



COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Urban Transportation Commission

Recommendation Number #20201208-02B I-35 Capital Express Central Project

WHEREAS, the TxDOT I-35 Capital Express Central Project proposes to add two non-tolled managed lanes in each direction to I-35 through central Austin, between US 290 East and SH 71/Ben White Boulevard, growing to 20 total lanes in some segments of the highway;

WHEREAS, the original siting and construction of I-35 through Austin was a directed, intentional project to physically enforce racial segregation;

WHEREAS, the Austin Strategic Mobility plan calls for Austin to reach a goal of 50% of Austinites commuting by walking, biking, transit, or any other non-drive-alone mode by 2039, from today's current 24% of Austinites using non-drive-alone modes;

WHEREAS, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan further reaffirms the Vision Zero goal the City of Austin set in 2016, to reach zero traffic fatalities by 2025;

WHEREAS, the Texas Transportation Commission has set a goal of zero traffic fatalities by 2050 and cutting deaths in half by 2035;

WHEREAS, our current climate crisis calls for us to make changes to the way we live and plan our cities and our pattern of continued highway construction is neither safe nor sustainable, given the contributions of automobiles to climate change;

WHEREAS, in November 2020 Austin voters passed a Project Connect tax district which will fund and construct a generational, comprehensive portfolio of transit projects;

WHEREAS, the Orange Line light rail corridor included in Project Connect essentially runs parallel to I-35, while also taking people more directly to their homes, jobs, and a variety of safe, walkable destinations;

WHEREAS, the Orange Line light rail corridor can therefore serve as a better alternative for I-35 commuters, particularly if the delivery of later phases of the project (such as the northern segment to Tech Ridge Park and Ride) are accelerated by additional funding;

WHEREAS, average daily traffic on I-35 from 2015-2019 was relatively flat during a time of population and job growth, while TxDOT predicts dramatic increases in traffic demand on the corridor;

WHEREAS, the City's 2014 Bicycle Master Plan envisions a core network of safe facilities suitable for people of all ages and abilities, and approximately three-quarters of the streets that cross this project corridor have been identified as being in the Bicycle Priority Network;

WHEREAS, the City's Sidewalk / ADA Transition Plan accounts for missing and broken sidewalks citywide, including significant very high priority missing and broken sidewalks along the project corridor and TXDOT has adopted a renewed focus on sidewalks and building an inclusive, accessible transportation system for all users;

WHEREAS, the High-Injury Network (HIN) identifies streets in Austin that are under City of Austin jurisdiction that has a relatively high number of serious injuries and fatal crashes, and 12 of the streets which cross this project corridor are included therein;

WHEREAS, the City's Vision Zero Plan calls for intersection improvements, raised crosswalks, signal upgrades, design modifications to major streets and other measures aimed at ending the needless deaths and injuries occurring on Austin roads every year;

WHEREAS, a significant number of people who were walking or riding bicycles or micromobility devices have been killed or seriously injured on or along Interstate Highway 35 (I-35) in Austin;

WHEREAS, the impact of these serious injuries and fatalities have been inequitable, disproportionately affecting people of color, individuals experiencing homelessness, and other marginalized communities;

WHEREAS, CapMetro's transit service currently releases passengers near I-35 frontage roads, leaving them to make east-west connections across IH-35 or along the frontage road via whatever means of transport they have available, most often by foot or bicycle;

WHEREAS, the Purpose and Need document of the TxDOT I-35 Capital Express Central Project clearly states "there is a need to provide safer and more continuous accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians" (within the project corridor);

WHEREAS, the first stated goal of the TxDOT I-35 Capital Express Central Project is to "enhance safety," however, significantly more energy and materials within the Virtual Public Meeting from 11/12/20 is spent describing current travel time issues than current safety issues, despite safety issues resulting in a profound loss of life;

WHEREAS, National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) guidelines for all ages & abilities bicycle facilities state bicycles should be separated from pedestrians where significant volume of either mode is present and American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines state "segregation of pedestrians from wheeled [e.g. bicyclists] users may be appropriate";

WHEREAS, there will be high enough pedestrian volume throughout the project corridor to warrant that the walkway and bikeway are separate from each other;

WHEREAS, the Red Line Trail and Parkway are projected to have over 10,000 daily users at both crossings of I-35 upon completion circa 2030;

WHEREAS, TxDOT recognizes the "local and regional importance of the proposed I-35 Capital Express Central Project," and espouses to "encourage the participation of all interested stakeholders," but the originally proposed 30 day deadline for public comments on the Draft coordination plan and schedule, Draft project purpose and need, and the Draft range of alternatives is unduly inadequate for many interested stakeholder groups which convene only once per month;

WHEREAS, the City, County, TxDOT, and the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization have an obligation to consider past inequities and potential disproportionate impacts of project alternatives and mitigate negative impacts through equitable planning processes and outcomes;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that safety for all road users be prioritized above all other considerations during the design and implementation of the I-35 Capital Express Central Project, and that language reflecting this be added explicitly to the Purpose and Need clearly indicated as a higher priority than congestion;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT prioritize safe, all ages and abilities east-west connectivity across and along the I-35 corridor;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends the implementation of protected all ages & abilities high comfort bikeways which are separated from both motor vehicle lanes and pedestrian sidewalks along the entire project corridor;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends project elements (aside from the controlled access facilities) should be designed and operated as multimodal city streets using target speeds, design speeds, and posted speeds of 30 mph or less in accordance with NACTO and City of Austin design guidelines, including sufficient safety lighting for all users;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends all controlled access facilities should be designed with modern design guidance, including the most recent AASHTO Green Book, using target speeds, design speeds, and posted speeds appropriate for a dense urban context and to allow seamless and safe integration with a safe, multimodal urban street grid;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends TxDOT commit to a full and honest consideration of alternatives to the current proposed design, up to and including fully burying the highway through downtown or dismantling and redesignating I-35 along another existing highway, e.g. US 183 or SH 130, to enable the City of Austin to reconnect its street grid and repair the divide that presently separates it;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends TxDOT consider alternatives proposed by Our Future 35, Reconnect Austin, and Rethink35 in furtherance of this goal;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC urges TxDOT to explore providing additional funding to Project Connect as an alternative to highway expansion, in particular, funding the northern segment of the Orange line from the Tech Ridge Park and Ride to US 183;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends minimal implementation of slip lanes and that any slip lanes in this corridor should be designed with tight tolerances and clear sight lines to crossing walkways and bikeways that slow right turns to improve safety for people crossing those slip lanes, and that crossings be raised;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that any I-35 roadway lanes, i.e. both mainlanes and frontage road lanes (street lanes), go below the Red Line Parkway at both Red Line crossings, i.e. next to 4th St. and near 43rd St.;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that the Airport Blvd. intersection configuration take into consideration a future Hancock transit station for the Gold Line and/or the Red Line by creating a superior pedestrian and bicycling crossing, including putting the intersection of Airport Blvd. and I-35 frontage road (street lanes) underground and providing plaza, park, and buildings opportunities on the surface;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT and the City of Austin mutually pursue an interlocal agreement for implementation of surface-level improvements that are not within the direct purview of TxDOT, e.g. caps and real estate value capture;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT consider utilizing pedestrian scramble phases at intersections with high pedestrian volumes;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends TxDOT allow 90 days of public input after the publication of technical reports and other relevant project documentation for all public comment periods for the remainder of the environmental process;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT provide \$500 million for pedestrian and bicycling improvements to local streets and trails within 3-5 miles of the project in order to mitigate the negative consequences of additional motor vehicle traffic on local streets caused by any additional motor vehicle capacity of the proposed project;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC requests that Austin City Council actively engage in every phase of the TXDOT environmental process for I-35 central and incorporate these recommendations and those of other community groups into their own comments as appropriate;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT provide \$650 million for facilitating construction of affordable housing and support programs for people experiencing homelessness on I-35 and Austinites displaced, or in danger of being displaced along the corridor;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT adds to the Project Purpose and Need to align with local plans and goals, including, but not limited to, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, Street Design Guide, City of Austin Vision Zero goals, Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, and the Austin Climate Equity plan;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT design bike-ped crossings to be safe for vulnerable road users, especially in areas where a drivers' attention is primarily focused on merging with traffic;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT create effective wayfinding systems to provide well-structured directions for people walking and biking. These would have distances to key destinations, as well as estimated time to bike or walk to those destinations;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UTC recommends that TxDOT provide bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure like street furniture, water fountains, and tree plantings to increase economic activity, improve environmental quality, and provide shade. Trees should be between fast-moving cars and people to add safety and comfort for vulnerable road users.

Date of Approval:

Record of the vote:

Attest: