



RECOMMENDATION

Pedestrian Advisory Council

Recommendation Number: 20161003-03C

Central 7-mile Comprehensive Project

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) is to advise the City of Austin and other jurisdictions on all matters relating to walking; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is currently taking public input on the Central 7-Mile Comprehensive Project, encompassing both Elevated and Lowered alternatives for I-35 from Holly St. to Martin Luther King Blvd, as well as other improvements within the Central 7-Mile project from Riverside Dr. to Hwy. 183; and

WHEREAS, the TxDOT definition of the Purpose and Need for this project includes the following: “Improve safety and mobility for all users of I-35 while minimizing right-of-way, community and environmental impacts”; and

WHEREAS, 17% of the 2015 traffic fatalities within the City of Austin occurred in the I-35 corridor; and

WHEREAS, according to City of Austin traffic data, pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists make up over half of all traffic deaths, despite accounting for less than 7 percent of commute travel; and

WHEREAS, this rebuild of I-35 in the urban core represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to remove the current barrier created by I-35, improve connectivity between walkable neighborhoods on either side of I-35, improve the safety and the comfort of the walking environment across I-35, and improve the safety and the comfort of the walking environment along TxDOT’s frontage roads; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has an adopted comprehensive plan, Imagine Austin, which has eight priority programs, including the goal to have a compact and connected city; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has adopted the Vision Zero Action Plan, with the stated goal to reduce the number of traffic deaths in Austin to zero by 2025; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has adopted the Great Streets Master Plan, which specifies streets design for downtown Austin; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has an adopted Complete Street policy that applies to all streets citywide; and

WHEREAS, TxDOT and the City of Austin have both adopted the ITE (Institute of Transportation Engineers) Recommended Practice, Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach; and

WHEREAS, ITE has issued a statement of intent to establish a Vision Zero toolkit for cities, with an intended release at the end of 2016, clearly stating: “No loss of life on the transportation system is acceptable. As transportation professionals we have no greater responsibility than protecting the lives of the public we serve”; and

WHEREAS, this project is currently shown as “30% Preliminary Design Schematic” and designs have not been finalized; and

WHEREAS, NACTO (National Association of City Transportation Officials) guidance across the United States recognizes that vehicular speeds of 10-15 mph have a crash risk of 5% and fatality risk of 2%, speeds of 20-25 mph have a crash risk of 15% and fatality risk of 5%, speeds of 30-35 mph have a crash risk of 55% and fatality risk of 45%, and speeds 40 mph and over have a crash risk of 90% and fatality risk of 85%; and

WHEREAS, NACTO guidance recognizes that roadway design speeds should be equal to both the target speed and the posted speed; and

WHEREAS, TxDOT has a policy for creating clear zones, outlining conditions for their use in the TxDOT Project Development Process Manual, that prioritize safety for automobiles by prohibiting streetscape elements that provide protection and comfort for vulnerable road users; and

WHEREAS, TxDOT has indicated that they will be allowing Cap Metro buses to use new managed lanes and frontage roads; and

WHEREAS, TxDOT’s Access Management Manual defines a frontage road, which provides access to local property, residences, and businesses, as: “A local street or road along an arterial highway allowing control of access and service to adjacent areas and property. A frontage road may also be referred to as a service road.” The AMM defines local streets: “provide the lowest level of mobility and are intended to provide direct access to properties, preserve the neighborhood environment, and enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety.”

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has the PAC as its designated group for recommendations related to pedestrianism, safety, and Vision Zero;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the City of Austin Pedestrian Advisory Council:

Request that TxDOT’s “Purpose and Need,” which includes improved safety, be reflected in frontage road, underpass, and bridge design speeds. It is further requested design speeds on all surface streets – including frontage roads, bridges, and underpasses –not exceed 25 miles per hour.

Requests that TxDOT respect the City of Austin stated Imagine Austin goal to grow as a compact and connected community. This includes re-stitching our divided city across the I-35 barrier with quality east/west connections.

Requests that TxDOT's clear zone policy for the I-35 corridor prioritize the safety and protection for pedestrians and cyclists.

Requests that TxDOT respect the City of Austin goals set out in the adopted Vision Zero Action Plan, and follow the upcoming ITE Vision Zero Toolkit and guidance in all implemented designs.

Requests that TxDOT comply with the adopted Great Streets Master Plan and adopted Complete Streets Policy on all surface streets and bridges in the I-35 corridor.

Requests that TxDOT ensure that the I-35 corridor is a walkable urban thoroughfare by using the guidance provided by Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context-Sensitive Approach.

Requests a robust transit / pedestrian network that increases accessibility for all ages and abilities. This project should focus on opportunities to support that network, including dedicated transit lanes on surface-level streets in the corridor, expanded park-and-ride facilities, safe transfers between routes, pedestrian access to all routes, and appropriate height clearances for high-capacity transit vehicles that will operate below-grade.

Requests that TxDOT ensure that all surface streets and bridges in the I-35 corridor are built to complement an all ages, all abilities, all modes transportation network.

Requests that a project representative from TxDOT provide the PAC with an update in February 2017 in relation to the recommendation.

Date of Approval: October 3, 2016

Vote: Unanimously approved

Attest:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily Smith".

Emily Smith, staff liaison to the PAC