The community is frustrated with TxDOT for not adequately responding to the plan the community presented in December of 2020. The history section of the revised Purpose and Needs statement still does not acknowledge nor adequately reflect the longstanding disproportionate racial and economic impacts exacerbated by the original construction of I-35.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TxDOT TO DO NOW:

Affirm that it has received the community’s plan (the original from 2020, and this version - both of which are available at www.ourfuture35.org).

Acknowledge our local history (provided below) by adding it to the Purpose and Needs statement for the I-35 Capital Express Central project.

Include Alternatives Evaluation Criteria (provided below) that directly respond to issues we’ve identified so that impacts can be avoided for those whose lives, and livelihoods will be disrupted again if racial equity and justice remain ignored.

Communicate more clearly (and continuously) to raise public awareness about which topics will be included in the upcoming Community Impacts Assessment.

Commit to transparent conversations with Scoping Working Group representatives about restorative justice during the upcoming CapEx VOICE public conversations that TxDOT will be facilitating (starting in spring 2021).

Provide paid opportunities for community consultants/ liaisons and compensate people for their time or outreach services.

Repair harm by leveraging Item 67 funding to provide a full study of the loss of generational wealth due to land that was taken by TxDOT for this project (e.g. Restorative RONDO Building Equity for All Past Prosperity Study https://reconnectrondo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rondo-Past-Prosperity-Study.pdf).

COMMUNITY HISTORY AUTHORED BY ALBERTA PHILLIPS

The areas along Interstate 35 corridor impacted by the TXDOT project is home to one of the largest concentration of unsheltered people in Austin, and specifically, unsheltered African Americans. It’s also true that areas and neighborhoods bordering portions of the impacted area are where the largest concentration of Austin African American churches reside. Of equal importance is the large concentration of Hispanic/Latino neighborhoods and businesses. Even as the area is rapidly gentrifying, the area remains a central point — the heartbeat — for Black and Hispanic residents across the city. What happens with that stretch of I-35 will greatly impact Communities of Color. We are deeply concerned about whether the project would speed up the massive displacement of Communities of Color out of the city. If that happens, then a project that is being sold and heralded as a way to lessen segregation and eliminate a racial barrier, will actually do the opposite. That is why TXDOT must work with African American and Latino community leaders, religious leaders, civil rights organizations, ECHO and nonprofits engaged in stabilizing the community and addressing displacement challenges.

Consider Austin’s painful history. Following emancipation, city, counties and the state passed vagrancy ordinances and laws, which outlawed loitering — essentially standing on the street — aimed at generating free Black labor through the prison system to work on projects across the state, including the building of the Capitol, which was done mostly with Black prison labor.

Following the abolishment of slavery in 1865, Black freedman communities, which were settled by ex-slaves were spread across Austin in neighborhoods, such as Clarksville, Wheatville, Pleasant Hill, Kincheonville, and Masontown. In all, there were 13 such freedmen communities, many in neighborhoods that now are high-priced and predominantly white. Austin’s 1928 Master Plan was the first forced removal of Black and Mexican American people from neighborhoods west of then East Avenue (which became I-35) and Republic Square.

City policies, including redlining, urban renewal and racist zoning laws (restrictive covenants) — along with the Austin Independent School District’s racialized boundaries to keep schools segregated — ensured African Americans and Latinos were socially, economically and politically segregated and denied access to capital and political power.

The Second Displacement of People of Color came as a solution to Austin’s environment-developer wars in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Save Our Springs movement was born to preserve the pristine Edwards Aquifer. To limit development over the aquifer and its recharge area, the city cut a deal to appease developers and environmentalists, and presumably, African Americans and Latinos, who wanted better infrastructure and revitalization in their neighborhoods, where with empty, littered lots, dilapidated buildings, open drug markets and other eyesores. Their neighborhoods were designated desired development zones, enterprise zones, smart housing zones, etc., and in swooped developers, investors and speculators, buying up properties — many sold on the courthouse steps for back taxes. The development East Austin desired is not what it got. For the past three decades, the once predominantly Black and Brown communities have been rapidly gentrified, sending home prices and taxes sky-high. Those dynamics again forced the removal of African Americans and Latinos from their once very homelands to far-flung areas of Austin or to Pflugerville, Buda, Cedar Park and Round Rock.

The fallout from such policies, practices, laws and dynamics shows up today in city figures and indicators: The median income for Black Austin households is $42,422. That is 55% lower than for White Austin households; For Latinos, the median household income is $50,332, which is 49% lower than the median household income for White Austinites.

Just 25 percent of Austin’s African Americans over 25 hold a bachelors degree; while 22 percent of Austin Latinos hold a bachelors degree.

In Austin, African Americans make up the largest share of the city’s unsheltered homeless population, more than 36%. That is more than four times their population share, at about 7.5%.

So TXDOT’s plan should incorporate all of that history and it’s legacy and create opportunities for Black and Latino people to return or stay. The plan should be developed with an equity focus that acknowledges that history and the role I-35 played in that history. There must be a restorative justice overlay to the plan that mitigates what otherwise will surely be a Third Forced Removal of remaining Black and Latino culture, businesses, churches, neighborhoods and life. So the plan should help restore and return land and opportunities to African Americans and Latinos as they are the ones who have been on the receiving end of policies and practices that locked them out of the game.

I-35 initially was a racial barrier to keep People of Color segregated from the rest of Austin. Now that those neighborhoods have been gentrified, the racial barrier no longer can be defined in those terms. The question is, how will TXDOT’s project be defined going forward — as something that promotes racial equity and justice or something that further alienates People of Color from justice and equality.

THE COMMUNITY'S ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION CRITERIA

**Maximize**

* Locally-sourced labor and materials
* Funding or space for housing and community services
* Solutions for unsheltered and vulnerable communities both during/ after construction
* Electric vehicle infrastructure and opportunities for People of Color to fully participate in innovative initiatives
* Achievement of Austin’s Climate Equity Plan, Vision Zero, Strategic Mobility Plan, Strategic Housing Blueprint, and Displacement Mitigation Strategy

**Minimize + Prevent**

* African-American and Latino- owned land from being pushed out
* Further displacement
* Negative impacts to quality of life/ public health including respiratory disorders or premature death
* Air, water, carbon emissions, and noise pollution
* Loss of (or disruption to) small businesses; minority-owned businesses; business communities; service industries, artists, musicians, entrepreneurial or creative talent; schooling, education, productivity or personal achievement; and healthcare

**Respect + Strengthen**

* The Cultural Legacy and Fabric of Communities of Color **within at least a 5-mile radius which includes but is not limited to**:
  + Churches/ faith-based organizations
  + Existing parks/ recreation spaces/ facilities such as Downs Field, Metz Park, Palm Park, St. John Community Center, Givens Park, and Rosewood Park
  + Schools/ historic institutions such as the African American District, African American Heritage facility, Huston-Tillotson University, Mexican American Cultural Center, Six Square, and George Washington Carver Complex
  + Cultural land such as Festival Beach Food Forest, Chicano Park, Kenny Dorham Backyard, and Edward Rendon Sr. Metropolitan Park at Festival Beach

WE DO NOT ENDORSE ANY ALTERNATIVE

TxDOT needs to provide the general public more information about designs in order to receive detailed feedback from the community.

These alternatives are not meaningfully different. They are one alternative with different design options. We want more meaningfully different choices that provide the most connectivity in the smallest footprint with the least tangible harms to the community and the greatest potential benefits for neighborhoods within a 5-mile radius of the corridor.

When we say "footprint" for the I-35 Capital Express Central project, we mean three things: 1) physical footprint (physical space); 2) cultural footprint (psychological space); and 3) temporal footprint (construction impacts, effect on street grid, legacy, etc).