with NCINC leadership and its member neighborhoods. This is a once-in-a-lifetime project, and NCINC is committed to taking as much time as needed to make sure we get this right.

Respectfully submitted,



Brendan Wittstruck  
Chair, North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition

Att: Letter to TxDOT from the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from the Delwood II Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from the Hancock Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from the Hyde Park Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from the North Loop Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from the Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from the Schieffer-Willowbrook Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from the Windsor Park Neighborhood Association  
Letter to TxDOT from NCINC, 11/11/2020  
Letter to TxDOT from NCINC, 12/21/2020  
Letter to TxDOT from NCINC, 3/9/2021  
Letter to TxDOT from NCINC, 4/9/2021  
Letter to TxDOT from NCINC, 9/24/2021

CC: capexcentral@txdot.gov  
Congressman Lloyd Doggett, District 37  
Congressman Gregorio Casar, District 35  
Governor Greg Abbott  
Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Secretary of Transportation  
Polly Trottenberg, Deputy Secretary of Transportation  
Shailen Bhatt, Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration  
Stephanie Pollack, Deputy Administrator of the FHWA  
Gloria Shepherd, Executive Director of the FHWA  
Al Alonzi, Federal Highway Administration, Texas Division  
Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Representative Gina Hinojosa, District 46  
Representative Sheryl Cole, District 49  
Chairman J. Bruce Bugg, Jr., Texas Transportation Commission  
Commissioner Alvin New, Texas Transportation Commission  
Commissioner Robert Vaughn, Texas Transportation Commission  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
Jeff Travillion, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 1  
Brigid Shea, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 2  
Ann Howard, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 3  
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Mayor Kirk Watson  
Mayor Pro Tem Paige Ellis  
Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison  
Council Member Vanessa Fuentes  
Council Member José Velásquez  
Council Member José Vela  
Council Member Ryan Alter  
Council Member Mackenzie Kelly  
Council Member Leslie Pool  
Council Member Alison Alter  
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Ashby Johnson, CAMPO  
Interim City Manager Jesus Garza  
Interim Assistant City Manager Robert Goode  
Richard Mendoza, Austin Transportation Department  
Mike Trimble, Corridor Program Office  
Lynda Rife, Rifeline  
Frances Jordan, Rifeline



The Cherrywood Neighborhood is bounded by I-35, 38 ½ Street, Airport Boulevard, and Manor Road. It is a flourishing neighborhood of homes, businesses, and green spaces in Central Austin.

P.O. Box 4631 | Austin, TX 78765 | [www.cherrywood.org](http://www.cherrywood.org)  
Contact | [steering@cherrywood.org](mailto:steering@cherrywood.org)

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February 20, 2023

Dear City of Austin leadership,

The Cherrywood Neighborhood Association (CNA) has participated in the engagement opportunities offered by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) on the Interstate-35 Capital Express Central Project (CapEx Project) for the last several years, including the latest feedback opportunity on the CapEx Project Preferred Alternative and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). We have also repeatedly encouraged neighborhood residents and business owners to provide their personal feedback on the CapEx Project.

On February 8, 2023, the CNA Steering Committee approved this fifth letter regarding the CapEx Project. This letter amplifies points specific to the Cherrywood section that have been articulated in previous letters from December 2020, April 2021, September 2021, January 2022 and that were further explored in a Cherrywood Neighborhood Association General Meeting on February 15, 2023.

While Cherrywood residents remain positive about the planned removal of the upper decks, the design change to create an east-west, at-grade crossing at Wilshire Boulevard (noting strong desire for the City to mitigate potential cut-through traffic between I-35 and Airport Boulevard), and appreciate the somewhat limited engagement opportunities to date, CNA's priorities for further improvements can be summarized:

1. The section between Dean Keeton and Airport Boulevards is as vital to future Austinites as both the UT Austin section and the downtown section in terms of urban character and future development potential. The Cherrywood section deserves a similar level of creativity, innovation, and advocacy from the City.
2. CNA's fundamental concern with the Preferred Alternative is that TxDOT not preclude future capping/decking between Dean Keeton and Airport Boulevards, specifically a North Central Deck.
  - a. Review and modify design and construction of the vertical structure within this section as needed. This modification is also supported by NCINC.
  - b. CNA supports CM Vela's call for no design that precludes future capping/decking north of Airport Boulevard.
  - c. TxDOT has shown potential "deck-plazas" adjacent UT Austin and downtown – if these are explored as modifications to the Preferred Alternative, then so should the North Central Deck.
3. Reevaluate the need for and siting of two specific ramps in the Cherrywood section.

Before addressing the Preferred Alternative, we want to add our voice to those questioning the premise of expanding interstate highways, such as I-35, through major urban areas, such as Austin. A growing body of research demonstrates that urban highway expansions induce more driving and worsen congestion (as in Houston's Katy Freeway) which negatively impacts residents' health and well-being.

In addition, we echo the broader questions being asked by several organizations, including the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC), of which we are a founding member, about key assumptions in the DEIS used to justify the design as being flawed and self-serving. We note the traffic data in the DEIS does not seem to support a 50% increase in highway capacity, a fundamental assumption of the CapEx Project, and similarly question the growth-rate assumptions driving the modeling methodology and the approach to the Area of Influence for the CapEx Project as misleading, and lastly the conclusion there will be minimal to no increases in greenhouse gas emissions seems highly questionable.

Nonetheless, for pragmatic reasons, we will comment below on some of the details of the preferred alternative. We acknowledge the inclusion of sound walls in the Preferred Alternative and DEIS on the Cherrywood side of this section, and also some on the Hancock side. We will work to notify and ensure residents in these blocks understand and engage in the noise evaluation and mitigation process that TxDOT is legally obligated to pursue and we recognize their preferences have primacy. However, we believe sound walls are arguably antithetical to both visual and physical connectivity. These are important but not urgent conversations related to the DEIS: the refinement of sound walls can wait until after the major DEIS and Preferred Alternative design modification requests have been addressed.

We are working from the knowledge that additional, even significant refinements to the Preferred Alternative are still possible as the DEIS is being reviewed, finalized, and taken into the construction documents phase in Summer 2024. **We call on our representatives in City government to, at a minimum, advocate for modifying the Preferred Alternative to not preclude future capping of some, preferably all, of the section between Dean Keeton and Airport Boulevards.** This design modification would enable a North Central Deck concept and amplifies several NCINC action items. The main action steps needed to accurately estimate a cost for this design modification are:

1. Revise the structural design of the footings/foundation for the primary vertical supports.
2. Revise the structural design of the vertical supports.
3. If needed, ensure the stormwater drainage system is modified accordingly.

### **North Central Deck concept**

Although neighborhood leaders support the fundamental questioning of the project as expressed by NCINC and Reconnect Austin, we also have a pragmatic interest in a bold idea to improve the project in the section adjacent our neighborhoods that is based on the same design principles and necessary modifications as concepts already in the Preferred Alternative for "deck plazas" in the UT Austin section and downtown section.

The North Central Deck responds to the distinctly different context of current and future residential urban-core fabric in this section. Similar to the downtown enhancements, the North Central Deck would create significant reputational value for the City of Austin (and Austin District of TxDOT) such as the Klyde Warren Park project did for the City of Dallas. The North Central Deck would create an ideal opportunity for an additional critical east-west crossing at Concordia Ave., as called for by NCINC and many other community organizations.

CNA, along with other urban core neighborhood leaders, have drafted design principles for the North Central Deck (available at [www.cherrywood.org/I35capex](http://www.cherrywood.org/I35capex)) and are more than ready to discuss this concept with TxDOT and City of Austin staff and consultants.

### **Supportive design modifications**

There are several additional design alternatives that would enhance a deck-plaza design in this section:

Eliminate the northbound main lane exit ramp to E. 38 ½ Street. We recognize that the proposed alternatives replicate the existing conditions for exit ramps. But we insist that the exit ramp to Manor Road/Dean Keeton and the ramp to Wilshire Boulevard/Airport Boulevard provide sufficient future accessibility to Cherrywood, Hancock, and Mueller residents and businesses. Eliminating the exit ramp to 38 ½ Street appears to relieve the necessity for much of the right-of-way expansion in the Cherrywood section, enabling shorter and safer east-west connections. We see no justification for including a ramp in this location in the new designs, whether it relates either to balancing the number of I-35 main lanes or frequency of access ramps. We dispute the importance of this specific ramp for access to the Mueller redevelopment—a position that has been expressed by Mueller Neighborhood Association. If this ramp cannot be removed, the exit should be redesigned as a portal ramp.

Move the southbound managed lane exit ramp from E. 32nd Street to Dean Keeton Boulevard. Again, we understand that the proposed alternatives replicate the existing conditions for exit ramps. But we note the exit ramp from the managed lane to E. 32nd Street is not optimized for emergency vehicles or transit and does not seem to support City mobility goals. The E. 32nd Street bridge intersection will be signalized and appears still to have very tight geometry heading west from the intersection that will be inefficient for both emergency vehicles trying to access the St. David's ER (which will then be required to make a left turn across traffic to access the St. David's ER) and for transit, which will have to wait through the light cycle to continue to Dean Keeton Blvd (E. 32nd Street is not a designated transit corridor, little if any transit will be turning either east or west at this intersection).

Shifting this southbound managed lane exit to Dean Keeton allows for a protected right turn for emergency vehicles (which will then have two more right turns – and no left turns across traffic - to access the St. David's ER) and allows mass transit vehicles direct access to Dean Keeton, a major transit corridor. If this ramp cannot be moved, the exit should be redesigned as a portal ramp. **We request that these ramping modifications be included as a scenario in the traffic model and that the results be shared with the City of Austin Transportation staff and community stakeholders.**

Stitches at E. 38 ½ Street and E. 32nd Street bridges. As noted in the January 2022 CNA letter, and seeing no design evolution in the DEIS or Preferred Alternative, we believe stitch designs for the 38 ½ Street and E. 32nd Street bridges only add additional hardscaping. There is no indication from TxDOT as to how the stitches become functional amenities. **We discourage the City from allocating funding to stitches that have no human-centered design or active functionality. We encourage the City and TxDOT to explore using the funds earmarked for the stitches as a first step toward creating a full cap between E. 38 ½ Street and E. 32nd Street and a new pedestrian/bicycle crossing at Concordia Ave.**

We note that future development on the west side of I-35 in this section will very likely be multi-family and mixed-use mid-rises, similar to the recent construction at the intersection of E. 32nd and I-35. There will be hundreds, if not thousands, more residents in this area in the future who will benefit from a meaningful, functional cap or deck-plaza, physically and visually connecting east and west sides of the corridor.

Boulevard frontage road. We are enthusiastic about TxDOT's creativity with the boulevard frontage road alignment between Manor Road and Dean Keeton, as well as the slightly wider boulevard design in the downtown section between 5th and 7th Streets. We understand the TxDOT preference to build on solid ground when it is available, as through expanded right-of-way. However, we understand this to be a preference, not a requirement – clearly it is a viable configuration, as demonstrated in the downtown section. We believe the Cherrywood section deserves as much innovation and funding focus as the downtown section. **We echo the NCINC call to treat all frontage roads as part of a neighborhood street grid and employ appropriate urban design.**

New intersection design at E. 32nd Street. Again, the boulevard frontage road concept between Manor Road and Dean Keeton is exciting. **We encourage the City to work with TxDOT to replicate the Dean Keeton intersection/overpass design at the E. 32nd Street intersection.** We acknowledge this will require extending the boulevard frontage road design from the UT section north to the E. 32nd Street intersection. We see this is already intended to be a signalized intersection and suggest that vehicles seeking to access the northbound on-ramp just north of E. 32nd Street can utilize a dedicated lane at the intersection as is frequently done in other

cities. The frontage roads could then shift together to the west side in a boulevard design (or separate to either side on the north side of the intersection). The northbound-to-southbound turnaround can be eliminated and vehicles can simply go through the intersection signal cycle to make the turnaround. If separated frontage roads, the southbound-to-northbound turnaround could remain, albeit narrower (as shown in Alternative 1 in August 2021). This change would greatly reduce the right-of-way expansion needed between Dean Keeton and E. 32nd Street, reducing – perhaps eliminating – the negative impact on the People’s Community Clinic Center for Women’s Health and Prenatal Care and Stars Café.

### **Removal of billboards**

The Preferred Alternative and DEIS indicates removal of five billboards on the east side of I-35 and do not indicate new or relocated billboard easements. We trust the City will ensure the permanent retirement of these billboards and not allow them to be relocated to any other roadway within the City or its ETJ.

### **Business displacement**

Cherrywood residents are more concerned with existing business displacement than with negative impacts to their property values (see survey in September 2021 letter). The DEIS confirms the displacement of beloved neighborhood businesses on the frontage road, including Escuelita del Alma, Stars Café, and Taqueria Los Altos, as well as Dreamers, Le Rouge, Zebra Smoke Shop, the new Progress Coffee and others.

Regardless of personal opinions about the nature or purpose of any specific business, we note that these are primarily small, locally owned businesses with property owners, business owners, and employees who live in this community and contribute to the Austin economy. The CNA supports all of these businesses and their employees equally. Displacement is a deeply intertwined land use and social concern for our neighborhood. **We encourage the City to collaborate with CNA to ensure that business owners are fully aware of the TxDOT process for property acquisition and displacement options, and that a fair and transparent processes be utilized when dealing with all businesses that experience impact from the CapEx Project.**

### **Equity**

As stated in previous letters, CNA continues to support the work of People United for Mobility Access (PUMA), Our Future 35, and other organizations that continue to question the higher-level Purpose and Need statements for the CapEx Project. CNA believes the CapEx Project can and must be driven by positive community equity goals beyond mobility and we will continue to stand with and support groups that are focused on equity goals. We especially believe more attention needs to be demonstrated toward mitigating the equity impacts of the construction phase of the project.

Sincerely,

Cherrywood Neighborhood Association Steering Committee

cc: Councilmember Vela and Austin City Councilmembers  
 Congressman Lloyd Doggett  
 Congressman Greg Casar  
 Texas Senator Sarah Eckhardt  
 Texas Representative Sheryl Cole  
 Tucker Ferguson, Texas Department of Transportation  
 Tommy Abrego, Texas Department of Transportation  
 Lynda Rife, Rifeline Communications

5 March 2023

## Comment from Delwood 2 Neighborhood Association on TxDOT Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the I-35 Capital Express project.

The proposed alternatives for rebuilding I-35 through the central segment do not meet Delwood 2 neighborhood needs and actually cause mobility issues.

*The proposed highway designs do not meet Delwood 2 mobility and access needs.*

The proposed alternatives call for closing one of the four entrances to the neighborhood. This will increase the difficulty of getting in and out of the neighborhood, and increase the cut through traffic in the neighborhood when the right hand lane traveling north on Airport backs up, which it does regularly at all times of day. Neither of the proposed alternatives address this issue, and instead focus on the left turn to go south on I-35, a section of traffic that only backs up briefly during rush hour.

The proposed pedestrian/mixed use pathways to navigate the Airport/I-35 intersection without a car are unnecessarily hostile to anyone without a car. Instead of diverting car drivers, who can easily traverse hills, grade changes, and increased distance, mixed use path users are diverted. This results in proposed mixed use paths that nearly double the travel distance for wheelchair users and requires cyclists to dismount to navigate the hairpin turns or stairs in the paths.

The proposed pathways also include an outrageous proposal of 'underpasses' for pedestrians, including a very long segment in which pedestrians are expected to pass under the 8 lanes of Airport Blvd instead of crossing at the intersection above ground.. These tunnels take pedestrians out of sight of anyone around, which is uncomfortable and unappealing to any mixed use path users, including the young and disabled, especially after dark. Furthermore, given that TxDOT is well aware of the number of people who use highway infrastructure as shelter because Austin lacks sufficient affordable housing, it is inconceivable that the tunnels will not be turned into shelter for these people, resulting in poor outcomes for everyone. As a final point, this intersection regularly sees issues with flooding during heavy rain, making pedestrian tunnels an even more unusable proposal. Cars can easily navigate a bit of water on the road. Expecting pedestrians and cyclists to do so is absurd.

All of the above issues appear to be driven largely by the choice of intersection at Airport Blvd and I-35 that TxDOT is proposing. The Single Point Urban Interchange is extremely unfriendly to anyone not in a car. Delwood 2 strongly encourages TxDOT to consider a more traditional four way intersection where pedestrians, cyclists, and other users are on equal footing with the rest of the road users and do not have to travel so far out of their way in deference to cars. We understand that TxDOT is attempting to reduce 'conflict points' between pedestrians and cars, but relegating pedestrians to below-grade tunnels or elongated indirect paths is not an appropriate solution for these road users.

*Proposed highway designs have negative environmental impacts that outweigh the purported benefits.*

The proposed alternative highway designs reduce connectivity through the central region, including the Delwood 2 neighborhood area, by removing connections across I-35. This reinforces and exacerbates the historic and current racial and economic segregation in central Austin. There are no crossings or plans for capping north of Airport Blvd, which is the current section of the highway where people of color and people with fewer economic resources are currently concentrated.

The removal of highway crossings also increases the negative environmental impact of the proposed alternatives. By reducing the ability to cross the city through alternative transportation options like walking or cycling, the design increases reliance on polluting and inefficient forms of transportation like cars. It also has negative social and economic impacts by making it difficult to cross the city east to west or vice versa.

Proposals for elevated mixed use crossings do not ameliorate the lack of connections. Pedestrians, cyclists, and other users should not be forced to climb long ramps or stairs for elevated crossings or be forced so far out of their way. Making these crossings so unappealing and difficult to use will result in them not being used.

We are concerned that the environmental impacts of all the alternatives are modeled based on outdated modeling methods and inaccurate and unrealistic traffic projections. Traffic on I-35 has remained effectively constant for the past 20 years, so any analysis based on the current highway configuration somehow supporting significantly higher rates of traffic is implausible. Furthermore, this makes the comparisons between the no-build and proposed alternatives meaningless if the current configuration can't support the amount of traffic they are projecting for the future.

Delwood 2 does support the removal of the upper decks and the capping of many sections of the highway. We hope that TxDOT will continue to improve the design by:

- Keeping the Fernwood Rd. connection to the Delwood 2 neighborhood.
- Improving the usability of the mixed use path by keeping the paths above ground, at grade, and direct.
- Increasing the number of connections across the highway in line with the proposals from the City of Austin and NCINC (North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition).
- Improving the intersection at Airport Blvd so that it works for all road users, not just cars.
- Allow for capping the highway north of Airport Blvd.
- Increase the number of crossings north of Airport Blvd.
- Reconsider the drastic highway expansion in favor of shifting trips away from private car use to public transportation and other alternatives.

Delwood 2 Neighborhood Association

# Hancock Neighborhood Association

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The Hancock Neighborhood in Austin, TX is bounded by Duval Street in the West, I-35 in the East, 45<sup>th</sup> Street in the North, and 32<sup>nd</sup> Street in the South.

President: Barbara Epstein, Vice President: Bart Whatley, Treasurer: Bruce Fairchild, Secretary: Sowmya Srinivasan

[www.hancockna.org](http://www.hancockna.org)

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I-35 Capital Express Central Project Team  
1608 W 6th Street  
Austin, TX 78703

March 6, 2023

Dear Mr. Williams, Mr. Abrego, Mr. Ferguson, and Ms. Ashley-Nguyen,  
dear I-35 Capital Express Central Project Team,

On February 21, 2023, the Hancock Neighborhood Association unanimously voted to submit the following statement in response to TxDOT's I-35 Capital Express Central Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

With over 5,000 residents, the Hancock neighborhood is located right on I-35, between 32nd and 45th Street. As such, it is among the neighborhoods most directly affected by the existing highway and the Capital Express Central project here in Austin.

We are grateful to TxDOT for its efforts to improve I-35, for the opportunities to provide feedback, and the significant improvements we have seen in the project over the past several years. We welcome the removal of the upper decks, the safety improvements, the lowering of the main lanes below ground, and the potential for caps in the downtown area. However, **we remain strongly opposed to the expansion of the highway and deeply concerned about the partial attention to livability in the residential north-central section of the project.**

At TxDOT public events, in online surveys, in our statement from September 15, 2021, and in our Transportation Committee's meeting with TxDOT in May 2022, we have voiced these concerns – alongside thousands of other Austinites; fellow neighborhood associations; the North-Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC); community organizations such Reconnect Austin, Rethink35, Safe Streets Austin, People United for Mobility Action (PUMA), and Austinites for Urban Rail Action (AURA); the Travis County Commissioners Court; and recently elected city council members. We will voice them again here in further detail.

# 1 Fundamental concerns about freeway expansion

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In a time of climate emergency, we – the citizens and elected officials of Austin, and the agencies of this state – should make every effort to rebuild I-35 with the smallest footprint possible and to mitigate traffic without incentivizing even more of it.

TxDOT has repeatedly explained that its mandate is to focus only on roads and traffic, which has resulted in a myopic approach to a project that will affect generations of Texans. Rather than build an oversized road with higher costs, more displacements, more construction disruption, and a legacy of greater emissions, the agency should look to its willing partners in the city of Austin for innovative, sustainable strategies to support a rebuild that is *as narrow as possible*.

We respectfully suggest that the methodology used to justify a large expansion of the freeway deserves much closer scrutiny. To wit:

## 1.1 Modified Alternative 3 is based on flawed growth and traffic demand predictions.

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Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO)'s population projections and TxDOT's travel demand projections have consistently over-projected growth in the past, putting into question the need for an expansion. This time around, too, TxDOT warns that without the massive expansion, afternoon peak hour travel times on I-35 would reach over 3.5 hours by 2045. Of course, this is absurd. Not a single person would commute under such conditions. Rather, people at large – especially newcomers to Austin – would either work closer to home, or live closer to work; they would walk, bike, take public transportation, or telecommute – all of which are much better and more sustainable solutions than a massively expanded highway.

At the same time, a look at the most recent demographic projections for the Five County Metropolitan Area,<sup>1</sup> as opposed to the 2019 numbers used by TxDOT (DEIS, p. 75), indicates that the project is based on a (current) overestimation of the 2050 regional population by 18%. In other words, based on this alone, the planned plus/minus 20-lane highway could presumably do with 3-4 fewer lanes.

## 1.2 Concerns over induced demand must be taken seriously.

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The phenomenon of induced demand – the observation that more lanes will encourage more driving, thus negating any temporary congestion relief – has not been adequately addressed. This is a widely documented traffic phenomenon; most of us are familiar with the example of the Katy Freeway, which filled back up almost immediately after its expansion to 26 lanes in 2011.

At our meeting with TxDOT in May 2022, TxDOT representatives suggested that induced demand was negligible (“probably less than 1%”) in this project, and that they were much more focused on “latent demand.” It is not yet clear, however, how TxDOT measures latent demand; how it separates it from induced demand, or how it determines that the latent demand for driving is more than the latent demand for safe pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, or efficient public transit. In the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), “induced demand” is mentioned only three times total, each time in reference to community feedback, and not accompanied by any explanation whatsoever of

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<sup>1</sup> City of Austin Demographics, “Austin Area Population History & Forecast,” published January 9, 2023. Online at <https://demographics-austin.hub.arcgis.com/documents/27bd25c8afff4017a66cd4c467893c3f/explore>.

why TxDOT thinks this widely documented phenomenon does not apply to I-35. “Latent demand,” incidentally, is mentioned zero times.

### **1.3 The effect of Project Connect on traffic demand needs to be properly accounted for.**

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We remain concerned that the impact of Project Connect, an expansive public transit initiative with a construction timeline parallel to I-35, has not been fully incorporated into traffic projections. TxDOT asserts that, even under the assumption of maximum ridership (i.e. 120,000 people per day), Project Connect would only result in a 2.5–3% reduction of the car travel demand (projected at 280,000–320,000 vehicles per day) on the I-35 central segment in 2045.<sup>2</sup> We appreciate the publication of these numbers in response to our request, but no explanation of this counterintuitive conclusion was presented – counterintuitive particularly in light of TxDOT’s statement elsewhere in the report that 82% of traffic on I-35 is local.

### **1.4 A project as large, complex, impactful, and expensive as CapEx Central must employ state-of-the-art traffic modeling methods.**

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We also point out that TxDOT used Static Traffic Assignment (STA) in its modeling of the various future highway scenarios. The STA method, which stems from the 1950s, has significant limitations. For example, STA is unable to distinguish between lanes, it assumes no passing maneuvers happen, it routinely assigns *more* traffic to roadway links than the links can physically service, and it fails to account for congestion spillbacks. These limitations are known to result in serious overestimates of expanded highway capacities and performance. As an expanded I-35 will fill back up to capacity, we are concerned that inadequately modeled congestion spillbacks are going to affect adjacent roads such as Red River, 32nd, 38th, 38th ½, and 45th Streets, as well as Airport Blvd, in our neighborhood. Especially in the light of a project as large, complex, impactful, and expensive as CapEx Central, we are puzzled by TxDOT’s failure to either insist on state-of-the-art *Dynamic* Traffic Assignment (DTA) modeling on the part of CAMPO, or to perform its own DTA modeling, instead. For a professional assessment in this matter, we refer to traffic engineer Norman L. Marshall’s report *Valid Modeling of the I-35 Capital Express Central Project*, available at the link below.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.5 TxDOT should work creatively alongside other state and local entities to reroute non-local I-35 traffic to SH-130.**

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TxDOT has stressed that 82% of traffic on I-35 is local, and thus “only” 18% could be rerouted via SH-130. Given the tremendous cost and impact of acquiring right-of-way and adding lanes, however, we think the opportunity to remove nearly one fifth (!) of traffic from I-35 – without any need for construction – should not be forfeited. We do understand that, as TxDOT argues, “The current \$4.9 billion allotted for the I-35 Capital Express Central project [are not] eligible for paying [SH-130’s] outstanding debt.” TxDOT also acknowledges, however, that a waiver to reduce or remove the tolls

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<sup>2</sup> TxDOT, “Project Connect Modeling Process,” online at <https://my35capex.com/project-connect-modeling-process>.

<sup>3</sup> Norman L. Marshall, *Valid Modeling of the I-35 Capital Express Central Project*, December 2020, available online at [https://www.dropbox.com/s/6f25cghni3fkkgr/Marshall\\_Valid\\_Modeling\\_of\\_CapEx\\_Central.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/s/6f25cghni3fkkgr/Marshall_Valid_Modeling_of_CapEx_Central.pdf).

could take care of that, noting that “While this can happen, it is usually for a temporary scenario such as construction.”<sup>4</sup>

This, however, is not the time for business as usual. We call upon TxDOT, Governor Abbott, and the Texas state legislature to seek creative, bold, and sustainable solutions to the pressing, existential challenges of the 21st century. We also note that Austin City Council on February 23, 2023 voted 10:1 in support of a Resolution which, among other actions, calls for the provision of incentives “to reroute 18-wheeler traffic that is passing through Austin to Texas State Highway 130.”

### **1.6 TxDOT’s widening of I-35 will cause substantial degradation of Austin’s historic-age structures and affordable housing.**

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The addition of lanes and taking of right-of-way will have a deleterious effect on the east end of our neighborhood. We note that TxDOT’s Historic Resources Survey recommends two properties in the Area of Potential Effect in Hancock for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (the Elgin-Butler Brick Company Main Office, currently serving as offices for the *Austin Chronicle*; and the service station at 38th and IH-35). Unfortunately, TxDOT will acquire and demolish these same two properties. Many other historic-age structures in Hancock will be affected by the encroachment of the freeway, even if they are not outright acquired and demolished.

Of the approximately 52 historic-age properties in Hancock that were surveyed, 38 are modest, single-family houses dating from the 1930s through the 1950s. All but one are largely intact, and we believe they would be contributing resources in a local historic district or a National Register District. As importantly, they provide comparatively affordable housing for members of our community. We anticipate that as the I-35 Right of Way is expanded, more of these homes will be converted to commercial use as increased traffic, noise and air pollution make residential use less desirable. Austin’s stock of affordable housing is already small. We cannot justify the likely removal of more market-affordable housing through the negative effects of a widened freeway.

## **2 A more livable freeway environment**

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We recognize the necessity of upgrading I-35 to current design standards in order to enhance safety. We support TxDOT’s efforts to solve problems such as narrow lanes, the absence of shoulders, insufficient overhead clearance, and inadequate drainage. We would applaud a remaking of I-35 that does not expand the freeway but reduces crashes and increases neighborhood connectivity.

As some of I-35’s closest neighbors, those most affected by its noise and air pollution, and those who will be most immediately affected by construction, we request – in addition to a footprint as narrow as possible – the following modifications to the Preferred Alternative. We believe these have the potential to turn I-35 into an asset for our community.

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<sup>4</sup> TxDOT, “I-35 Capital Express – Frequently Asked Questions,” online at <https://my35capex.com/about/faqs>.

## **2.1 Large caps/decks, not mere stitches, are imperative if the highway's current footprint does not significantly shrink.**

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We urge TxDOT to ensure the future option of placing large caps or decks between Dean Keeton and Airport. The Cherrywood and Hancock neighborhoods and others in NCINC strongly support the concept we refer to as the North Central Deck. This deck would fully cap a long stretch of road, such as from 32nd to 38th  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and would support amenities for recreational and civic use atop the cap (similar to Klyde Warren Park in Dallas). As important, the deck would increase connectivity between the Cherrywood and Hancock neighborhoods and make the process of moving between them a pleasant prospect.

We support TxDOT's responsiveness to requests from Downtown and UT stakeholders and the current design that enables the later construction of significant caps in those areas. We encourage TxDOT to apply the same flexibility and creativity to this stretch of the freeway, which is flanked on both sides by residences and is likely to grow more dense in the coming years. We believe there is a clear and compelling case for a North Central Deck: it would further reduce noise pollution, increase east-west connectivity, improve the viewshed for residents closest to I-35, and provide open space for recreation and civic activities. We note that the resolution 20230223-044 just recently passed by the Austin City Council is aligned with this goal, stating that "The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should ensure that I-35 is designed and built in a way that does not preclude adding additional caps and connections in the future."

The idea of the North Central Deck makes us feel excited. It strikes us as a positive legacy for the I-35 project; one that future generations will appreciate – and will not be able to imagine Austin without.

## **2.2 A full North Central Deck is preferable to stitches, which are unlikely to be used for purposes other than transit.**

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The North Central Deck is far preferable, in our estimation, to the stitches currently envisioned in the plan. Although we applaud the provision of more space for pedestrians and cyclists, and support this aspect of Modified Alternative 3, we remain skeptical that additional space on stitches beyond what is needed for safe and shaded travel will be used in any meaningful way for recreation. Anyone spending time on a stitch – whether sitting on a bench, admiring public art, or simply walking – will be surrounded by traffic, noise, and pollution, and exposed to heat for most of the year.

We respectfully ask that TxDOT take a more bold, expansive approach to making the I-35 a functional asset for people other than drivers, and focus on the North Central Deck rather than stitches we are unlikely to use commensurate with their expense. We echo the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association's call for TxDOT and the city to channel funds earmarked for stitches to a full deck/cap between 32nd and 38th  $\frac{1}{2}$  Streets instead. In addition, if an expansion of the freeway's footprint can be avoided, the money saved from right-of-way acquisition and construction can offset the cost of building for later placement of a deck.

### **2.3 Bike and pedestrian paths should be separated and follow the City of Austin design guidelines.**

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We applaud TxDOT's attention to adding space for bicycle and pedestrian travel on east-west crossings, such as at 32<sup>nd</sup> Street and 38<sup>th</sup> ½ Street. We ask that the same attention and creativity be applied to the pedestrian and bicycle facilities that run north-south, parallel to the car lanes.

- With three lanes of car traffic in many areas, the frontage roads most closely resemble a "Level 4" street in the City's Transportation Criteria Manual. The city's guidelines for Level 4 streets call for a separate sidewalk and bike path with a 6.5-foot tree and furniture zone between them.
- We also note that Section 2.8.2.6 of the City of Austin's Transportation Criteria Manual lays out the criteria for Level 4 frontage road street design, which are specific to TxDOT. These criteria call for a 12-foot shared-use path, with a 10-foot tree and furniture zone between the car lanes and bike/pedestrian lanes.
- As currently designed, the CapEx Central project proposes a 10-foot shared-use path, which does not match city guidelines for Level 4 streets or even the guidelines applicable only to TxDOT projects.

We ask that TxDOT separate the pedestrian and bike paths or, in instances where that is not possible, adhere to the city's guideline of a 12-foot shared-use path. We respectfully submit that decreasing the number of car lanes in the proposed project would, in addition to decreasing harmful emissions, also free more space for multimodal travel.

### **2.4 SPUI tunnel at Airport Blvd should be replaced with safer and emergency-accessible at-grade crossing.**

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We remain concerned about pedestrian- and cyclist-friendliness of the Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI) where I-35 and Airport Boulevard intersect: namely, the tunnel that takes the multi-use path under Airport Boulevard east of I-35. We strongly urge TxDOT to avoid tunnels as it progresses in the design process. We would prefer an at-grade crossing that uses medians and signals to protect pedestrians and cyclists or (our second choice) enough elevation to the Airport roadway so that pedestrians are clearly visible at grade when they cross beneath it.

Our experience with even very short tunnels is that some members of the community perceive them to be inherently risky and will not use them when walking/biking alone. We are concerned that, because of its location, this particular piece of transportation infrastructure will become used for shelter because it offers protection from the elements. It then will likely be avoided by other pedestrians and cyclists, who will end up crossing at grade after all. We urge TxDOT to design for the reality that a tunnel of any length is likely to become an attractive nuisance and instead consider creative ways to construct safe, at-grade crossings.

## In Conclusion

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The Capital Express Central project is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make the right decisions for a bright future of our city, our state, our children, and our planet. Whether congested by gasoline-powered or fully electric cars (which, realistically, is a long, long way down the road here in Texas), a massive, up to 22-lane highway through the heart of any city will hardly ever be sustainable,<sup>5</sup> and certainly not livable. We therefore plead with TxDOT to fundamentally reconsider the I-35 Capital Express Central project and embrace a vision for the future that prioritizes sustainability, equity, and quality of life – and humans over cars.

Respectfully submitted,

Burke Fort, Kitten Holloway, Hannes Mandel, and Robyn Ross  
HNA Transportation Committee

On behalf of the Hancock Neighborhood Association

CC: Congressman Lloyd Doggett, District 37  
Congressman Gregorio Casar, District 35  
Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Representative Gina Hinojosa, District 46  
Representative Sheryl Cole, District 49  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
Jeff Travillion, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 1  
Mayor Kirk Watson  
Mayor Pro Tem Paige Ellis  
Council Member Zohaib Qadri  
Council Member José Vela  
Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison  
Council Member Vanessa Fuentes  
Council Member José Velásquez  
Council Member Ryan Alter  
Council Member Mackenzie Kelly  
Council Member Leslie Pool  
Council Member Alison Alter  
Ashby Johnson, CAMPO  
Interim City Manager Jesus Garza  
Interim Assistant City Manager Robert Goode  
Richard Mendoza, Austin Transportation Department  
Mike Trimble, Corridor Program Office  
Al Alonzi, Federal Highway Administration, Texas Division  
Chairman J. Bruce Bugg, Jr., Texas Transportation Commission  
Commissioner Alvin New, Texas Transportation Commission  
Commissioner Robert Vaughn, Texas Transportation Commission  
Lynda Rife, Rifeline  
Frances Jordan, Rifeline

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<sup>5</sup> Damian Carrington, "Car tyres produce vastly more particle pollution than exhausts, tests show," in: *The Guardian*, June 3, 2022. Online at <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jun/03/car-tyres-produce-more-particle-pollution-than-exhausts-tests-show>.

# Hyde Park Neighborhood Association

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*VIA EMAIL, USPS, or HAND-DELIVERY*

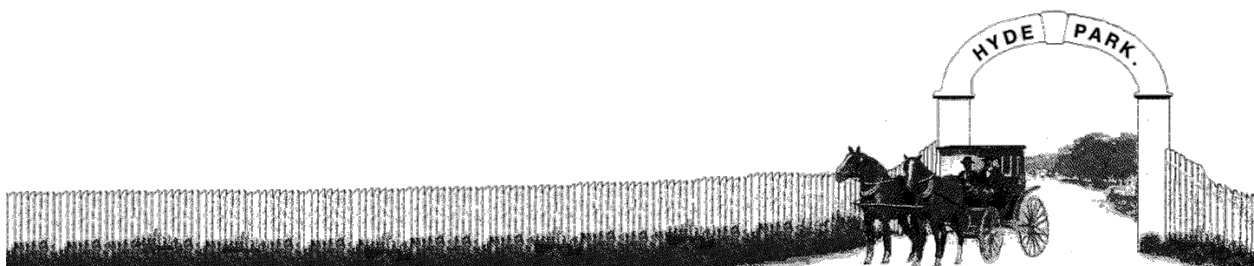
06 March 2023

Dear Mr. Williams, Mr. Abrego, Mr. Ferguson, and Ms. 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; imperiled the safety of people traveling on foot, by bicycle, and in vehicles; 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 agree that improvements to I-35 are badly needed. However, 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-related disruption.



# Hyde Park Neighborhood Association

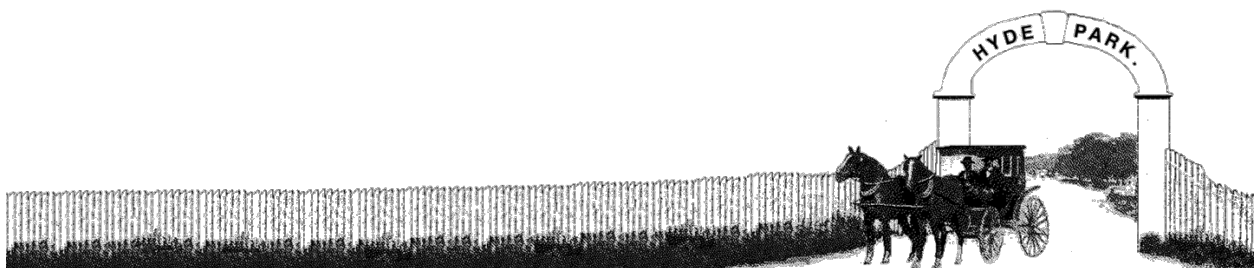
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HPNA recognizes that TxDOT possesses the directive and funding to expand the physical footprint of I-35 as part of its Capital Express Central project. Moreover, despite growing concerns that previous community comments are not sufficiently reflected in current design alternatives, we accept the need to work with TxDOT in this current project to minimize the many potential 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 worked to preserve and improve the historic and unique character, amenities, and ecology of our neighborhood. The current I-35 expansion proposal is incompatible with our goals of creating a healthy neighborhood. In fact, it represents a potential permanent barrier to accomplishing them in the future.

Therefore, HPNA calls for revisions to TxDOT's Preferred Alternative "Modified Alternative 3". In addition, HPNA 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, thus maintaining disconnection between neighborhoods. At a minimum, TxDOT should provide a fully accessible crossing at least every half-mile on I-35. Furthermore, 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 provided in the current plan.** "Decking" or "capping" over the highway provides a clear community benefit by reducing noise and air pollution from neighborhoods and creating new shared public spaces. TxDOT should also 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 a reduction in the number of planned ramps should be weighed against community benefits that will be achieved through additional covering of I-35.



# Hyde Park Neighborhood Association

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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 plan does not sufficiently promote 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. Frontage roads should be designed for 30 mph or less and 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, which will in fact encourage increased traffic through the center of Austin. Expanded capacity of I-35 will compound environmental and human health damage to nearby residents. Encouraging traffic to shift to SH130 may also reduce overall project costs. TxDOT's I-35 expansion plan should include means to reduce the traffic volume in central Austin, not encourage more traffic.

Our neighborhood is affected daily by I-35. Over the proposed decade of planned I-35 construction, there will be increased air, water and noise pollution that will impact our neighbors' health, especially the health of our children. We therefore call on the City of Austin and Travis County to support the health of residents and neighborhoods by continuing to identify and support revisions to Modified Alternative 3 that further common goals of health, access, and community strength.

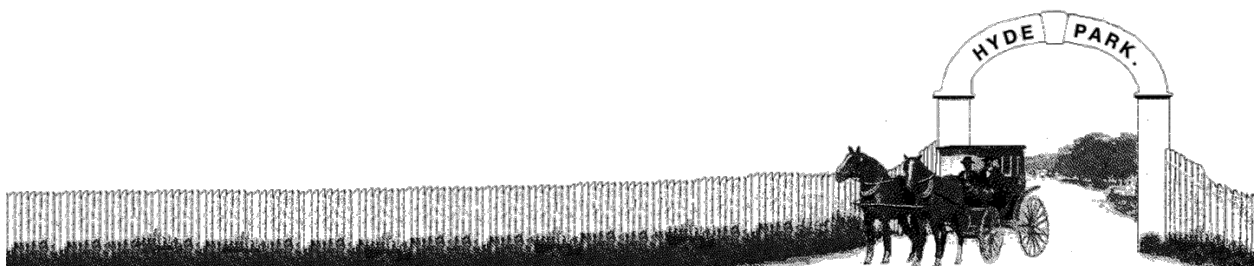
Each time TxDOT has acted on community input on I-35, it has produced a better version of the project. The current design will benefit from greater, deliberate engagement with HPNA and its allied neighborhood associations. We look forward to seeing revisions that will put this project on a path toward 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

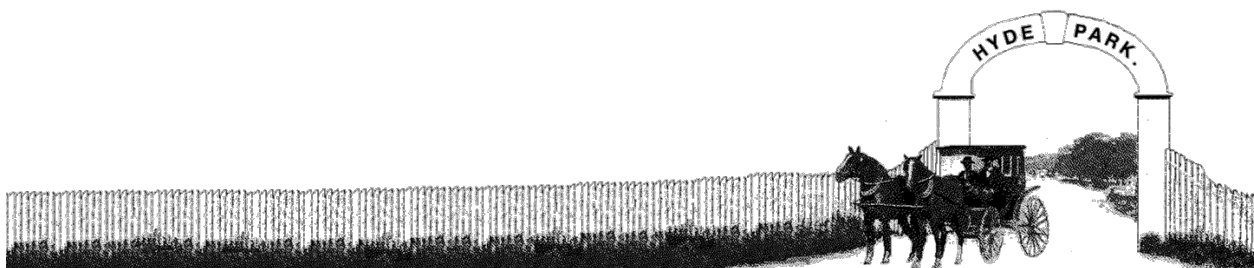
On behalf of the Hyde Park Neighborhood Association



# Hyde Park Neighborhood Association

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CC: Senator John Cornyn  
Senator Ted Cruz  
Congressman Lloyd Doggett, District 37  
Congressman Gregorio Casar, District 35  
Governor Greg Abbott  
Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Representative Gina Hinojosa, District 46  
Representative Sheryl Cole, District 49  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
Jeff Travillion, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 1  
Brigid Shea, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 2  
Ann Howard, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 3  
Margaret Gomez, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 4  
Mayor Kirk Watson  
Mayor Pro Tem Paige Ellis  
Council Member Zohaib Qadri  
Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison  
Council Member Vanessa Fuentes  
Council Member José Velásquez  
Council Member José Vela  
Council Member Ryan Alter  
Council Member Mackenzie Kelly  
Council Member Leslie Pool  
Council Member Alison Alter  
Ashby Johnson, CAMPO  
Interim City Manager Jesus Garza  
Interim Assistant City Manager Robert Goode  
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Commissioner Alvin New, Texas Transportation Commission  
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Lynda Rife, Rifeline  
Frances Jordan, Rifeline





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.**

To: TxDOT & Austin City Council

From: The Historic Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Neighborhood Association

Subject: The Expansion of I.H. 35

In 1928 government adopted a master plan in Austin to separate the races, (black vs. white).

Since then, the government cemented that plan (and I don't use the term loosely) by constructing I.H. 35 right down the middle of this great city. Along with Urban Renewal appropriation, red-lining by banks and local education systems that promote separate-but-not-equal policies, government systemic racism has plagued our black and brown communities for decades.

So, here we are again! TxDot and some Government officials want us to believe that expanding the current divide will not only help traffic in our neighborhoods, but that the displacement of businesses and homes to make room for that expansion will have little impact on the already beleaguered small business and families that have been discriminated in East Austin time after time.

Some of those neighborhood developments have life-long ties with our community but there is no right-to-return policies being introduced to curbe the displacement of legacy families that have lived in East Austin for generations. We've asked questions about what type of safety protections will be instituted when and if cap-n-stitch parks are established and get no concrete answers.

Black and brown communities in Austin have suffered decades upon decades of environmental racism, and widening IH 35 for this stretch would continue that trend by exposing our neighborhoods to even more toxic emissions.

As the only designated historic district established by black professionals and activists, the Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Neighborhood Association stands against the expansion of I.H. 35 and have serious safety concerns about the cap-n-stitch proposals. We want to see this city grow and improve but let that growth be guided by JUSTICE.

Our ask at this time is don't just think about your government role in perpetuating systemic racism, but think about how you as an enlightened human being can start the process of righting the wrongs that our community has endured from the past. Invest in communities and don't invest in the divide.

Take a step... Take a stand against the expansion of I-35.

Brenda Malik, President  
Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Historic Neighborhood Association

February 20, 2023

Mayor Kirk Watson  
301 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> St  
Austin, Texas 78701

Councilmember Zohaib Qadri  
301W 2<sup>nd</sup> St  
Austin, Texas 78701

Acting City Manager Jesus Garza  
301 W 2<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

Michael Trimble  
Corridor Program Office  
5202 E Ben White Blvd, Ste 450  
Austin, Texas 78741

Dear City of Austin Leadership,

I am writing on behalf on behalf of the Schieffer-Willowbrook Neighborhood Association. We are a member of the North Central IH35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC) and support the recommendations made to the Texas Department of Transportation regarding the CapEx Project Preferred Alternative and Draft Environmental Impact Statement. We support the removal of the Upper Decks of IH 35 and the new connection from E.41st to Wilshire Blvd.

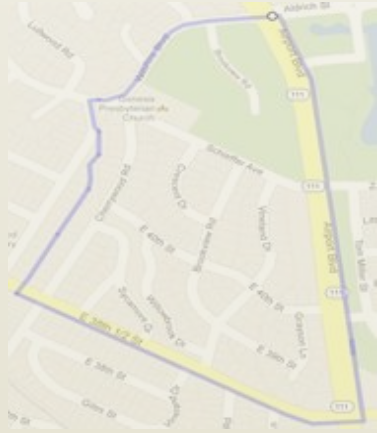
On behalf of the Schieffer-Willowbrook Neighborhood Association and the families that live in the blocks surrounding Wilshire Boulevard and Schieffer Avenue, we wish to ask for support from the City of Austin and the Texas Department of Transportation to preserve and defend the safe pedestrian, bicycling, and traffic-limited thoroughways that these two streets provide, in the face of the design for the new I-35 project.

We ask that the City and TxDOT support efforts to mitigate the increased motor vehicle traffic anticipated in the proposed thoroughfare that will meet the goals of the I-35 project to connect east and west Austin, while still ensuring the safety of children and pedestrians in our neighborhood and leveraging the investments already made in our neighborhood to encourage safe and walkable streets and increase bicycle traffic.

We believe that our recommendations will encourage connectivity—while preserving the safety of two 100% residential streets.

It is our understanding that TxDOT has proposed a possible design for its expansion of I-35 through our city area that would convert Wilshire Boulevard from its current status as a quiet residential street into a busy and potentially dangerous cut-through thoroughfare. Our understanding is that this would be achieved by extending 41<sup>st</sup> Street from the west side of I-35 across the Interstate to the east side to join Wilshire Boulevard and Schieffer Avenue in a continuing connective line to Airport Boulevard.

The neighbors most affected by this proposal are the residents of the Schieffer-Willowbrook neighborhood. Our neighborhoods are filled with a large population of young children, and will continue to be so through the upcoming years. The local elementary school, Maplewood Elementary, is home to grades Pre-K through 5. Our children daily walk with their parents through our streets,



### **Schieffer-Willowbrook Neighborhood Association**

*Priscilla Ebersole, Chair  
Schuyler Nelson-Brown, Vice Chair  
Margaret Mills, Treasurer*

**Mailing Address**

4004 Vineland Dr.  
Austin, TX 78722

**Email**

[swnasoc@gmail.com](mailto:swnasoc@gmail.com)

<https://sites.google.com/site/swnaaustin/home>

some of them coming all the way from the Mueller development across Airport Blvd., on their ways to and from their school. The safety of these and future children depends upon their being able to navigate easier traffic flows and slow-speed vehicles. These two factors comprise current conditions, with the occasional exception of a speeding vehicle using the two streets as a cut-through in a misdirected Google-mapped way to avoid extra stoplights. Such traffic already poses a danger to our residents; to increase it exponentially, which this conversion plan would do, is a daunting prospect for all of our citizens.

In addition, Wilshire Boulevard and Schieffer Avenue both border sides of a widely-used city facility, Patterson Park, which for generations has served as a haven for diverse peoples all over East Austin. Patterson Park epitomizes the connectivity that is central to the I-35 project by offering people from everywhere in East Austin a collective gathering spot. It provides a much-enjoyed destination for family picnics, barbecues, family reunions, Mardi Gras celebrations, birthday parties, soccer games, softball games, musical performances and rehearsals, neighborhood festivals, Easter Egg hunts, and many other outdoor activities, and acts as a great meeting point unifying many neighborhoods in addition to our own, adding richness and a strong sense of community to us all. The park contains a community garden, a swimming pool, a playground with swings and other equipment, a field for kite-flying and dog-play, tennis courts, and tracks and trails used by pedestrians for exercise and to walk their dogs. These pedestrians—mothers with strollers, dog-owners, entire teams of soccer-playing kids, elderly amblers--have also walked from their neighboring homes to reach the park. To jeopardize their safety and render the park more inaccessible would be worse than a mistake; it would mean discounting their well-being by a measurement we're sure the City of Austin does not intend to endorse.

These streets, in which we have invested time, money, energy, and dedication in developing and maintaining bicycle lanes, pedestrian-friendly walkways, and controlled speed limits, must not be sacrificed to motorists' convenience. We request that you mitigate these dangers by diverting traffic at the I-35 opening of Wilshire Boulevard where it would conjoin with the east side of the Interstate with longhorns, so that cut-through traffic could not enter Wilshire from the 41<sup>st</sup> Street crossover but would be compelled to turn left onto the frontage road instead, where they will have easy access to Airport Boulevard within a matter of seconds, without a stoplight or any other impediment.

In this way, connectivity is accomplished. But the residents who walk in our neighborhood daily, the children walking home from Maplewood Elementary, the bicyclers who take advantage of our streets, can continue their activities safely.

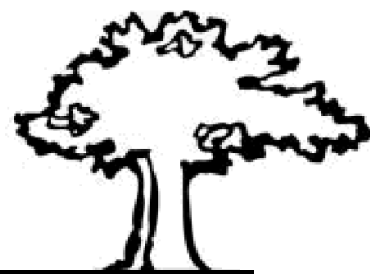
It seems a small price to ensure the safety of children, pedestrians, and the public events at Patterson Park.

Thank you for considering our request for support.

Sincerely,

Priscilla Ebersole, Chair  
Schieffer-Willowbrook Neighborhood Association

Cc: Texas Senator Sarah Eckhardt  
Texas Representative Sheryl Cole  
Tucker Ferguson, Texas Department of Transportation  
Tommy Abrego, Texas Department of Transportation  
Linda Rife, Rifeline Communications



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## Windsor Park Neighborhood Association

March 2, 2023

To: the Texas Department of Transportation

Re: I-35 Expansion Capital Express Project Opposition

On February 11, 2023, the Windsor Park Neighborhood Association (WPNA) voted unanimously in favor of the following resolution:

**The Windsor Park Neighborhood Association (WPNA) rejects the premise that the expansion of I-35 is justified, equitable, or necessary. However, if the project were to continue, the WPNA supports the Austin City Council's resolution in support of caps and connections on the I-35 project.**

The Windsor Park neighborhood abuts the east side of I-35. The currently proposed expansion will inequitably impact our neighborhood by removing businesses and residences adjacent to the current I-35; bring more traffic onto the expanded lanes, increase automobile pollution; further divide East and West Austin by providing inadequate east-west connections; pedestrian and bicycle mobility will be more complicated, unsafe, and unhealthy from East 51st to 290E. The Airport Boulevard connection is an excellent example. In addition, the expansion will fail to solve today's traffic congestion or projected increased traffic on the expanded lanes and internally in the Windsor Park neighborhood.

WPNA expects that the current design will be significantly altered to address the concerns of the entire project and our neighborhood.

Jeanette Swenson

President, Windsor Park Neighborhood Association



James M. Bass  
Executive Director  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 East 11th Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

Tucker Ferguson, P.E.  
North Austin Area Engineer  
Texas Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 15426  
Austin, Texas 78761-5425

Susan Fraser, P.E., CFM  
I-35 Program Manager  
Texas Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 15426  
Austin, Texas 78761-5426

Sara Behunek  
Director of Communications and Strategy  
Rifeline  
1608 West 6th Street  
Austin, Texas 78703

*VIA EMAIL*

11 November 2020

Dear Mr. Bass, Ms. Fraser, Mr. Ferguson and Ms. Behunek,

Tomorrow, November 12, 2020, TxDOT will begin its Virtual Public Scoping Meeting for the I-35 Capital Express Central Project ("the Project"). This public comment period will be open through December 12, 2020.

This is the first time that TxDOT has moved to the environmental study stage on a funded project in Central Austin. The North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC) recognizes this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to recraft I-35 through central Austin neighborhoods in a way that supports access for all users, strengthens neighborhood connections, improves access for all modes of travel, improves human and environmental health, repairs communities and addresses systemic inequities, and provides quality of life improvements for people who live and work along the I-35 corridor.

For over twenty years, NCINC has worked to share information on TxDOT plans with central Austin residents and businesses. We have previously asked that any TxDOT plans for I-35 align with existing City of Austin plans, provide a long-term vision for the I-35 corridor, and ensure a public input process that meaningfully engages north central stakeholders.

We are disappointed that TxDOT's public scoping period for the Project is limited to thirty (30) days. This is an insufficient amount of time for neighborhood organizations to meet, educate residents, and provide feedback. This time period is therefore insufficient for NCINC to provide formal feedback on behalf of its member Neighborhood Associations. Additionally, this comment period falls during the holiday season and we are also

sensitive to levels of access during COVID, when members of our communities who rely on limited public library resources for internet access may not be able to provide feedback.

We ask TxDOT to consider a period of up to ninety (90) days, which we believe is appropriate and necessary for us to participate in this scoping process. This letter comes on behalf of NCINC and may or may not reflect the individual positions of its member Neighborhood Associations.

NCINC endeavors to be active, informed, open-minded and critical when necessary to ensure that TxDOT conceives of a future for I-35 that supports the City of Austin and the health, well-being and mobility of its residents. **We hereby request that the Virtual Public Scoping Meeting for the Project be extended to a period of up to ninety (90) but not less than sixty (60) days in order for NCINC and its member Neighborhood Associations have time to provide meaningful and informed input.**

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Brendan Wittstruck', with a large loop on the left and a horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brendan Wittstruck, Chair  
North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC)

cc: Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Rep. Sheryl Cole, District 46  
Rep. Gina Hinajosa, District 49  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
Jeff Travillion, Travis County Commissioner, Pct t 1  
Ashby Johnson, CAMPO  
Mayor Steve Adler  
Mayor Pro Tem Delia Garza  
Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison  
Council Member-Elect Vanessa Fuentes  
Council Member Sabino Renteria

Council Member Gregorio Casar  
Council Member Ann Kitchen  
Council Member Jimmy Flannigan  
Council Member Leslie Pool  
Council Member Paige Ellis  
Council Member Kathie Tovo  
Council Member Alison Alter  
Rob Spillar, COA Transportation Department  
Melissa Barry, Downtown Austin Alliance  
Dewitt Peart, Downtown Austin Alliance



James M. Bass  
Executive Director  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 East 11th Street  
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Tucker Ferguson, P.E.  
North Austin Area Engineer  
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Susan Fraser, P.E., CFM  
I-35 Program Manager  
Texas Department of Transportation  
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Sara Behunek  
Director of Communications and Strategy  
Rifeline  
1608 West 6th Street  
Austin, Texas 78703

*VIA EMAIL*

21 December 2020

Dear Mr. Bass, Ms. Fraser, Mr. Ferguson and Ms. Behunek,

As part of the Public Scoping Period #1 for the I-35 Capital Express Central Project, the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC) is pleased to share input at this critically important phase that will determine the future of the project. NCINC comprises eleven Member Neighborhoods in North Central Austin on both sides of I-35 in Austin City Council Districts 1, 4, and 9.

We embrace a new future for the highway. I-35 is a physical and psychological barrier that disconnects neighborhoods; impairs safe and equitable access to, along, and across the corridor for pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, people with disabilities, the elderly, health-vulnerable, and children in Central Austin; an inhospitable refuge for people enduring homelessness; and a visible symbol of Austin's continuing struggle with its own history of segregation and prejudice.

TxDOT's recent commitment to funding the rebuilding of I-35 represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to re-shape the corridor according to the values and needs of people who are affected by and interact with it on a daily basis. This is a moment that will define Austin for our children and those who follow them.

NCINC applauds TxDOT's commitment to removing the Upper Decks. This alone is a powerful indication that TxDOT has listened to North Central Austin stakeholders. We also thank Program Manager Susan Fraser for her tireless commitment to reaching out to our Member Neighborhoods to share information about the project and hear questions and concerns from residents.

But there is still work to do. The Draft Coordination Plan and Schedule, Draft Project Purpose and Need, and Draft Range of Alternatives fall well short of committing to the necessary environmental, social, and cultural metrics that will ensure this project measurably improves the quality of life for residents and workers in North Central Austin and surrounding areas. We offer the following feedback on the Draft documents to help TxDOT balance its operational requirements for the I-35 corridor with the needs of our members and communities on both sides of the highway:

### **Draft Coordination Plan and Schedule**

We appreciate the extension of the Public Scoping Period #1 to 50 days from TxDOT's original 30-day period. The resounding public request for a longer input period reflects both the public's interest in this once-in-a-generation opportunity and our deeply rooted concerns regarding the ability of stakeholders to provide feedback during a global pandemic in which many are without resources to receive information about the project or have access to public resources needed to provide feedback. Despite the comment period extension, NCINC's Member Neighborhoods have not had sufficient time to review plans, gain input from residents, or vote on positions during this Public Scoping Period.

These obstacles to public input illustrate the imperative that all future Public Scoping Periods be of ample time to allow all stakeholders to meaningfully participate in the process. We therefore request that the Draft Coordination Plan and Schedule include a period of up to 90 days and not less than 60 days for all future Public Scoping Periods and other public input opportunities.

### **Draft Project Purpose and Need**

The Draft Project Purpose and Need does not address the effects of this project on the health, safety, level of access, and quality of life of people who live or work along I-35 in North Central Austin. Specifically, we request that the Draft Project and Need include measurable outcomes for improvements to the environmental, community, and cultural health of neighborhoods adjacent to I-35.

We request that TxDOT expand the Draft Project Purpose and Need to include the following needs in its study of Design Alternatives and evaluation of their respective strengths and drawbacks throughout the project area, as well as their particular impacts on historically disadvantaged communities:

- Reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Harmful Roadway-Related Emissions;
- Compliance with Federal EPA Requirements for Noise Pollution;
- Improvement to Local Air and Water Quality;
- Reduction in Respiratory Disorders, Premature Death, Nature-Deficit Disorder, and other physical and mental health impacts;
- Safe Access to Schools;
- Vehicle Speeds on Surface Streets and in Residential Neighborhoods;

- Preservation of Cultural and Historical Resources;
- Affordable Housing and Preference Policy (“Right to Return”);
- Compliance with City of Austin Standards for Surface Streets (including Frontage Roads);
- Character of and Distance between Crossings over I-35 for all Modes of Travel;
- Elimination of Land Condemnation or Eminent Domain and Disproportionate Impacts on East Austin Residents, Property Owners, and Businesses;
- Property Tax Rates and Impacts to Low- and Moderate-Income Property Owners (<80% AMI)
- Transit Potential and Multi-Modal Impacts;
- Support Systems for People experiencing Homelessness;
- Assessment of Trauma Against Communities of Color; and
- Climate Change Mitigation.

## **Draft Range of Alternatives**

At this point, we do not believe that the public has been given sufficient information on the Draft Range of Alternatives to provide meaningful comment on the designs. Many of our active members have voiced confusion over how the Draft Range of Alternatives addresses key design details including ramp design, collector-distributors, intersection design, surface street design speeds, and character and frequency of crossings.

Despite these challenges, NCINC has received the following resounding feedback on the Draft Range of Alternatives:

- We ask that any designs that expand the current right-of-way be removed from further study. An increase in the width of I-35’s current footprint through Central Austin will require significant land condemnation on the east side of I-35, continuing the troubling history of I-35 having a disproportionately negative impact on East Austin;
- We ask that any designs that include elevated portions be removed from further study. We support the removal of the Upper Decks and do not support their replacement with other elevated highway designs; and
- We ask that designs not include sound walls as the means by which to mitigate noise. Sound walls will perpetuate the separation and isolation of residents who live on the east side of I-35, continuing--if not exacerbating--the impenetrability of the roadway by cutting off sightlines, preventing access to the corridor, and preventing the frontage roads from becoming vibrant community edges and safe streets for business owners and patrons.

We further note that all three Build Alternatives include an expansion of the Central Segment to 20 total lanes. This does not amount to a sufficient study of available options during the Environmental Impact Statement. We offer the following specific objections:

- This is a notably larger expansion than the previous plans that TxDOT shared with the public in 2016 and, as such, represents a new design that has not been vetted at all by the public or local leadership;
- TxDOT is not providing any designs that maintain current capacity and address Design Standards, Operational Deficiencies, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety, in addition to other community requests as listed above; and
- TxDOT is not acknowledging known shortcomings in travel demand modeling or how it will include Induced Demand in its modeling. Specifically, traffic volumes on I-35 in North Central Austin over the last

decade have not kept pace with projections in previous travel demand models of the corridor. Research indicates volumes will increase commensurate with added capacity.

Therefore, we request that TxDOT work with project area stakeholders to create community alternatives--including in pre-engineering phases--as part of the full Environmental Impact Statement to include, at a minimum:

- A typical section of no more than fourteen total lanes;
- A public co-creation process to identify community alternatives;
- Outreach to determine appropriate locations and character for crossings, ramps, and other design features; and
- Clear visualizations for the public of all Build Alternatives, including community alternatives, that are easily understood by people without engineering or other technical expertise.

NCINC is empowered by its Member Neighborhoods to make statements on behalf of Neighborhood Associations based on the approved positions or general standing positions of those Associations. Providing a clear representation of the positions of our Member Neighborhoods is a responsibility that NCINC takes very seriously. Due to time constraints of the Public Scoping Period #1, our Member Neighborhoods have not taken official positions on the Draft documents and the contents of this statement, therefore, should not be construed as representing an official position of any Neighborhood Association or other organization.

This response does, however, reflect the spirit of NCINC's nearly 20 years of collaboration between neighborhoods in response to TxDOT plans for I-35, including past positions shared with TxDOT and local elected leadership, as well as hundreds of volunteer hours by our current active membership in reviewing the current TxDOT plans and providing feedback and sharing with our neighbors and networks.

We look forward to working with you to make I-35 a better component of Austin's mobility future and a better neighbor to north central neighborhoods.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brendan Wittstruck', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brendan Wittstruck, Chair  
North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC)

cc: Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Rep. Sheryl Cole, District 46  
Rep. Gina Hinajosa, District 49  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
Jeff Travillion, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 1 1  
Ashby Johnson, CAMPO  
Mayor Steve Adler  
Mayor Pro Tem Delia Garza  
Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison  
Council Member-Elect Vanessa Fuentes  
Council Member Sabino Renteria  
Council Member Gregorio Casar  
Council Member Ann Kitchen  
Council Member Jimmy Flannigan  
Council Member-Elect Mackenzie Kelly  
Council Member Leslie Pool  
Council Member Paige Ellis  
Council Member Kathie Tovo  
Council Member Alison Alter  
Rob Spillar, COA Transportation Department  
Melissa Barry, Downtown Austin Alliance  
Dewitt Peart, Downtown Austin Alliance

*VIA EMAIL*



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Sara Behunek  
Director of Communications and Strategy  
Rifeline  
1608 West 6th Street  
Austin, Texas 78703

*VIA EMAIL*

09 March 2021

Dear Mr. Bass, Ms. Fraser, Mr. Ferguson and Ms. Behunek,

On behalf of the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC), I want to share my thanks for your decision to extend last year's Virtual Public Scoping Meeting #1 following our request for additional time to provide input. The extension to 50 days, while short of the 60 we requested, did allow time for some of our Member Neighborhoods to contribute to the stakeholder input process which otherwise could not have happened during a 30-day window.

We are saddened, then, to see TxDOT return to a minimum 30-day public comment period for its Virtual Public Scoping Meeting #2, now scheduled to begin on March 11th. **With this letter, we repeat our request that TxDOT extend the comment period to a period of no less than 60 days in order for NCINC and its Member Neighborhoods to have time to provide meaningful and informed input. We further request that a minimum of 60 days be included for all future public comment periods throughout the Environmental Impact Statement process.**

There is a mechanical purpose for our request for this extension. NCINC's mission is to share information between our eleven Member Neighborhoods and advocate on IH-35 plans on their behalf. Typically, the Neighborhood Associations of our Member Neighborhoods meet monthly and require advance notice of action items for a vote. Only following official positions or confirmation of existing positions of our Member Neighborhoods does NCINC take a formal position on matters related to IH-35. This process, while laborious, is essential for us to ensure that NCINC and its Member Neighborhoods faithfully and responsibly convey the viewpoints of our membership and reach the widest possible audience.

The public scoping extension had a measurable impact on the quality of feedback NCINC and its Member Neighborhoods were able to provide. At a time when neighborhood organizations still cannot meet safely in person, sharing information with neighbors and affected stakeholders on this hugely important project continues to be uniquely challenging. On top of this, our community was rattled by power and water outages during last month's historic winter storm; as I write, many in Austin are still without water and struggling to meet basic needs.

NCINC affirms our commitment to sharing information about the project and encouraging north central Austin residents, business owners and workers to engage with TxDOT's environmental review process to help shape a positive outcome for the project. In order to enable this, we greatly appreciate your consideration of our request for the expansion of Virtual Public Scoping Period #2 and all future public comment periods to not less than 60 days.

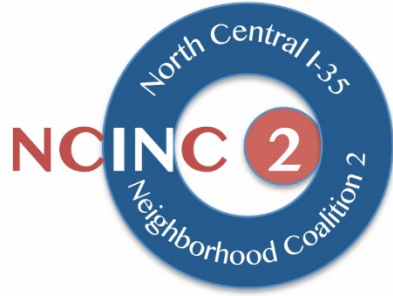
Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a vertical stroke.

Brendan Wittstruck, Chair  
North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC)

cc: [my35capex@txdot.gov](mailto:my35capex@txdot.gov)

Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Rep. Sheryl Cole, District 46  
Rep. Gina Hinojosa, District 49  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
Jeff Travillion, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 1  
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Council Member Mackenzie Kelly  
Council Member Leslie Pool  
Council Member Paige Ellis  
Council Member Kathie Tovo  
Council Member Alison Alter  
Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
Gina Fiandaca, Assistant City Manager for Mobility  
Rob Spillar, COA Transportation Department  
Mike Trimble, COA Corridor Program Office  
Melissa Barry, Downtown Austin Alliance  
Dewitt Peart, Downtown Austin Alliance



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Susan Fraser, P.E., CFM  
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Sara Behunek  
Director of Communications and Strategy  
Rifeline  
1608 West 6th Street  
Austin, Texas 78703

*VIA EMAIL*

09 April 2021

Dear Mr. Bass, Ms. Fraser, Mr. Ferguson and Ms. Behunek,

As part of the Public Scoping Period #2 for the I-35 Capital Express Central Project, the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC) is pleased to submit our scoping feedback to encourage a positive process and outcome for the project. NCINC now comprises twelve Member Neighborhoods in North Central Austin on both sides of I-35 in Austin City Council Districts 1, 4, and 9. We appreciate Program Manager Susan Fraser and her team meeting with us on March 24th of this year; questions from that meeting follow this letter for the record *[Attachment A]*.

As a group, our daily experience is intimately tied to I-35 and we endeavor to engage with TxDOT in a supportive fashion that is hopeful for a positive future for the highway. We are sorry to say that TxDOT has not met our communities' expectations in its responses to feedback from the previous Public Scoping Period that concluded in December 2020.

We reiterate our previous request that public comment periods be no less than sixty (60) days in length. The limited duration of TxDOT's current scoping periods is insufficient for the public at large to educate themselves, share information with each other, and provide feedback on a project of this magnitude. As most of our Member Neighborhoods have not had time in this 30-day period to sufficiently discuss TxDOT plans with their members, the feedback we are providing here is representative of our concerns as an organization but should not be construed as representing an official position of any Neighborhood Association or other organization.

At this point, we do not have enough information on TxDOT's Design Alternatives to engage in a discussion of their merits and drawbacks. The profile diagrams and illustrations supplied in the current scoping period are insufficient for us to provide meaningful feedback on any of the Design Alternatives. Specifically, we request reasonably detailed treatments for the length and location of ramps and intersections in the north central area of the Central Segment (including at Airport Boulevard, where previous TxDOT concepts have shown intersection designs that are inappropriate for use in an urban core and substantially impair access for bicyclists and pedestrians) as well as surface street design elements including design speed, posted speed, lane widths, bicycle facilities, street trees, and facilities to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act and Texas Accessibility Standards.

Additionally, the Design Alternatives presented are not suitable for comparative study. The three Alternatives are functionally nearly identical to one another, with only minor variations between Alternatives 2 and 3 and without any variation in the vehicle carrying capacity of the designs. There can be no objective comparison of concepts that are too similar to generate tangible differences in evaluation outputs. This is evident in TxDOT's omission of air quality as an evaluation metric, despite the obvious science that Design Alternatives that do not expand capacity would result in fewer emissions-producing vehicle miles traveled. TxDOT has eschewed community requests for "community alternatives" or alternative alignments that could provide invaluable side-by-side scoring of TxDOT's evaluation criteria. While NCINC has never formally discussed or taken a position on existing community-generated concepts--including Reconnect Austin, Rethink35, the recommendations of the Downtown Austin Alliance's ULI Study, and a designation switch to 183 or SH 130--we offer that these designs are templates already available to TxDOT with the potential to create a more appropriately diverse range of Design Alternatives for environmental review.

Despite these concerns, NCINC and its Member Neighborhoods continue to work tirelessly to engage with TxDOT's process, review plans for I-35, and share information with affected stakeholders. While the feedback we provide here is by no means comprehensive, it represents several key issues of discussion that require revision to or further clarification of TxDOT's draft scoping documents:

### **Environmental Justice**

The Austin community has resoundingly called upon TxDOT to acknowledge the past and present role of I-35 in reinforcing segregation and placing disproportionate harm upon communities of color as part of this project. The current draft scoping materials fall far short of meeting this demand. Specifically, we call for the Project Purpose and Need to explicitly recognize how previous planning processes for I-35 systematically undermined the health and agency of communities of color, many of whom were not

even legally able to vote when I-35 was first constructed. We further call on TxDOT to undertake specific outreach to communities of color and historically underserved communities, preferably in concert with the City of Austin and the City of Austin's Equity Office, as part of the planning, design, and construction process for I-35.

NCINC supports the feedback provided by the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association and the Our Future 35 Scoping Working Group in calling for TxDOT to substantively address the past harms of the planning process, construction, and legacy of I-35 as an integral part of this environmental planning process.

### **East-West Connectivity**

We acknowledge that removing the upper decks will be a positive development that has strong support among our Member Neighborhoods; however, their removal is not a sufficient measure if it comes as part of a project that does not also make substantial progress in providing high-quality, well connected, and safe surface streets and crossings and improve the resilience of a multi-modal local street grid.

As we have previously stated, east-west connectivity is a primary concern for NCINC. Despite TxDOT stating that this is a key project goal, the current available information on the Design Alternatives show that TxDOT is providing no improvement to east-west connectivity as part of this project and in some cases may be making it worse. The Design Alternatives show no new east-west crossings of any kind in the north central segment, despite our repeated requests for additional crossings and the City of Austin's recommendation of no more than a half mile between crossing opportunities. TxDOT has indicated to us that a pedestrian crossing north of 51st Street is under study, although this is not available in public materials. We request detailed schematics for this crossing and repeat our request that TxDOT conduct a full study of all potential connections across I-35 through the north central area.

NCINC supports the feedback from the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association [*Attachment B*] in calling for frontage roads that are low-speed, multi-modal-friendly routes that support the development of vibrant residential areas and commercial retail destinations.

### **Noise and Air Quality**

The neighborhoods along I-35 through north central Austin are among the closest in proximity to I-35. Fittingly, we have many questions about how sound mitigation will be handled in this project. We request additional information from TxDOT on how sound attenuation will meet Federal requirements; how property owners, residents, commercial tenants, and neighborhood organizations will be able to provide feedback; and how TxDOT's methodology will account for differing vehicle speeds and actual and perceived noise at all times of day and year.

In addition to sound attenuation, special attention must be paid to localized air quality and the effects of air pollutants and particulates on nearby residents. As we have yet to see metrics on current air quality and anticipated changes to it as a result of the project, our Member Associations have reason for concern regarding the impact of additional vehicle lanes on local air quality and associated respiratory health. We request that TxDOT add the assessment of localized air quality impacts and associated health impacts on north central residents to the evaluation criteria.

### **Land Acquisition**

It is evident to NCINC that TxDOT's intentions for this project require the taking of properties or portions of properties along I-35 and this is an element of the project that is of significant concern to Member Associations. We request additional information specific to what properties are anticipated to be affected, including properties to be acquired and adjacent properties, and through what means TxDOT proposes to acquire them. We further ask that TxDOT limit right-of-way expansion to only what is necessary for transportation purposes, or no greater than approximately half the depth of the lots facing the frontage road, whichever is less.

### **Historic Preservation**

The Wilshire Historic District abuts I-35 and is recognized as a National Register Historic District under Federal law. As such, we understand construction or roadway projects, including TxDOT's plans for I-35, are subject to Section 106 (16 U.S.C. 470f) review. We request additional information on how TxDOT plans to address this review and impacts from the proposed construction.

NCINC supports the feedback from the Wilshire Wood-Delwood I Neighborhood Association [*Attachment C*] in requesting detailed feedback on how TxDOT will meet Federal requirements regarding effects on the Historic District's design, cultural, and environmental integrity.

### **Local Enhancements**

Finally, we stress that Austin has grown and evolved as a city considerably in the decades since I-35 was first constructed. In this time, north central Austin--which was on the very edge of city limits when construction began on the highway--has become an increasingly urban center of activity and companion to the downtown area. We call on TxDOT to recognize the contemporary context of north central Austin and provide designs for I-35 that reflect this character, rather than reinforcing the suburban character of the highway's original construction.

In particular, we ask that the local enhancement ("cap and stitch") area under study by the City of Austin and TxDOT, presently limited to the downtown area (between Lady Bird Lake and 15th Street), be extended into north central Austin. This concept will provide clear community benefits to the downtown area and would arguably provide even more demonstrable value to the residential neighborhoods fronting I-35 in north central Austin. NCINC is committed to working with the City of Austin to broaden the scope of its local enhancement study, and we request that TxDOT also provide design consideration for future capping of I-35 through north central Austin in addition to downtown.

In closing, after review of the available materials provided by TxDOT in the Public Scoping Period #2, NCINC does not endorse any Design Alternative in its current form. We call on TxDOT to examine a greater range of Design Alternatives and alignments in order to produce a meaningful study of diverse design ideas that address the myriad community needs for mobility, safety, quality of life, and acknowledgment of past harms such that they are not repeated.

In order to achieve this, we call on TxDOT to expand the Project Purpose and Need to address long-standing harms against communities of color enforced and embodied by I-35, bolster grid resilience and access for all ages and abilities by adding crossings and meeting the City of Austin's standards for surface street design and character. We also ask for TxDOT to re-evaluate its responses to our community feedback in a way that encourages a meaningful dialogue throughout this environmental process with people who will live with the outcome of this project for a generation or more.

We look forward to continuing our work on this important project with TxDOT in the next stages of public engagement and throughout the conclusion of the environmental process.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a vertical stroke.

Brendan Wittstruck, Chair  
North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC)

att:     Attachment A – Questions from NCINC 3/24/2021 Meeting with TxDOT  
         Attachment B – Letter from Cherrywood Neighborhood Association to TxDOT  
         Attachment C – Letter from Wilshire Wood-Delwood I Neighborhood Association to TxDOT

cc: [my35capex@txdot.gov](mailto:my35capex@txdot.gov)  
Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Rep. Sheryl Cole, District 46  
Rep. Gina Hinojosa, District 49  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
Jeff Travillion, Travis County Commissioner, Pct 1  
Ashby Johnson, CAMPO  
Mayor Steve Adler  
Mayor Pro Tem Natasha Harper-Madison  
Council Member Vanessa Fuentes  
Council Member Sabino Renteria  
Council Member Gregorio Casar  
Council Member Ann Kitchen  
Council Member Mackenzie Kelly  
Council Member Leslie Pool  
Council Member Paige Ellis  
Council Member Kathie Tovo  
Council Member Alison Alter  
Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
Gina Fiandaca, Assistant City Manager for Mobility  
Rob Spillar, COA Transportation Department  
Mike Trimble, COA Corridor Program Office  
Melissa Barry, Downtown Austin Alliance  
Dewitt Peart, Downtown Austin Alliance

## Questions from NCINC 3/24/2021 Meeting with TxDOT

On March 24th, 2021, NCINC members met virtually with TxDOT to receive information about the current scoping process and ask questions of TxDOT. Our membership's questions to TxDOT during that meeting here are repeated for the public record:

*As a homeowner literally living under the upper deck, I'm curious what property owners are involved in the noise assessment? Are these commercial property owners? I would argue that those properties have a VERY different experience of roadway noise, not to mention vibrations. Similarly, noise and vibrations levels change dramatically through the 24 hour cycle, with the worst noise occurring in the middle of the night when congestion is lightest. Are noise and vibration levels being evaluated at all times of the day?*

*Noise abatement walls/barriers: for TxDOT to suggest/propose noise pollution "walls", what triggers that? Anticipated noise levels with the "new build" more than with a "no build", or Anticipated noise levels with the "new build" more than what is currently allowed by current US federal environmental law?*

*I am wondering if this work would require "taking" of land currently in use for commercial purposes just north and East of the 51st st "fly over"?*

*Current 290 flyover to Koenig Lane has added a measurable increase of noise to the Ridgetop Neighborhood. How will additional flyovers at 290 be built to mitigate additional sound?*

*How were the projections for increased trips on I-35 through central Austin calculated to increase by such a huge amount? I saw a data compilation of traffic data for I-35 between 2015 and 2019 and the trip count was virtually unchanged, not increasing.*

*In the 80's the Federal environmental agency found Austin I-35 high air pollution levels. The traffic has grown exponentially - is TxDOT receiving air quality reports?*

*Is induced demand a recognized concept by TxDOT?*

*Do the build proposals fit within the existing I35 footprint?*

*Has TxDot engaged the City of Austin's Equity Office to conduct a study on how these changes could impact the equity of communities in the area?*

*Are all build alternatives compatible with cap and stitch design options for this stretch?*

*Do the projections for I-35 traffic take into account the light rail line that's going in a mile to the west along a parallel north/south path and will remove cars from the road? It doesn't seem possible that the I-35 traffic models account for that, since that vote just happened in November.*

*Austin has a net-zero community-wide greenhouse emissions goal for 2050. Are the proposals considering how to aid that goal?*

*Is TXDOT measuring travel time and/or access for non-vehicle users?*

*What criteria or methodology does TxDOT use to evaluate when to sunset or remove a freeway? Or does TxDOT never evaluate that option?*



The Cherrywood Neighborhood is bounded by I-35, 38 ½ Street, Airport Boulevard, and Manor Road. It is a flourishing neighborhood of homes, businesses, and green spaces in Central Austin.

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Director of Communications and Strategy  
Rifeline  
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April 7, 2021

Dear Mr. Bass, Mr. Ferguson, Ms. Fraser, and Ms. Behunek,

We appreciated the presentation by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Interstate-35 Capital Express Central Project (CapEx Project) to the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association (CNA) general membership meeting on November 18, 2020, and the presentation to the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC) on March 24, 2021. Thank you.

The CNA Steering Committee met on April 7, 2021 to finalize our response to the TxDOT CapEx Project Second Virtual Public Scoping Meeting phase of engagement. CNA, as a founding member of NCINC, continues to support NCINC's advocacy on issues that affect all neighborhoods adjacent to I-35 through central Austin.

This letter reaffirms the CNA support for the project-scale advocacy points of NCINC and several other organizations, as well as the neighborhood-scale points specific to the Cherrywood area set out in our letter dated December 30, 2020. These points are loosely grouped around accessibility to, along, and across I-35; land use opportunities along and character of the frontage road; and attending to current social considerations as the project proceeds.

This current letter further amplifies several CNA concerns and aspirations for this project. One emerging thread over the last several months of this process that bears highlighting is the combined experience that residents of CNA and NCINC neighborhoods (and many, many others along the entire length of the CapEx project) bring to this effort to renovate I-35 through Austin; we have been engaged in this conversation for decades, and we live the reality of the highway daily. We appreciate and welcome that the team of staff, engineers, and consultants from TxDOT and its consultants are almost all new to this conversation and therefore bring a fresh perspective. However, for many of us, the points of concern—and the TxDOT responses in public meetings to-date—feel like another iteration of a familiar, uninspiring story. With an eye toward implementation of plans from the CapEx project, we trust that TxDOT will make every effort to act in alignment with its stated aspirations for this process

and the project and actively listen and respond to community input in a different and more meaningful way than years past.

Regardless of the final design alternative pursued, CNA sees the CapEx Project as an opportunity to reimagine the roadway and its impact on our neighborhood and generations of future Cherrywood residents and business owners and on Austin as a whole. Cherrywood residents are heartened by and enthusiastic about TxDOT's commitment to removing the upper decks.

### **Design Alternatives**

CNA residents have always supported the removal of the upper deck and fully depressing the I-35 main lanes in order to limit or negate the need for right-of-way expansion, to mitigate the roadway's looming visual and physical presence, to reduce noise and air pollution generated by roadway traffic, and to address the legacy of racism and segregation I-35 embodies. A final design option that limits right-of-way expansion and depresses main and managed lanes offers the only comprehensive solution to the roadway's impact on the Cherrywood neighborhood.

Current design options presented by TxDOT indicate I-35 expansion would occur entirely below grade, with one build alternative showing a tunnel at "minus 2" for through-traffic and depressed lanes at "minus 1" for local traffic. CNA supports a fully depressed roadway that is designed and built in preparation for "cap and stitch." Designing the roadway for future capping/stitching allows for the real possibility of reconnecting east and west Austin neighborhoods, which is of paramount importance to our residents. We look forward to seeing TxDOT's sincere evaluation of a roadway that is fully depressed and built to be capped not just in the downtown area, but that reaches as far north as Airport Boulevard.

### **Right-of-Way and Land Use**

CNA's preference is for no right-of-way expansion in the CapEx project but, as all scenarios seem to encroach on the existing right-of-way to varying degrees, CNA is proceeding under the assumption that there will be some impact to the existing right-of-way on the northbound frontage road into properties in the Cherrywood area, even if only for construction purposes. In fact, TxDOT has made clear in public meetings that expanding the right-of-way into Cherrywood would likely be required due to the proximity of St. David's Hospital on the west side of I-35.

We believe the lingering, imminent possibility of property being purchased by TxDOT for highway expansion has negatively influenced development along the northbound frontage road for decades. While the lots on the northbound frontage road are not as deep as those on the southbound frontage, we note the recent and rapid development of high-rise residential units and parking decks abutting the edge of the southbound frontage road, and new development along the short section of the northbound frontage road north of Airport Boulevard.

In the interest of good design that will benefit our neighborhood as well as TxDOT, the CNA is developing a set of principles that would exemplify a best-case scenario for the right-of-way that helps achieve long-held neighborhood values and goals of encouraging vertical-mixed use and pedestrian-oriented development along the corridor from Dean Keeton Street to Wilshire Boulevard. We will continue to refine these principles through community engagement and explore the various ways of implementing them over the coming year.

Initial principles of the Cherrywood Vision for I-35 Renovation:

- Removal of the upper deck
- Depression of the main lanes
- Limit right-of-way expansion to only what is necessary for transportation purposes, or no greater than approximately half the depth of the lots facing the frontage road, whichever is less
- Redesign the northbound frontage road as a city street, with low design speeds and a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly edge

- Utilize the property remaining between the new right-of-way edge and the back property line of residential and commercial properties to achieve:
  - Development that itself creates a good buffer between the residential area and the highway
  - Ground floor office, retail, and recreation geared toward providing services that will serve the neighborhood as well as the larger community
  - Housing above commercial development—a significant portion of which is affordable at all income levels
  - Community spaces
  - Green spaces and natural streetscaping
  - Mobility patterns oriented to the east-west streets
  - Re-subdivision of properties so they are oriented to east/west streets rather than to I-35

CNA's ideal vision for the new frontage road is a low-speed, multi-modal-friendly urban street lined with nodes of mixed-use development. Parking facilities would be accessed from the east-west streets and properties would be reoriented (through re-subdivision) to the east-west streets rather than to I-35. We believe that this development and scale both reinvigorate the thoroughfare and provide a meaningful and organic barrier to sound for residential properties just off the frontage road.

At a city scale, CNA would like to reinforce its support for the resolutions and letters recently submitted by Austin City Council and for the statement submitted by Austin assistant city manager Gina Fiandaca in response to the first scoping period. We also express our support for the letters submitted by advocacy groups such as the Pedestrian Advisory Commission, Bicycle Advisory Commission, and NCINC. We especially note the history and design ideas from Reconnect Austin are very worthy of serious consideration, such as their "urban boulevard" concept which appears in alignment with our vision for a renovated frontage road along CNA's western edge.

CNA continues to support the work of Our Future 35 and others who are focused on the higher-level Purpose and Need statements for this project, which many believe still fall short of addressing critical perspectives such as acknowledging the legacy of racism and segregation embodied in the roadway and committing to righting historical wrongs. While the Cherrywood area is predominately white and trending upward in affluence relative to the city, we recognize I-35 is a physical embodiment of Austin's on-going struggle with institutional segregation and racism. CNA believes the CapEx Project can and should include positive community equity goals beyond mobility and we will continue to ally beside and behind groups who are focused on equity goals.

Sincerely,  
Cherrywood Neighborhood Association Steering Committee

cc:  
Texas Senator Sarah Eckhardt  
Texas Representative Sheryl Cole  
Austin Mayor Steve Adler  
Austin City Council District 9 Kathie Tovo  
Austin City Council Members

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Sara Behunek  
Director of Communications and  
Strategy  
Rifeline  
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Austin, Texas 78703

April 6, 2021

Dear Mr. Bass, Mr. Ferguson, Ms. Fraser, and Ms. Behunek,

The Wilshire Wood - Delwood 1 Neighborhood Association (WWD1NA) is hereby responding to the Interstate-35 Capital Express Central Project (CapEx project) of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The WWD1NA is a member of the new North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC), and it supports the general position of NCINC that the Purpose and Need of the CapEx project should include traffic metrics as well as community, cultural, and environmental health considerations.

We here point out concerns of our neighborhood, which borders I-35 on the east side between 38<sup>th</sup> Street and Airport Boulevard.

The WWD1NA sees merit in removing the two upper decks of I-35 between Manor Road and 51st Street, and to lower the managed lanes and mainlanes of the interstate highway. The upper decks are a physical and a symbolic barrier that has impeded the integration of East Austin neighborhoods in our city for decades.

Though a lowered interstate highway will appear less of an obstacle between East Austin and Central Austin, it is imperative that east-west connections for cars, cyclists, and pedestrians are maintained and improved in the new design for I-35. At present, residents from the Wilshire Wood - Delwood 1 neighborhood make use of Airport Boulevard, the crossing at the east entrance of Hancock Mall, and 38th

Street to travel westward across I-35. These intersections and other I-35 crossings are essential for the quality of life in Austin's neighborhoods.

The WWD1NA is very concerned that the three Build Alternatives that TxDOT has released, do not offer enough detail, in their designs released to the public, on the location of the northbound frontage road of I-35 and exit lanes towards eastbound Airport Boulevard.

The WWD1NA agrees with NCINC that TxDOT should offer a design alternative for I-35 that stays within the current right-of-way of I-35. The proximity of the I-35 traffic to our residential neighborhood is already a source of air and noise pollution, and further encroachment of the highway on the neighborhood will negatively impact our health and safety. If TxDOT pursues an expansion of right-of-way along the north-bound frontage road, it should therefore aim to minimize this addition, and initiate a dialogue with NCINC and the Neighborhood Associations along I-35 to assess the impact of this change in footprint.

The Wilshire Wood neighborhood largely consists of single-family homes that were built in the late 1940s and early 1950s with a consistent architectural design. Its unique character, and diverse cultural history, earned this neighborhood a National Register Historic District designation. To preserve this neighborhood, and to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, WWD1NA requests that a survey is conducted to assess the impact of future I-35 traffic on noise and air and water pollution to assure that it meets federal standards.

We point out that the following is not just an informal request, it is a reminder that the Interstate-35 Capital Express Central Project must follow the law: The Wilshire National Register Historic District was signed into federal and state law as such on June 8, 2011. It is bounded by the Southern Pacific Railroad, Ardenwood Road, Wilshire Boulevard, and the Delwood III subdivision. Though Bradwood Road and Ardenwood Road are particularly close to I-35, the importance of preservation of the entire Wilshire National Register Historic District must be recognized by TxDOT.

While the WWD1NA is in favor of a new I-35 profile that would connect east and central Austin, lower the upper decks, reduce noise and air pollution, and achieve other goals that the NCINC advocates, we stress here that federal law states the following:

According to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, this officially designated Wilshire National Register Historic District is protected from any adverse, character-altering construction project involving even a portion of funding

from federal sources (e.g. the Mobility35 project), if the proposed design and construction would affect the District's historic design integrity, cultural integrity, or environmental integrity. U.S. law states clearly that rigorous Section 106 (16 U.S.C. 470f) review is not solely in the domain of TxDOT or State of Texas officials. Any proposed changes to I-35 that impact the design integrity, cultural integrity, or environmental integrity of the Wilshire National Register Historic District could be required to undergo Section 106 (16 U.S.C. 470f) review by U.S. agencies, with the input of the WWD1NA.

In summary, the WWD1NA is in favor of a new I-35 profile that would connect east and central Austin, lower the upper decks, reduce noise and air pollution, and achieve the additional goals that the NCINC advocates. In addition, the WWD1NA supports the work of Our Future 35 "focused on how to guide and leverage this major investment to achieve positive outcomes for the Austin community" and the five desired outcomes they have outlined for TxDOT to incorporate into the planning process.

We applaud TxDOT in taking a leadership role in the scoping process, and look forward to a dialogue between WWD1NA and TxDOT not only in this current "scoping" process but also in the full Environmental review period that extends well beyond the April 9<sup>th</sup> deadline for the current stage of scoping.

Sincerely,



Harm Van Avendonk

Secretary

Wilshire Wood –Delwood 1 Neighborhood Association



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Lynda Rife  
Principal  
Rifeline  
1608 West 6th Street  
Austin, Texas 78703

*VIA EMAIL*

24 September 2021

Dear Mr. Williams, Mrs. Fraser, Mr. Ferguson and Mrs. Rife,

Over the past year and through the current public comment period for the Capitol Express Central project, the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition has continued our work sharing information about IH-35 plans with central Austin residents and businesses and acting on behalf of our member neighborhoods in providing feedback to TxDOT on this important project.

We reiterate our support for the removal of the upper decks and lowering of main lanes through much of the Central Segment. These design elements represent an improvement over the existing IH-35 that will improve the quality of life for nearby residents.

However, representatives of our member neighborhoods have broadly agreed that the plans as provided do too little to address and mitigate the negative impacts of the expansion of IH-35 on central Austin neighborhoods. Of particular concern to our members is the exorbitant acquisition of property within our member neighborhoods. We are also disappointed to see the “decks” area of the Central Segment not receive the same level of innovation that is being discussed in the downtown area. TxDOT has provided design solutions that do not respond appropriately to the current urban character of central Austin neighborhoods. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to recreate IH-35 in a manner that supports walkable, safe, and attractive neighborhoods and better connects neighborhoods to each other, and the two design alternatives remaining under consideration fall short of this goal.

We repeat our frustration that the public comment periods and engagement are insufficient for a project of this scale and impact on adjacent communities. As of this writing, only four of our twelve member neighborhoods have been able to provide formal feedback during this public comment period. We were also surprised at District Engineer Ferguson's recent remark to the Travis County Commissioner's Court that TxDOT has engaged with local residents on trade-offs of removing the upper decks; NCINC has not been invited to participate in any such discussions of trade-offs, though we would welcome the opportunity to do so.

As presented, the project TxDOT has brought to the public will inflict avoidable harm on north central neighborhoods and does not address repeated requests to better connect neighbors and mitigate the impact of IH-35 on nearby residents. The benefits of this investment in IH-35 are outweighed by the shortcomings of current plans to address the reasonable needs and requests of our member neighborhoods.

Therefore, NCINC does not endorse or support Alternatives 2 or 3 in their current form. We formally request that TxDOT immediately engage specifically with our member neighborhoods through NCINC to create a forum for a dialogue on design alternatives and potential trade-offs that support our community needs for this project.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brendan Wittstruck', with a large loop on the left and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Brendan Wittstruck, Chair  
North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC)

att: Letter from the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association  
Letter from the Hancock Neighborhood Association  
Letter from the North Loop Neighborhood Association  
Letter from the Mueller Neighborhood Association

cc: [capexcentral@txdot.gov](mailto:capexcentral@txdot.gov)  
Al Alonzi, Federal Highway Administration  
Senator Sarah Eckhardt, District 14  
Rep. Sheryl Cole, District 46  
Rep. Gina Hinojosa, District 49  
Hon. Andy Brown, Travis County Judge  
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Council Member Alison Alter  
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The Cherrywood Neighborhood is bounded by I-35, 38 ½ Street, Airport Boulevard, and Manor Road. It is a flourishing neighborhood of homes, businesses, and green spaces in Central Austin.

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Rifeline  
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September 23, 2021

Dear Mr. Williams, Mr. Ferguson, Ms. Fraser, and Ms. Rife,

We have appreciated the engagement by staff from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) on the Interstate-35 Capital Express Central Project (CapEx Project) with the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association (CNA) during this latest scoping period. Thank you.

The CNA Steering Committee met on September 23, 2021, to finalize our third response to the TxDOT CapEx Project Virtual Public Scoping phase of engagement. While Cherrywood residents are enthusiastic about TxDOT's commitment to removing the upper decks, CNA strongly supports the resolutions and letters recently submitted by the City of Austin, Travis County, Downtown Austin Alliance, Reconnect Austin and many others broadly calling out deficiencies in TxDOT's process and current design alternatives for the CapEx Project. The schematics provided on August 10, 2021, reflect an inattention to community feedback and represent unnecessary harm to the north central neighborhoods that will disproportionately bear the negative outcomes of an expansion of I-35.

The CapEx Project section between Dean Keeton Street and Wilshire Boulevard is of particular concern to Cherrywood residents and deserves as much innovation, creativity, and perhaps additional funding, as has been focused on the downtown section. This letter amplifies neighborhood-scale points specific to the Cherrywood area that were initially articulated in our letters from December 2020 and April 2021, further explored in an open house on September 8, and a follow-up survey of Cherrywood residents and business owners (select results below).

Even as we stand with NCINC, Reconnect Austin, City of Austin and others asking TxDOT to refresh the design alternatives, we welcome further direct engagement with TxDOT and City of Austin staff on several key issues:

#### **Improving community awareness and additional engagement opportunities**

We reiterate that many Cherrywood residents have been engaged in conversation about renovating the I-35 central section for decades, and we live the reality of the highway daily. Almost all of us moved into this part of Austin in full awareness of our proximity to the freeway and its eventual renovation, yet there are still many who are still learning about the scale and impact of this project (Chart 1). We recognize that community engagement requires a great deal of coordination but is a fundamental and paramount effort when planning for generation-spanning investments such as the CapEx Project.

Indeed, this awareness drives our collective insistence that TxDOT act in better alignment with its stated aspirations for its process (for example, not precluding design alternatives before publicly releasing them) and this project (for example, a commitment to a “no wider” and “no higher” alternative) and actively listen and respond to community input in a different and more meaningful way than years past. TxDOT is operating from a trust deficit (Chart 2) that should be a core concern moving forward.

As a neighborhood, we are eager to work with TxDOT and the City to increase community awareness.

### **Revisiting design alternatives**

CNA supports the calls from the City of Austin, Travis County, Downtown Austin Alliance, Reconnect Austin and others for a narrower right-of-way. We especially encourage TxDOT to pursue development of a narrower design that incorporates more cantilevered lanes in the Cherrywood section in preparation for “cap and stitch” options.

Designing the roadway for future capping and stitching allows for the real possibility of reconnecting east and west Austin neighborhoods with safe and inviting pedestrian, cycling, and vehicular connections. This is a critical accessibility issue for our residents (Chart 3) as well as for many other community organizations.

Cherrywood residents see minimal expansion of the right-of-way and minimal displacement of existing businesses (Chart 4) as critically important. This approach also creates more opportunities for future land use innovation.

As a neighborhood, and individually, we recognize that trade-offs are often necessary. One of the primary benefits of Cherrywood’s proximity to I-35 is freeway on- and off-ramps so convenient to our homes. While the importance of this convenience is decidedly mixed across neighborhood survey respondents, there is a general willingness to give up convenience of access to the freeway in exchange for design alternatives that minimize right-of-way encroachment on homes and creates a frontage road and freeway landscape more conducive to development according to City of Austin and neighborhood goals (Chart 7, Chart 8, Chart 9). This includes, but is not limited to, pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented commercial development that itself serves as a buffer from the highway.

A renewed effort on design may also improve how the CapEx Project begins to address the social concern of the interstate as a physical reminder—either as an elevated deck or a wide canyon—of historical inequities in the city’s development and daily functions, which our residents strongly support (Chart 6).

We will continue to be part of a large community coalition calling on TxDOT to revisit its design alternatives and we welcome working more closely with TxDOT on changes specific to our mile-long segment of the CapEx Project.

### **Maximizing remaining land for creative use**

CNA’s preference is for implementation of an alternative with no right-of-way expansion, but as a pragmatic anticipation given the alternatives currently presented, CNA assumes there will be some impact to the existing right-of-way along the frontage road and on adjacent properties (especially Robinson Avenue). We encourage TxDOT to revisit the principles guiding the narrower footprint design of Alternative 1 and includes the greater possibilities for returning land used temporarily for construction to private owners or the City of Austin.

In the interest of land use design that will benefit Austin and Cherrywood, as well as TxDOT, CNA is developing a set of principles that would exemplify a best-case scenario for the future frontage road from Dean Keeton Street to Wilshire Boulevard being envisioned and designed as an urban corridor or central city boulevard, similarly to design concepts envisioned for the downtown-section frontage roads. The following principles reflect long-held neighborhood values and goals of encouraging vertical-mixed use and pedestrian-oriented development along all commercial corridors. CNA recognizes future land use efforts will be coordinated with the City of Austin and private property owners and not TxDOT, so we will continue to refine these principles through community engagement.

### Guiding principles for land use

- Limit right-of-way expansion to only what is necessary for transportation purposes, leaving at least sixty feet (60') of depth from the private property line to the back of the shared-use path TxDOT is required to build.
- Redesign the northbound frontage road as an urban corridor city street or as a central city boulevard, with a design speed of no greater than 35 miles per hour and a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly edge that is more than a wide, unshaded sidewalk in the highway clear zone.
- CNA will work with private property owners and the City of Austin to utilize remaining property to achieve:
  - Development that itself forms a buffer between the residential area and the highway
  - Development of ground-floor office, retail, recreational areas, and community spaces geared toward providing services that will enhance the neighborhood as well as the larger community
  - Zoning that allows for housing over commercial, including affordable housing at a range of income levels
  - Green spaces and natural streetscaping that provides shade and buffering for pedestrians, cyclists, and non-vehicular motorists
  - Increased number of east-west connections across I-35
  - Possible re-subdivision of properties to allow for orientation to east/west streets
- Appropriate noise mitigation designed in collaboration with CNA and impacted residents

### **Construction-Phase Considerations**

As CNA and the rest of Austin absorbed the details of all three design alternatives released in August, it became clear that each alternative appeared to require some amount of additional, expanded right-of-way for the demolition of the upper decks and construction of the new depressed lanes.

While we encourage revised design alternatives that require no expanded right-of-way for construction purposes, we recognize the strong possibility of negative impacts to beloved businesses on the frontage road, including Escuelita del Alma, Stars Café, Taqueria Los Altos, and other small, local businesses such as Dreamers, Le Rouge, Texas Gamers Lounge, the Zebra Smoke Shop, and more. In fact, residents are more concerned with existing business displacement than with negative impacts to their own property values (Chart 4).

This is a deep intertwined land use and social concern for our neighborhood. Regardless of final design alternatives, if the CapEx Project proceeds to implementation, creating a plan for the construction phase that is clear and fair to existing businesses along the frontage road is critical to Cherrywood residents.

### **Equity**

As stated in our April 2021 letter, CNA continues to support the work of People United for Mobility Access (PUMA), Our Future 35, and other organizations that are focused on the higher-level Purpose and Need statements for this project, which many believe still fall short of addressing critical perspectives such as acknowledging the legacy of racism and segregation embodied in the roadway and committing to righting historical wrongs. While the Cherrywood area is predominately white and trending upward in affluence relative to the city, we recognize I-35 is a persistent physical embodiment of Austin's on-going struggle with institutional segregation and racism. CNA believes the CapEx Project can and should include positive community equity goals beyond mobility and we will continue to ally with and stand behind groups that are focused on equity goals.

Sincerely,  
Cherrywood Neighborhood Association Steering Committee

cc: Texas Senator Sarah Eckhardt  
Texas Representative Sheryl Cole  
Austin Mayor Steve Adler  
Austin City Council District 9 Kathie Tovo  
Austin City Council Members

Chart 1

Which phrase best describes how informed you feel right now about TxDOT's plans for the renovation of I-35?  
132 responses

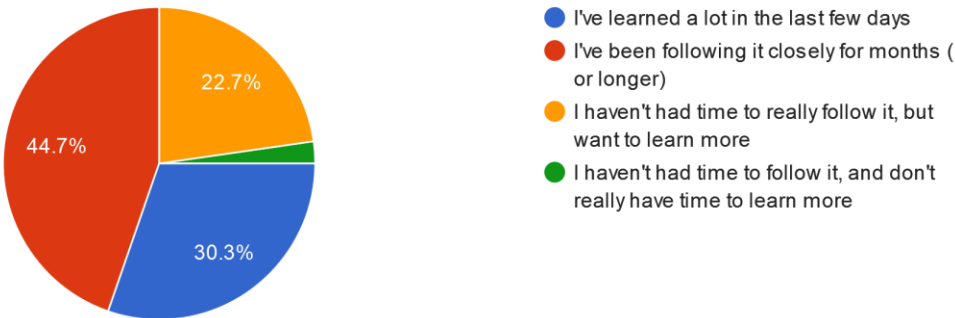


Chart 2

Do you feel TxDOT will consider your feedback when finalizing plans for I-35 renovation?  
133 responses

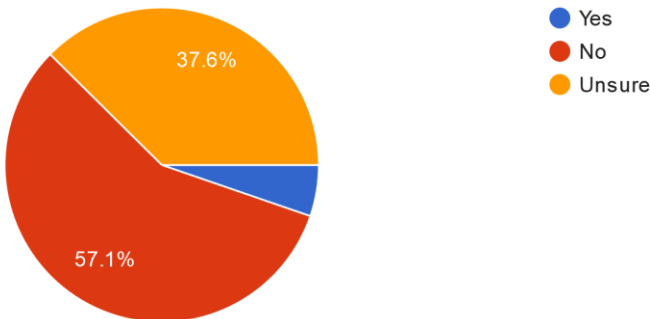


Chart 3

What ACCESSIBILITY issues are most important to you about any proposed TxDOT I-35 plans?

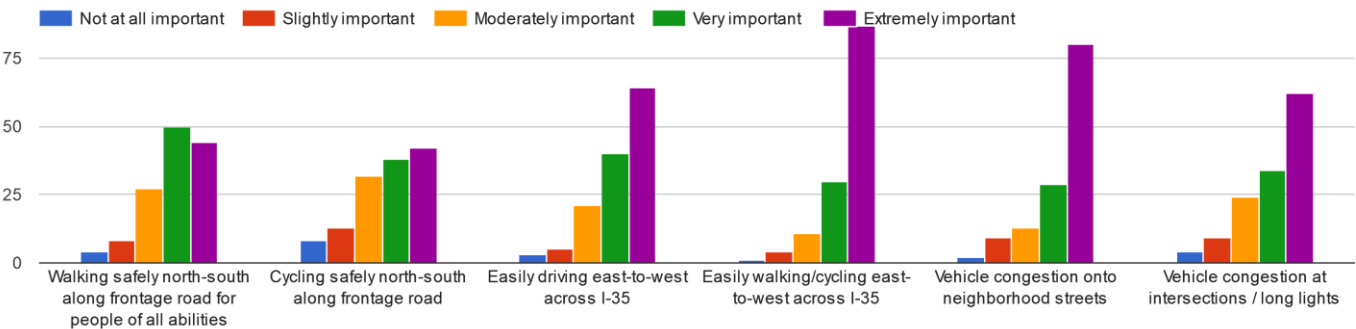


Chart 4

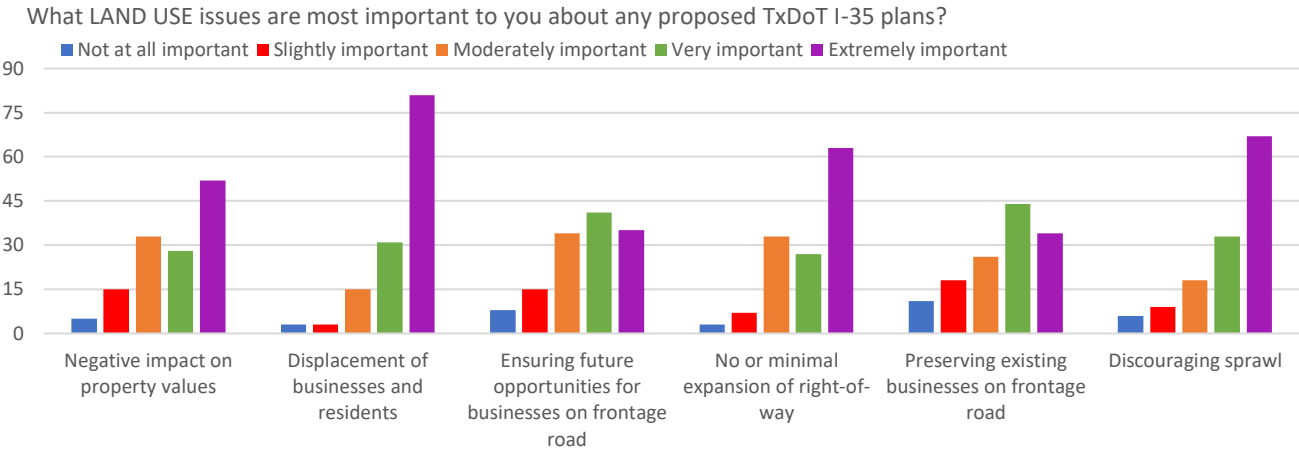


Chart 5

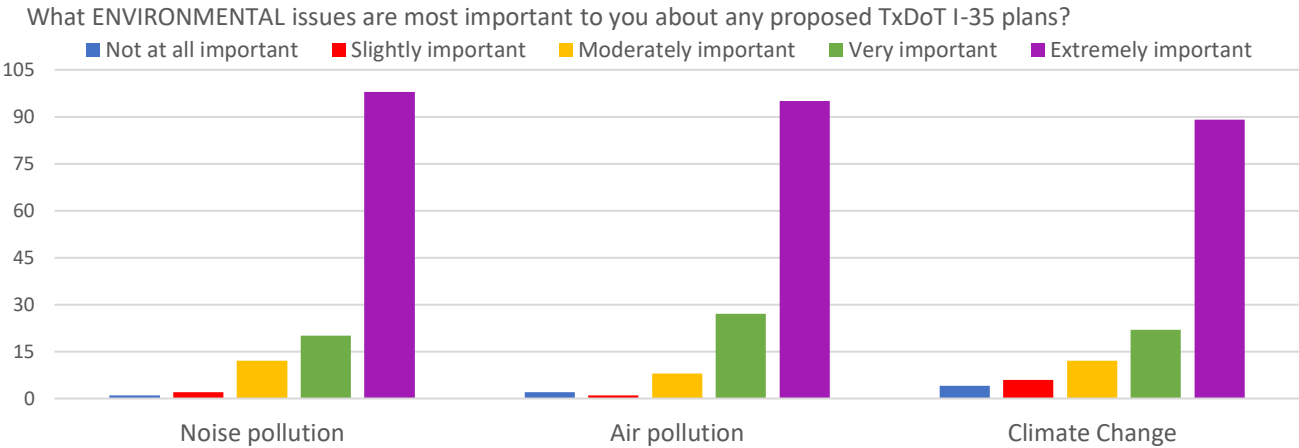


Chart 6

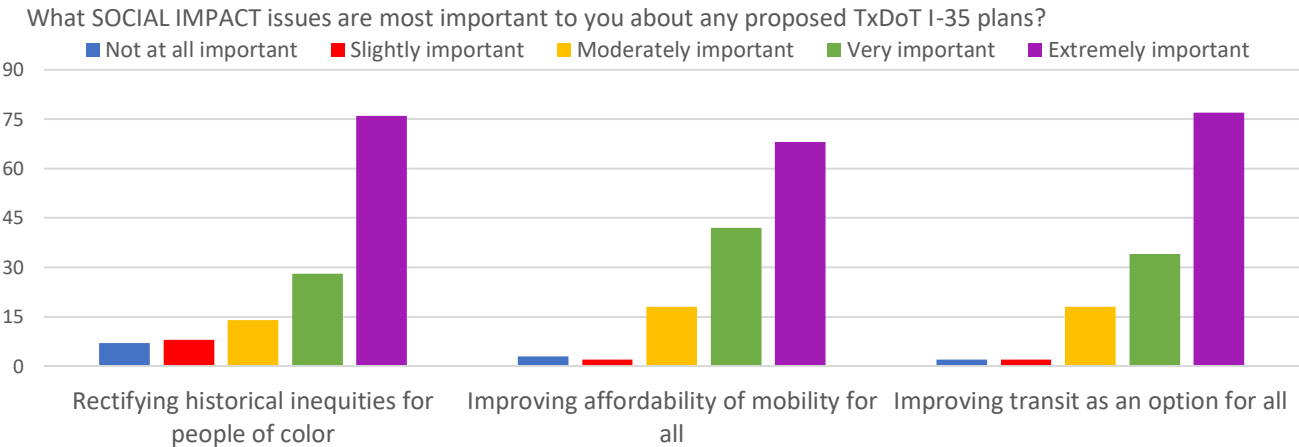


Chart 7

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

If a new frontage road allowed enough land for businesses, then I'm willing not to have a convenient access to or from I-35 in Cherrywood

133 responses

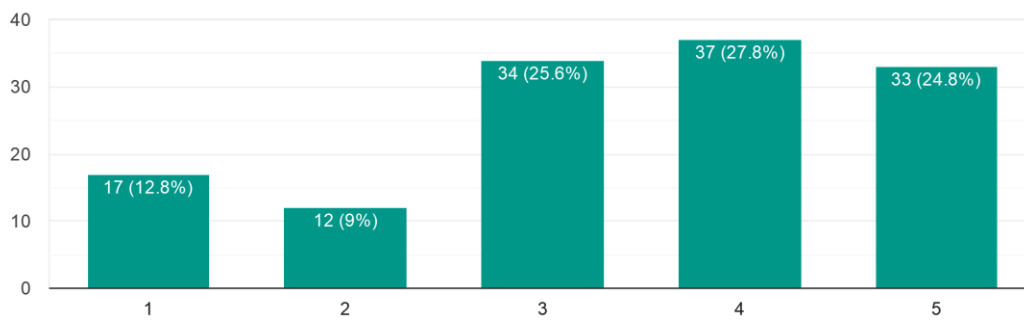


Chart 8

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

I'm willing to give up the existing on- and off-ramps to the freeway that are most convenient for Cherrywood, if that means the freeway right-of-way can be kept narrower.

133 responses

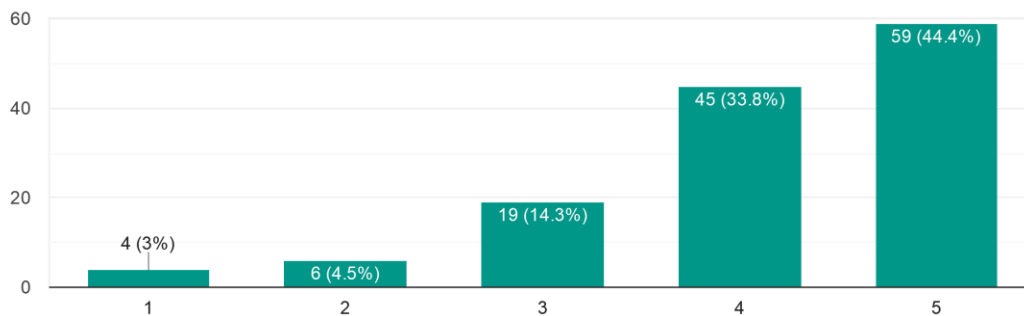
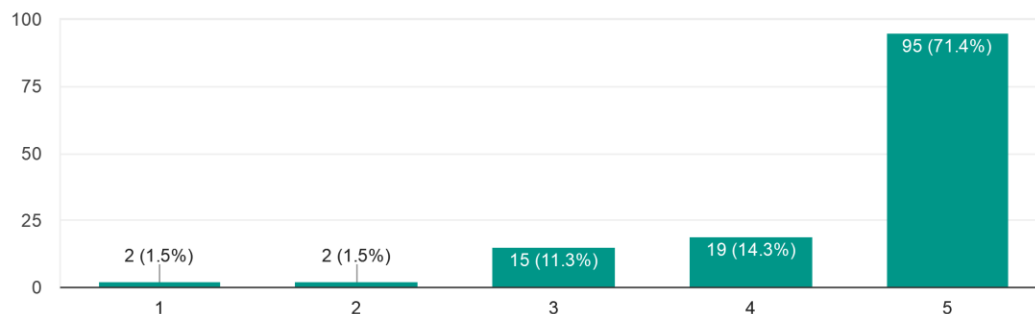


Chart 9

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

I'm willing to give up the existing on- and off-ramps to the freeway that are most convenient for Cherrywood, if that means there could be a cap and cover of the freeway in the Cherrywood area.

133 responses



# Hancock Neighborhood Association

The Hancock Neighborhood is bounded by Duval Street in the West, I-35 in the East, 45<sup>th</sup> Street in the North, and 32<sup>nd</sup> Street in the South.

President: [Coan Dillahunt](#), Vice President: [Bart Whatley](#)  
Treasurer: Bruce Fairchild (3907 Red River St, Austin, TX 78751), Secretary: [Robyn Ross](#)  
[www.hancockna.org](http://www.hancockna.org)

Marc D. Williams  
Executive Director  
TxDOT  
125 East 11th Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

Tucker Ferguson, PE  
Austin District Engineer  
TxDOT  
P.O. Box 15426  
Austin, Texas 78761-5425

Susan Fraser, PE, CFM  
I-35 Program Manager  
TxDOT  
P.O. Box 15426  
Austin, Texas 78761-5426

I-35 Capital Express Central Project  
Attn: Project Team  
7901 N. I-35  
Austin, TX 78753

September 24, 2021

Dear Mr. Williams, Mr. Ferguson, and Ms. Fraser,  
and dear I-35 Capital Express Central Project Team,

The Hancock neighborhood spans the area between 32<sup>nd</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> streets immediately west of I-35, and the Association serves to represent the interests of more than 2,000 central Austin households, i.e. around 6,000 residents, according to our estimates. On September 15, the Hancock Neighborhood Association unanimously voted to adopt the following statement regarding the Capital Express Central project:

The Hancock Neighborhood Association opposes TxDOT's current plans for the I-35 Capital Express Central project. The schematics provided on August 10, 2021, reflect TxDOT's insufficient attention to community feedback and represent unnecessary harm to north central neighborhoods.

Expanding I-35 to 20 – and in some areas 22 – lanes will induce thousands of additional vehicle trips per day through central Austin, offsetting potential gains in traffic safety, increasing emissions and noise pollution, degrading air quality, exacerbating health conditions, likely contributing to further neighborhood traffic congestion, and obstructing Austin's Community Climate Plan target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. All this for an expansion that will not relieve congestion, as stated by TxDOT's own District Engineer Tucker Ferguson in a presentation to Austin City Council on August 31.

We find these plans to be indefensible in light of the already unfolding climate crisis, which requires that we all think more carefully and creatively about how we travel. We also find them to be outdated, as they do not sufficiently take into account – let alone strategically integrate – the Project Connect plans for extensive light rail service and additional bus service that will reduce Austinites' need for vehicle trips.

We do applaud TxDOT's intent to remove the upper decks, which bring noise into the entirety of our neighborhood and exacerbate the division between Hancock and our eastside neighbors in Cherrywood,

Wilshire Woods, Mueller, and East Austin. We also applaud TxDOT's openness to reconnecting downtown with a cap and stitch plan and adding pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

However, with only two "stitches" between US 290 East and MLK Blvd, and no definite plans for any "caps" in this 3.5-mile stretch, north central neighborhoods like ours will disproportionately bear the considerable negative outcomes of an expansion of I-35. It is already exceedingly difficult and dangerous for us to travel east to Cherrywood or Mueller on foot or by bicycle. We can only imagine the additional challenges posed by a 20-lane thoroughfare, including up to 4-lane frontage roads, no matter the particular design. What is more, the overwhelming majority of up to 147 displacements and 32 acres of right-of-way required for Alternatives 2 and 3 are located in north central neighborhoods, including Hancock.

In 2020, Texas Transportation Commission Chairman Bruce Bugg vowed that plans for I-35 in central Austin would be "no wider and no higher." With its dismissal of community alternatives and the removal of Alternative 1 from study – the only alternative that approached this claim – before the public was able to comment on it, TxDOT has not kept this promise.

Furthermore, TxDOT's Alternatives 2 and 3 are practically identical, leaving no opportunity for the community to participate in the project in a meaningful way. North central neighborhoods affected by this proposed expansion deserve a direct, open dialogue with TxDOT to develop a reasonable alternative that produces positive impacts for the people living and working along the I-35 corridor, now and in the future.

We therefore join other north central neighborhoods in rejecting TxDOT's current plans. We would like to engage with TxDOT to identify solutions that balance TxDOT's mandate to move traffic with our neighborhoods' needs to breathe clean air, travel safely on foot and by bicycle, and keep our homes and businesses from being demolished to make room for an even larger highway.

We ask TxDOT to heed our concerns and design an I-35 corridor that

1. truly connects us, instead of dividing us further;
2. preserves the integrity of our neighborhoods, instead of uprooting businesses and families;
3. reduces I-35's footprint, if anything, instead of expanding it further;
4. works hand in hand with Project Connect, helping reduce traffic and pollution, instead of increasing them further;
5. serves the needs, health, and safety of all Austinites engaged in all modes of transportation, of this and many future generations, instead of doubling down on the mistakes of the past.

Sincerely,

Hannes Mandel, Robyn Ross, and Kitten Holloway (Hancock Neighborhood Transportation Committee, on behalf of the Hancock Neighborhood Association)

CC: Texas Senator Sarah Eckhardt  
Texas Representative Gina Hinojosa  
Austin Mayor Steve Adler  
Austin City Council District 9 Kathie Tovo  
Austin City Council Members



September 15, 2021

For its over 50 years of existence, I-35 has preferenced travel to and from the center of Austin at the expense of isolating neighborhoods east to west. Rebuilding a highway of this scale represents a massive investment of time and tax dollars, and we had hoped that the new design of I-35 would aspire to address the failings of the past and seek to heal this wound in our city fabric. **As the residents of the North Loop Neighborhood of North Central Austin, we grow concerned that the current build Alternatives 2 and 3 represent solutions which would radically reduce our quality of life and reinforce and expand the physical divide between us and our neighbors to the east.**

I-35 is part of our neighborhood and traveling on or along I-35 is a daily reality for residents of North Loop and Ridgetop and other neighborhoods throughout North Central Austin. As a matter of both safety and livability, our neighborhood is in desperate need of a version of I-35 that improves accessibility and allows for safe crossings where people need them. We believe that limiting the scale of I-35 to its current ROW and increasing the amount of safe bicycle and pedestrian crossings through North Central Austin best realizes that goal. We are willing to work with TXDOT as some of the stakeholders most personally and directly impacted by this project and hope and trust that this feedback will be seriously and thoughtfully considered before TXDOT takes further steps on an alternative that does not adequately address these concerns.

As the Austin City Manager's office has recognized, the I-35 replacement project represents "a multi-generational opportunity to **improve the long-term mobility and safety** of our region; an opportunity to **rejoin people and places previously separated by the corridor**; and an opportunity to **benefit the economic, equity, and quality-of-life outcomes for the residents of Central Texas.**" However, the current build alternatives for North Central Austin do not appear to advance these goals and are potentially counterproductive to these goals in critical ways.

As we view them, the current build alternatives contemplating an expansion of I-35 and rejecting the concept of a "cap and stitch" through North Central Austin as is proposed for Downtown will likely serve to negatively impact safety and will reinforce barriers between us and our neighbors to the east. Under any of these alternatives, Downtown will be better connected with heavily gentrified Central East Austin, while working class neighborhoods such as St. John's will be further isolated from its North Central neighbors. At the same time, North Central neighborhood businesses and institutions along I-35 will pay the price, as their property is condemned to accomplish the expansion. We do not believe that this result

will benefit the “economic, equity, and quality-of-life outcomes” for our neighborhood and therefore urge TXDOT to evaluate other reasonable alternatives for the replacement project, such as the North Central Austin “cap and stitch” previously recognized as a viable alternative by TXDOT.

We are hopeful and optimistic that TXDOT will ultimately identify a build alternative that serves to increase mobility through the North Central stretch of I-35 while advancing the three goals identified by the City and supported by our neighborhood. We are also hopeful that, pending identification of such an alternative, it will not proceed with a build that runs counter to these goals.

Thank you,

North Loop Neighborhood Association



Mueller Neighborhood Association  
PO Box 49123  
Austin, TX 78765

September 21, 2021

I-35 Capital Express Central Project  
Attn: Project Team  
7901 N. I-35  
Austin, TX 78753  
[capexcentral@txdot.gov](mailto:capexcentral@txdot.gov)

Dear TxDOT,

The Mueller Neighborhood Association of residents of the Mueller Community, a fast-growing 711-acre mixed use commercial/residential development directly adjacent to I35 near Airport Boulevard offers the following feedback on the I-35 Capital Express Central project.

TxDOT has invited public comment on the I-35 Capital Express Central project, but the two Alternatives that will be carried forward for detailed analysis do not respond to community input that this organization has submitted previously, nor to input that North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC), of which we are members, has submitted. This leads us to oppose TxDOT's current process as unresponsive; and we do not support TxDOT carrying Alternatives 2 and 3 into the Draft Environmental Impact Statement because:

- The metric of Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is not mentioned or utilized apparently; and the Imagine Austin goal of reducing VMT's is thus necessarily not achieved.
- Expanding I-35 to 20 lanes will induce more than 100,000 additional vehicle trips per day through the center of Austin--increasing emissions, degrading air quality, exacerbating human health conditions such as asthma, and ignoring Austin's Community Climate Plan target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- Expanding I-35 to 20 lanes will result in at least 142 displacements--more than a third of which are minority or low-income--and consume up to 32 acres of central Austin, reducing the City's ability to fund essential services through property taxes.
- Alternatives 2 and 3 are practically identical; meanwhile, Alternative 1, which would have kept TxDOT's promise of "no wider and no higher", has been removed from study before the public could even comment on it.
- Neither Alternative treats central Austin neighborhoods as having the same walkable character as downtown: for example, no new crossings in north central Austin that would connect communities, improve accessibility, and allow safe crossings where people need them are proposed (except for an

awkward pedestrian bridge near the existing Target in Capitol Plaza; and the unimaginably complex Airport Boulevard intersection – see below).

- Neither Alternative provides physical protection for pedestrians and bicyclists on sidewalks shown immediately adjacent on frontage roads (up to four lanes wide - which encourage excessive speed). They also show raised and tunneled crossings that impair accessibility, lengthen walking distances, and create indefensible and unattractive places for people who aren't in vehicles.
- Pedestrian and bicycle crossings of I-35 at Airport Boulevard have been very difficult for decades and the proposed design fails to improve the situation. The at-grade intersection design proposed at Airport Boulevard with the I-35 frontage roads, as stated above, is unimaginably complex, and clearly favors the ease and speed of vehicular maneuvers above all else, especially pedestrians and bicyclists (with at grade crossings across free-flow ramps and absent pedestrian refuge when crossing multiple lanes). It would also be extremely confusing and complex for pedestrians with vision impairment. This entire intersection design is unacceptable as presented.

We sincerely hope that the I-35 Capital Express Central project will receive community input and respond with revised Alternatives that meet City of Austin goals (including the Climate Equity Plan), and that we, as an affected neighborhood, can support. Finally, if the No-Build Alternative is the unfortunate necessary choice, while adequate funding sources to achieve desired community preferences and features (that TxDOT will not fund) put forth in community plans, that is preferred to either Alternative 2 or 3 being advance further.

Sincerely,

Mueller Neighborhood Association