



City of Austin

**Gregorio “Greg” Casar, Council Member
District 4**

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March 23, 2021

Texas Department of Transportation
c/o Tucker Ferguson, Austin District Engineer
c/o Susan Fraser, Mobility35 Project Manager
7901 N. IH 35 Austin, Texas 78753

RE: I-35 Capital Express Project

Dear Mr. Ferguson and Ms. Fraser,

As the Austin City Council Member representing District 4, I write to ask the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to ensure the I-35 Capital Express Project meets the needs of Austin residents and not exacerbate the many harms that I-35 has historically caused. As you may be aware, I-35 cuts District 4 in half and therefore has a massive impact on the day-to-day lives of my constituents.

For decades, I-35 has been an enforcer of division. We should be working to connect our communities, instead of making that division wider. I cannot support a project that conflicts with the city’s connectivity goals and that could widen the highway unnecessarily without addressing the real traffic needs inside the city.

The City of Austin is taking important steps toward a more connected future—with the 2016 Corridor Construction Program, creating safe and accessible spaces for users of all modes, ages and abilities on major streets; with the 2018 Affordable Housing program, removing barriers to housing and access to housing; in the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan’s (ASMP) goal for a 50/50 mode share split; and with the voter approval of Project Connect, which will transform how people can safely live in and move around our city.

In stark contrast, I-35 is an unforgiving environment to people on foot, on bike, and with mobility impairments. Recently, people have been killed trying to cross I-35 on foot in my district where there are not crossings. Along the more than four and a half miles of I-35 that runs through District 4, there are only four crossings with up to a mile and a half between crossings—two of which are unsafe highway crossings themselves. This project could perpetuate these divides for generations to come. Any I-35 project in Austin should include safe crossings within at least every half-mile, anything less perpetuates safety risks and geographic division.

I support more connectivity across I-35 in the Downtown area, but we cannot settle simply for connectivity Downtown and continued divisions and safety risks in the working class parts of Austin. All multimodal bridges in our city should be sufficiently wide to provide convenience, safety and comfort to all people who use them to cross. The character of crossings, and all other



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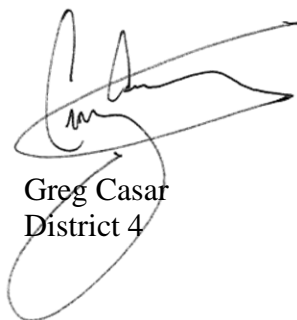
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surface frontage streets, must reflect that of a growing city committed to hospitable and vibrant streets. The ASMP offers guidance for safe and prudent speeds for Urban Core Arterials and Downtown Streets. It is important that TxDOT's design speeds for all surface streets be supportive of posted speeds recommended by the ASMP. The overall cross-section of surface streets should also be context-sensitive and designed to minimize crossing distances and vehicle speeds. Safety of all users—in or out of vehicles—should be the primary concern.

We are also concerned that a flawed methodology is steering this project toward being much larger than it should be. The growth model being used for Average Annual Daily Trips (AADT) may produce unrealistic numbers that have historically far outpaced actual observed AADT increases. My office asks that TxDOT revise its methodology, specifically by acknowledging historical patterns where actual AADT counts have differed from projected counts, using observed trends in AADT rather than compounded growth models, and accounting for current capacity constraints.

This methodology, further, must be applied on a broader range of design alternatives. To date, TxDOT has provided the public with variations of the same idea—that I-35 must be expanded to twenty lanes. We reject the idea that this is the only course, and request that TxDOT provide the public with design alternatives that, among others, address operational deficiencies, update design standards, improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and support the City of Austin's mobility, equity and climate action goals without such an expansion. We know from experience, in Texas city after city, that a simple addition of lanes will not fix our traffic woes. A more connected, safe, and accessible Austin is possible, but that vision for our capital city could be severely harmed for generations if we make the wrong decisions on I-35.

Sincerely,



Greg Casar
District 4

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Robert Spillar, Director, Austin Transportation Department
Mike Trimble, Officer, Corridor Program Office