



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor Steve Adler and Austin City Council Members

**FROM:** Gina Fiandaca  
Assistant City Manager for Mobility at City of Austin

Tucker Ferguson, P.E.  
TxDOT Austin District Engineer

**DATE:** January 7, 2022

**SUBJECT:** City of Austin and TxDOT update for the I-35 Capital Express Central project

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TxDOT and the City of Austin are coordinating during weekly and monthly meetings to ensure the I-35 Capital Express Central project will improve safety and mobility for all modes of transportation along the corridor, that the project reflects community values, is operationally efficient for local and regional traffic, and increases connectivity within Austin.

Following extensive community input and collaboration with the City, the project now includes the following additions:

City/Community requests accommodated by TxDOT:

- Removal of upper decks
- Cap/stitch accommodations
- Reduced speed limits
- East side shared-use path (SUP) switchback connection (north of 8<sup>th</sup> Street)
- New 5th Street east/west connection
- Enhanced, grade-separated Lance Armstrong Bikeway crossing
- Enhanced bike/pedestrian connections at Lady Bird Lake
- Relocation of managed lane ramps in vicinity of Airport Blvd. to reduce impacts on surrounding properties and improve operations
- Expanded opportunity for inclusion of aesthetic treatments, community art and place making (see below)

Alternative refinements developed collaboratively between TxDOT/COA:

- Lowered lanes through the project corridor
- Pedestrian bridge between US 290 East/51st Street
- Airport Boulevard Single-Point Urban Interchange (SPUI), with improved operations for Project Connect Blue Line

- Pedestrian bridge at Red Line crossing, near Airport Blvd.
- Frontage road grade-separation at Red Line (Airport Blvd.)
- Enhanced cross-street bridges

We are also working through the following possible design opportunities that could potentially improve the current project:

- “Signature” bike/ped bridge at Lady Bird Lake
- Pedestrian bridge at Wilshire Blvd.
- Connection to Cesar Chavez Street drainage tunnel
- Palm Park connection to the east side of I-35
- Riverside Drive Innovative Intersection (Single Point Urban Interchange) – COA/CapMetro request
- Downtown Blvd-like “arterial” instead of traditional frontage roads to reduce pedestrian barriers
- Arterial operations on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Street to better facilitate safe loading and unloading of I-35

The Cap Ex I-35 project adds two managed lanes for transit and high occupancy vehicles and improvements for people who bike and walk while only adding safety improvements for single occupancy vehicles and therefore encourages the 50/50 mode share goal by 2039 adopted by the City as part of the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan.

Here are additional details on some of the key improvements:

Reduced Frontage Road Speed

In the central corridor of I-35, the frontage road posted speeds in the project area currently range between 40-50 mph. For all proposed alternatives, TxDOT is reducing frontage road speeds to 35-40 mph. This is similar to many major roads in the City of Austin, such as:

Street Name	Speed Limit (MPH)
Burnet Road	35
Lamar Boulevard	35
Congress Avenue	30
Airport Boulevard	40
East Riverside Drive	35/40
Manor Road	35
East Martin Luther King Boulevard	35/45
West Martin Luther King Boulevard	30

Frontage Road Shift Configuration

TxDOT is working with the City to modify Alternative 3 to include a lower profile and a shift of the frontage road in the downtown area to the west side of I-35 using context sensitive urban design concepts. This design change would provide a potential connection between Palm Park and the neighborhoods east of I-35 via a future lid, as well as other cap and stitch opportunities. The modified Alternative 3 is based on community input, along with feedback from the City of Austin, CapMetro and a recommendation from the Texas A&M Transportation Institute. This alternative is scheduled to be available to the community for public review in early 2022.

Connecting communities and cultures through Locally Influenced Visual Enhancements. (Live35)

To celebrate Austin's cultural and community diversity, TxDOT, in partnership with the City of Austin, is launching, Live35 (Locally influenced visual enhancements), an aesthetic design program for the I-35 Capital Express Central project. The goal is to gather community input for design elements that resonate with the Austin community. These design elements would be incorporated primarily along the cross streets, east-west connections and the Lady Bird Lake crossing. In addition to developing these concepts, TxDOT and the City will solidify their roles in the construction and maintenance of bridges, cap and stitches and aesthetic elements.

This effort will take approximately 10 months and will include a community survey, stakeholder meetings and a series of workshops with the public to gather feedback about aesthetics for the project. Participants will have the opportunity to provide input regarding the design of cross-streets and the Lady Bird Lake crossing, so they reflect neighborhood values and connect the Austin community. TxDOT will also work with the Our Future 35 group to develop materials and gather feedback on outreach and engagement strategies.

### Cap and Stitch

TxDOT is proposing a major reconstruction of I-35 through Austin, and with this effort, the city has a unique opportunity to address the long-standing issues regarding the I-35 corridor. In coordination with TxDOT's federally regulated planning process, the city can drive cap and stitch development, funding and implementation. Through interagency coordination and a locally based funding strategy, TxDOT's planned improvements will include the structural infrastructure to make the city's cap and stitch plan feasible. In addition, TxDOT is already incorporating several widened bridges into the Capital Express Central Project, making the "stitch" component of the project a reality. Working together with the community, our agencies can bring solutions to a long-discussed problem.

As part of the current evaluation of cap and stitch placement and size, TxDOT is considering factors such as cost, structural feasibility, elevations, grading, access to and from caps, right-of-way and construction impacts. TxDOT will continue to work with the City and community to further refine cap and stitch opportunity areas as environmental and design work continues for the Capital Express Central Project.

Cap and stitch infrastructure provides an opportunity for amenities that connect all Austinites. Greenspace that could be incorporated into caps and enhanced cross-streets (i.e., stitches) are also expected to benefit the environment, improve the local economy, as well as increase safety and mobility for all transportation modes.

The City of Austin will be hosting a virtual open house for the public the week of December 13<sup>th</sup> to show concepts for the types of amenities and improvements that could be possible given the identified locations and feasibility of cap and stitch structures. This will begin a more robust phase of community engagement around potential cap and stitch improvements that will carry into the next phase of planning and design work in 2022.

### **Engaging with the Community**

As part of the environmental process, TxDOT has engaged with more than 9,500 participants including three public meetings, 63 meetings with community members and leaders, 51 agency coordination meetings and workshops, and built a stakeholder database of more than 1,800 people. TxDOT has heard from a lot of community members who have successfully improved this project,

## **Next Steps**

Our launch of the Live35 aesthetics program will begin in December with virtual mini-workshops and in-person drop-in opportunities. The drop-in meetings will target underserved populations for the community to learn about the program face to face with our project team while social distancing and following COA Public Health COVID guidelines

We are actively working and collaborating on additional opportunities and would like to return to City Council in the new year with an update.

## Enclosures:

- Capital Express Central Renderings



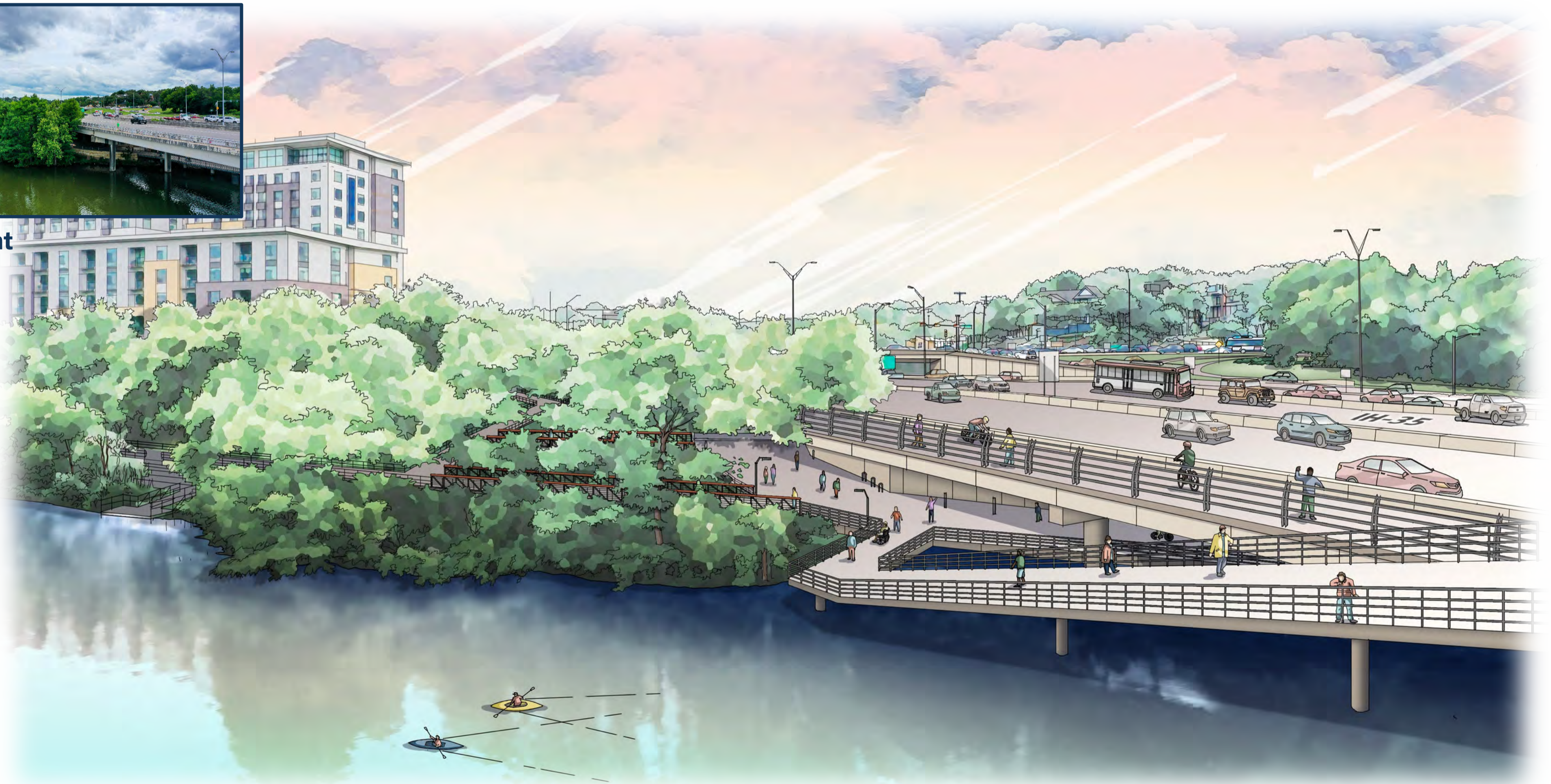


TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# Envision I-35 at Lady Bird Lake



Current



Proposed: Alt. 2 and Alt. 3

Rendering is a concept only. Further analysis and coordination are required. All features are subject to change.





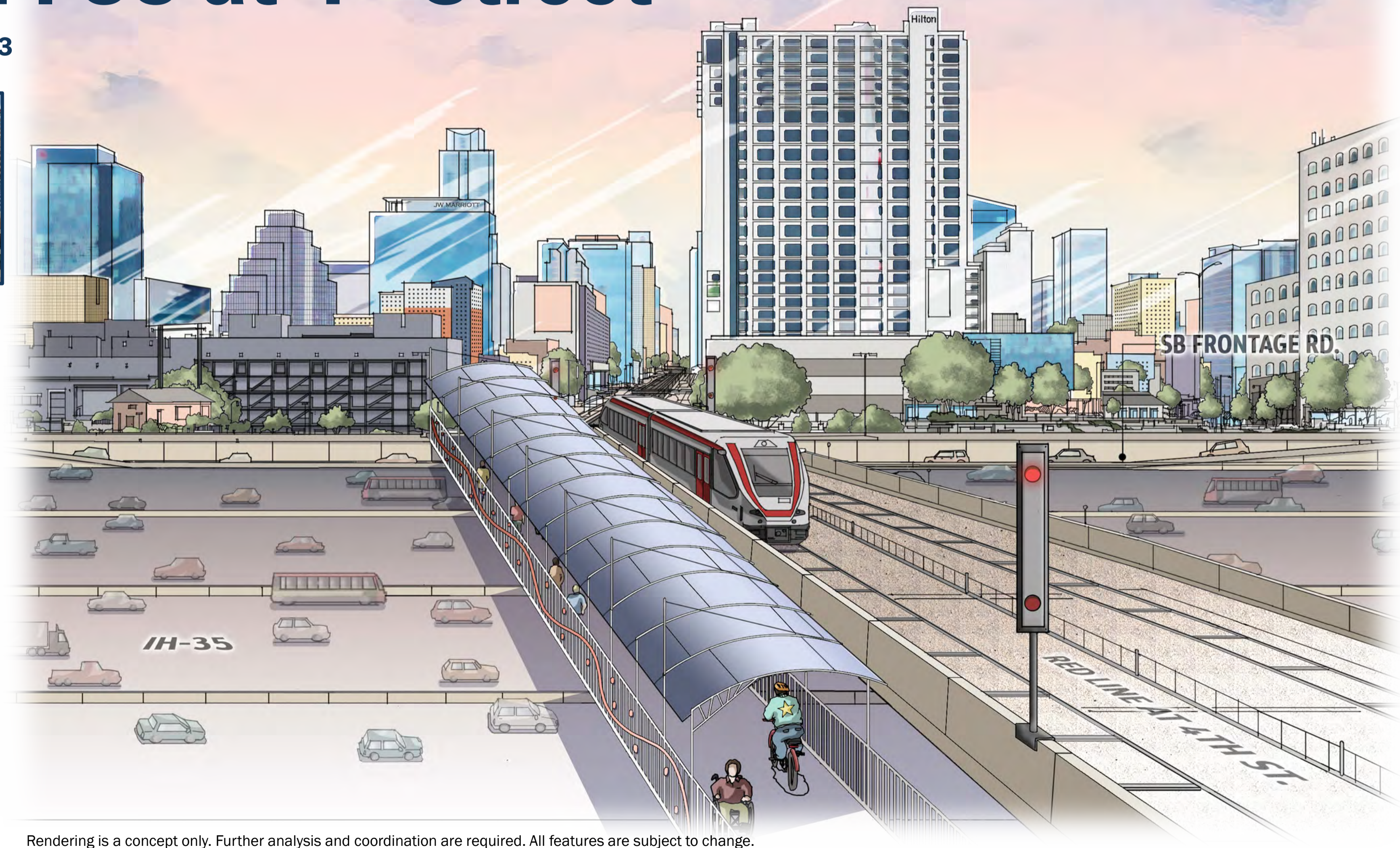
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# Envision I-35 at 4<sup>th</sup> Street

Proposed: Alt. 2 and Alt. 3



Current



Rendering is a concept only. Further analysis and coordination are required. All features are subject to change.

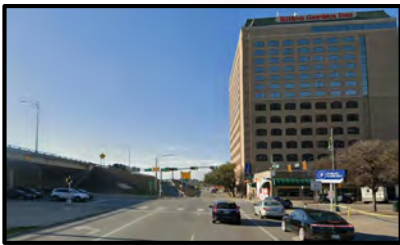




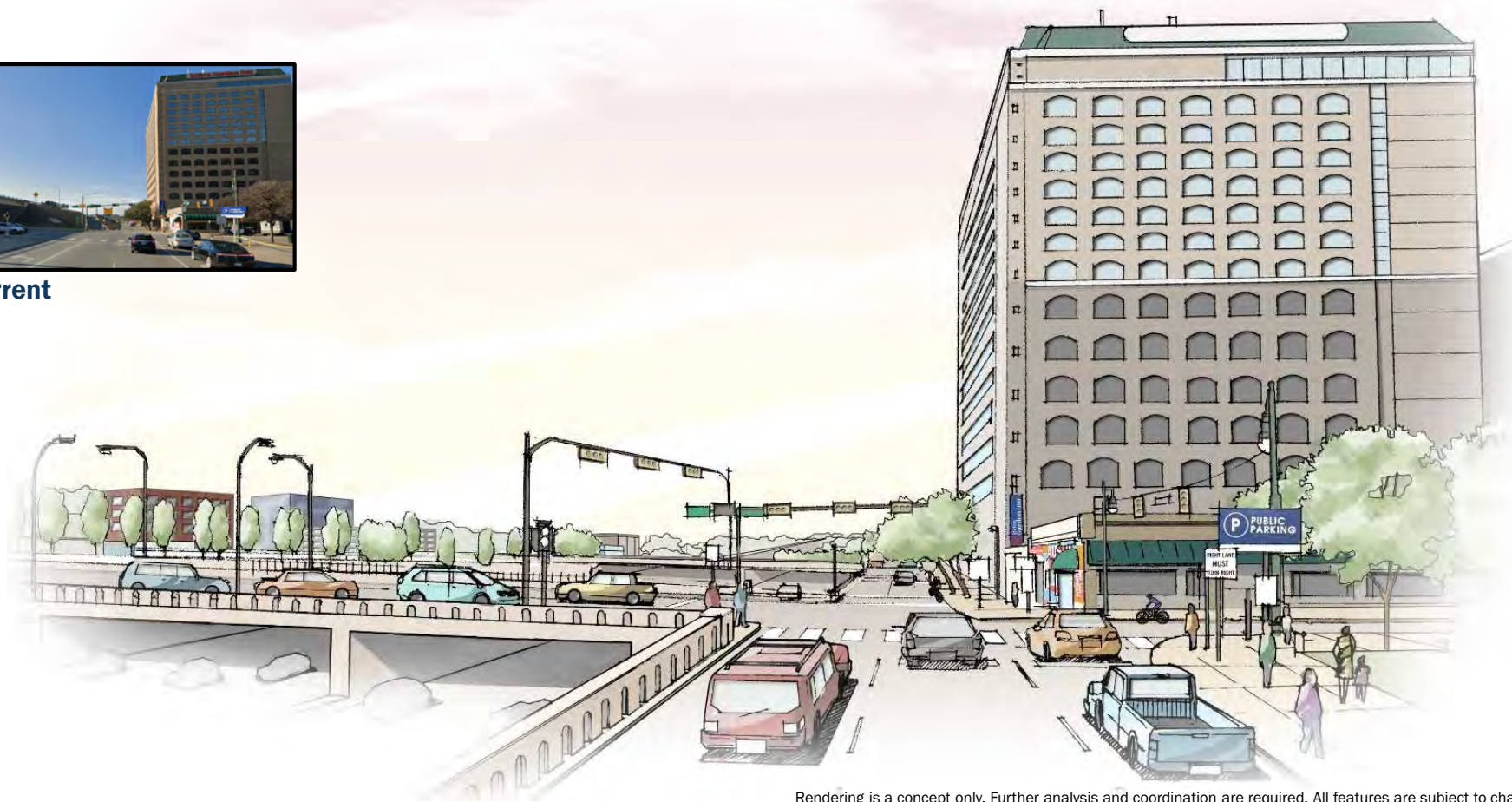
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# Envision I-35 at 6<sup>th</sup> Street

Proposed: Alt. 2



Current



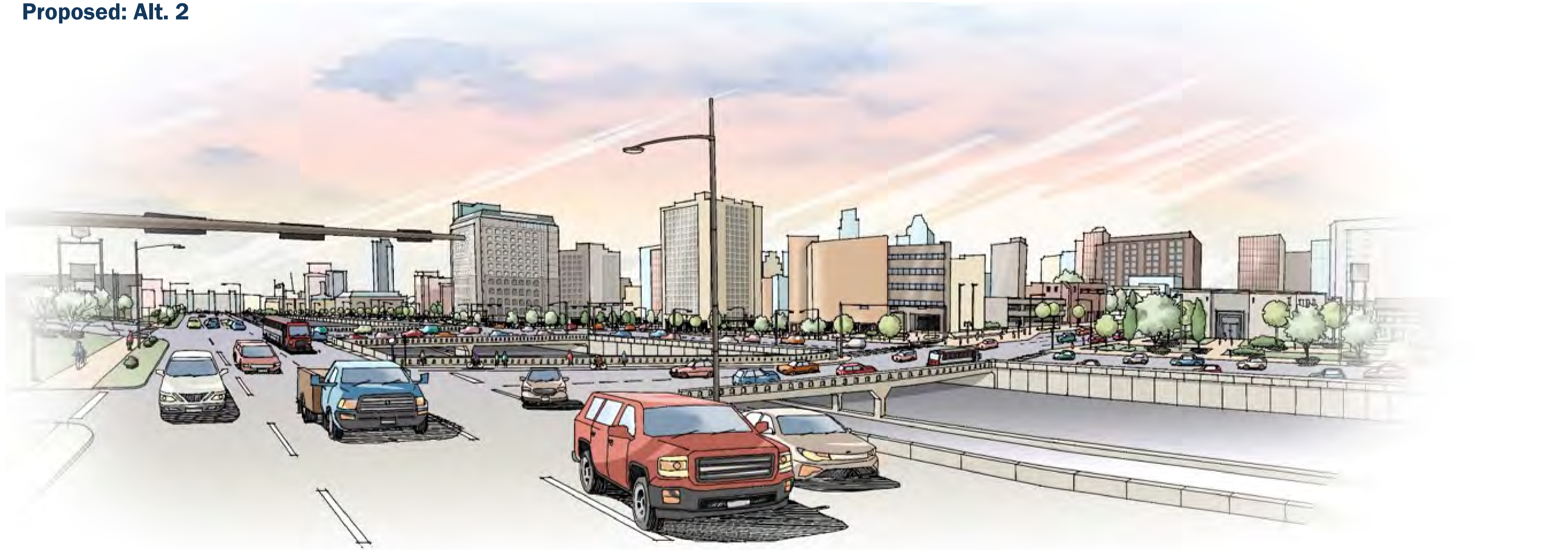
Rendering is a concept only. Further analysis and coordination are required. All features are subject to change.



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# Envision I-35 at 8<sup>th</sup> Street

Proposed: Alt. 2



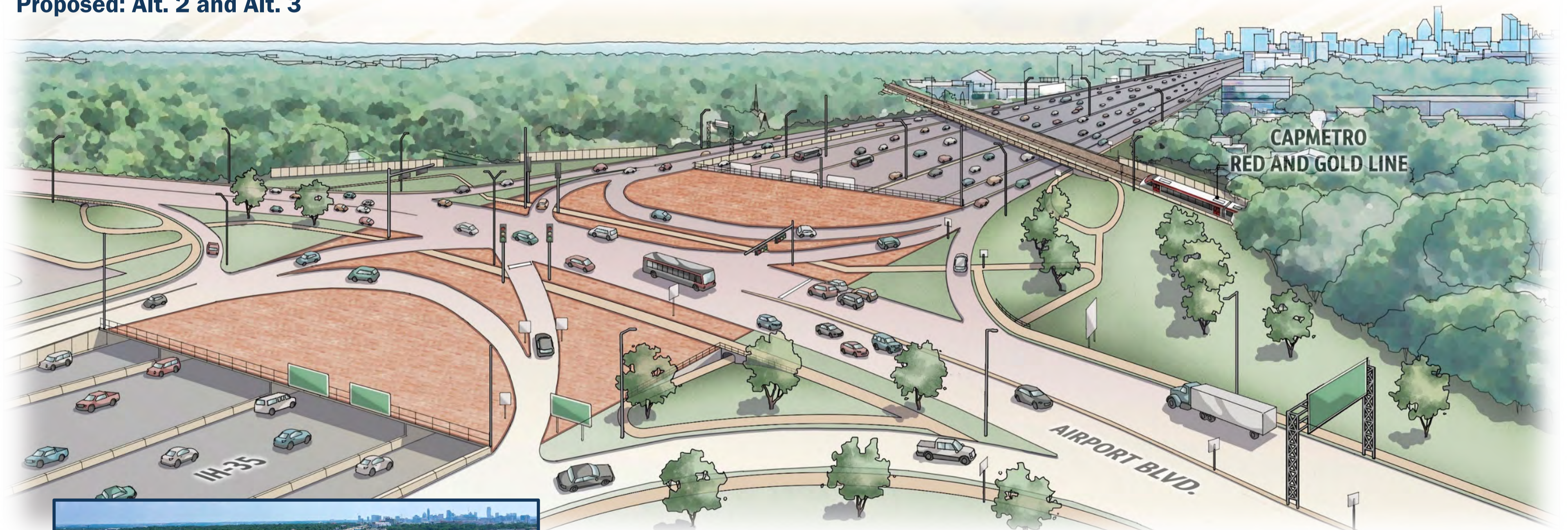
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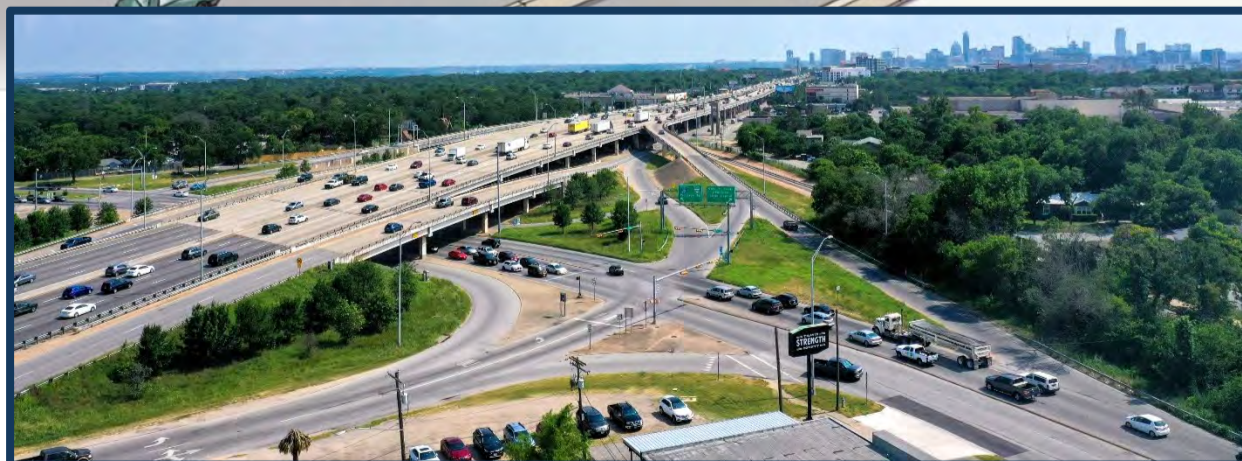


# Envision I-35 at Airport Boulevard

Proposed: Alt. 2 and Alt. 3



Rendering is a concept only. Further analysis and coordination are required. All features are subject to change.



Current





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# Envision I-35 at 32<sup>nd</sup> Street

Proposed: Alt. 2 and Alt. 3



**Current**

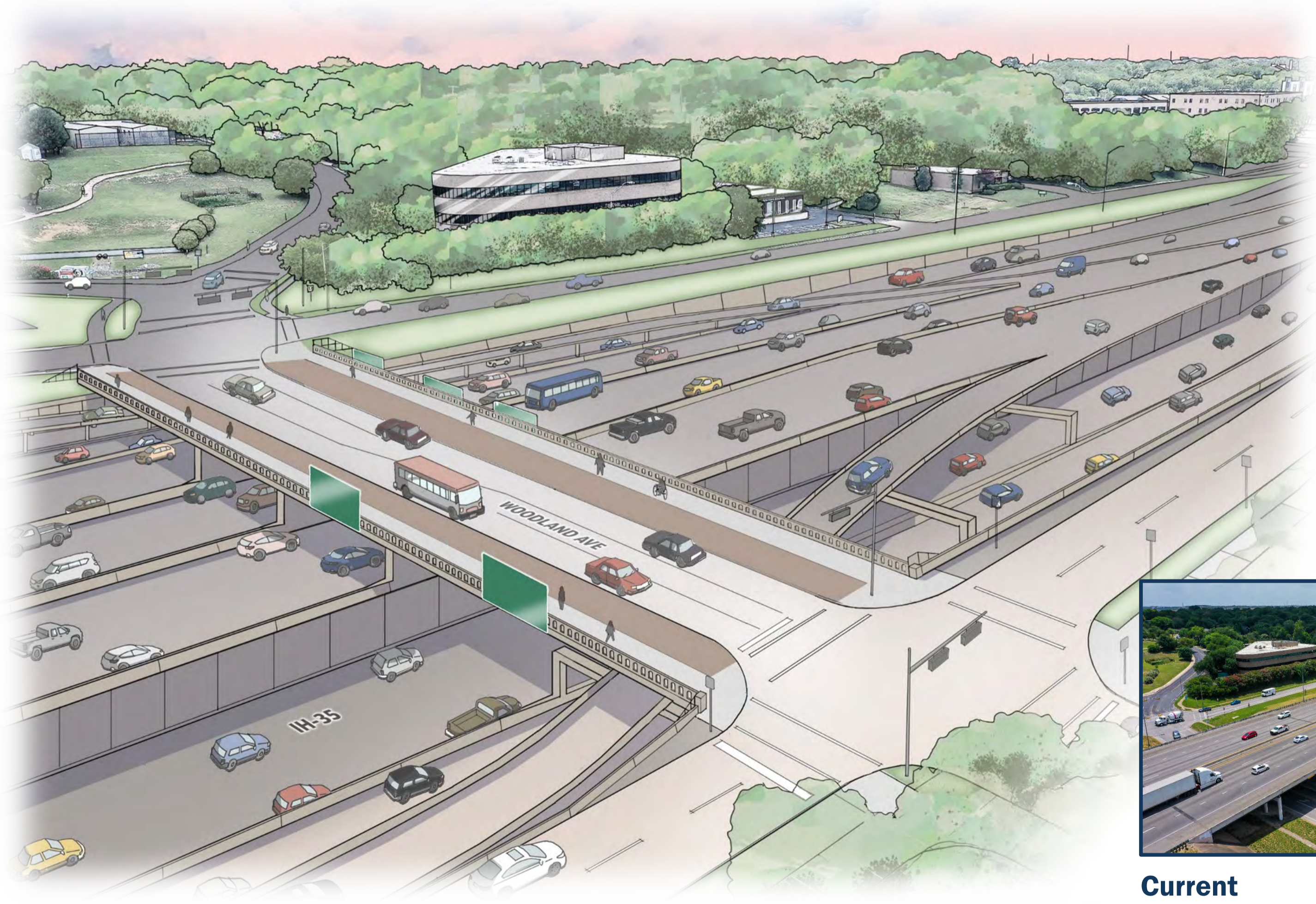
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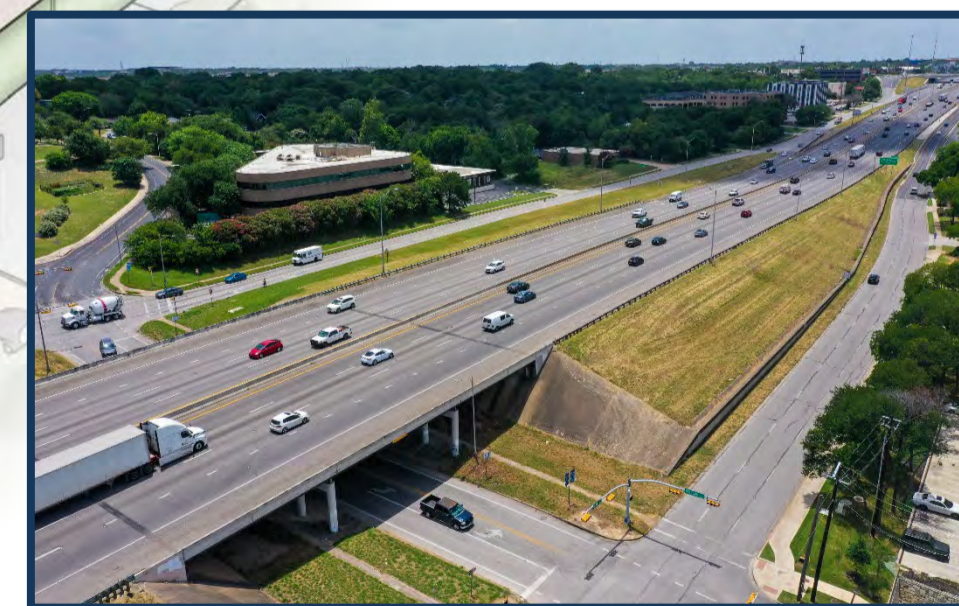


TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# Envision I-35 at Woodland Avenue



Proposed: Alt. 2



Current

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