

December 14, 2020

To: Texas Department of Transportation

ATTN: Project Team, 1608 W. 6th St., Austin, TX 78703

Subject: I-35 Capital Express Central Project draft Coordination Plan/Schedule, draft Purpose and Need for the project and the draft Range of Alternatives

Attachment: Letter to City of Austin

Dear Project Team,

We are part of a coalition, referred to as “**Our Future 35**”, that represents 50+ organizations in the Austin community, many of whom have been working closely for over a year to coordinate our goals for the three-mile segment of TxDOT’s I-35 Capital Express Project through central Austin.

In an effort to respond to TxDOT’s virtual scoping documents, we have met four times over the past month to define the community’s desired outcomes for I-35 in central Austin.

The pending reconstruction of I-35 brings us an opportunity to not only repair the racial legacy of the highway that has long divided our city, but obligates us to take a new approach this time – one that brings the community to the table in an unquestionably meaningful way. We can do more than avoid the impacts of I-35’s reconstruction; we can prioritize the best outcomes for Austin and its communities of color.

We request the following be incorporated in TxDOT’s I-35 Capital Express Central Project (the Project) before it advances to the next step in the NEPA process. This includes modification of the Purpose and Need statement to reflect these important community priorities.

- 1. Rectify longstanding disproportionate racial and economic impacts exacerbated by the original construction of I-35. This Project must help rectify past impacts to Austin’s People of Color that resulted from its original construction, and not repeat the same mistakes again.**
 - Document and preserve the historic and cultural fabric of the community - including land, businesses, civic spaces, and housing with historic ties. Preservation is critical to avoiding the mistakes of the past.
 - Mitigate long-standing disproportionate impacts by providing new or reclaimed lands (either as caps and/or repurposed right of way) for community uses that would be defined by a local, community-driven process.
 - Conduct an equity assessment as part of the NEPA process.
 - Conduct a human health and well-being impact analysis as part of the NEPA process that documents both existing and future impacts to physical and mental health (inclusive of our elderly, youth, and health vulnerable populations).
 - Create a proactive plan to ensure the care of those currently experiencing homelessness near the Project.

- Advance an alternative that enables the safe physical reconnection of communities at street or surface level, without further displacement; and one that prioritizes the right of communities of color to remain, return, and reside near the Project.
 - Create all necessary solutions to ensure that People of Color (residents, businesses, institutions, organizations) are not further impacted by the construction of I-35. This includes mitigating the temporary loss of access for businesses and the loss of access to cultural institutions, educational institutions, parkland, greenspaces along our waterfront, cultural institutions, or other community amenities that result from the construction process.
 - We do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past in the North and South Projects.
- 2. Prioritize safe local access and connectivity to, along, and across the I-35 corridor for pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, the disabled, the elderly, health vulnerable, youth, students of all ages, and individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Create a safe, local street network at surface level to ensure that all people driving cars and all vulnerable road users can safely and efficiently get around.**
- Enable all surface roads are designed as part of the city street network, providing both east-west and north-south access for all ages and abilities with separate facilities for bicycle and pedestrian mobility; mitigate traffic spillover into adjacent neighborhoods and communities.
 - Study an alternative with a more narrow footprint.
 - Coordinate transit planning with the City of Austin and Austin Transit Partnership. Provide for optimal transit access to and from the Project, as well as enabling enhanced transit operability at the surface level.
 - Design the Project to minimize fatalities and injuries within the project limits for all transportation users.
 - Use microsimulation tools to study and evaluate local traffic as part of the traffic modeling.
- 3. Co-design the Project with the community and include Our Future 35 community alternatives and the Downtown Austin Alliance ULI study recommendations—even in pre-engineering phases—as part of the full Environmental Impact Statement.**
- 4. Shrink the footprint of the Project and fully evaluate and mitigate its environmental and community well-being impacts. This includes physical and mental health impacts such as nature-deficit disorder, respiratory disorders, premature death, access to schools and healthcare. It also includes air and water quality, noise pollution, impacts to wildlife/endorangered species, loss of parkland, access to parkland, loss of farmable land, climate change, heat island effect, and drainage/flooding impacts resulting from the Project.**
- Create transparent reporting of methodologies, measurements, and analysis of impacts.

- Design the Project in a way that can absorb the impacts of air, water and noise pollution, and help mitigate flooding; this can also result in multi-purpose and active public spaces that are safe, comfortable and inviting for surrounding communities and their families.
 - Design to reduce vehicle miles traveled (or VMT) along the Project, which allows for the consideration of a variety of strategies to reduce transportation impacts on air quality and noise pollution.
- 5. Provide a minimum of 90 days of public comment for all future comment periods. Proactively educate everyone about the Project so that all impacts of design/ engineering decisions and build alternatives are known and understood by the community.**
- Provide interim reports related to traffic modeling, climate change modeling, alternative designs, engagement outcomes, and other assessments.

Sincerely,

Dr. Colette Pierce Burnette, Co-Chair
Linda Guerrero, Co-Chair