



Monday Morning Report

February 22, 2021

INTERNAL

Last week's meeting of the Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council had to be canceled due to the severe weather conditions and will be re-scheduled. Members will be notified of a revised date via email. For questions, or to add an item to the agenda, contact council@thecorridor.org. Sorry for any inconvenience created.

COVID-19 UPDATE: The US death total from the coronavirus surpassed 500,000 yesterday, with total confirmed cases of 28,134,803. As of this morning, confirmed global cases are now 111,434,139, with 2,467,481 deaths (2/22). (*Johns Hopkins*) Texas was reporting 2,245,634 cases as of yesterday, with 41,343 deaths. **Bexar County:** 2,752 fatalities, with 160,386 confirmed cases; **Guadalupe County:** 9,841 cases with 182 deaths; **Comal County:** 4,671 cases with 254 deaths; **Hays County:** 15,837 cases with 173 deaths (may be data lag); **Travis County:** 73,538 cases with 819 deaths (possible data lag); and **Williamson County:** 34,527 cases with 380 deaths (2/21/21). (*TDHHS*)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Finally, Good News on COVID (If True): A leading public health expert from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in **Baltimore** is predicting in the *Wall Street Journal* that the aggressive pace of the coronavirus pandemic will begin to retreat in April 2021 as the combined effects of widespread vaccine distributions and 'herd immunity' - a controversial concept politically that he deems 'reckless' - begin to be felt. "When the chain of virus transmission has been broken in multiple places, it's harder for it to spread," he writes. *Opinion*.

Empty store shelves and long lines of ultimately disappointed shoppers this past week - due to historic cold weather events - drew a new appreciation for truckers, 'the Angels of the Highway,' otherwise known as part of the supply chain. A look at **Corpus Christi** markets examines why the shelves were empty, how quickly they can be re-stocked, and the role that hoarding plays in shortages. *Story*.

As to last week's epic infrastructure fail for the unfortunately named Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), We. Can't. Even. Begin. But the *San Antonio Report's* Robert Rivard can: "There's something about leaving people to freeze in their homes without running water for days on end that transcends political party affiliation," he writes, reserving plenty of blame for the governor's office, the Texas Legislature, and the Public Utility Commission. *Opinion*. For more on the Texas energy crisis, go [here](#).

Last week's power blackouts across Texas preview larger questions about the resiliency of the US's aging infrastructure in the face of changing weather patterns that can set off a domino effect of service breakdowns in hard-to-predict ways, according to the *New York Times*. And it's not just roads, rails, and power grids that are threatened: sewer systems are overwhelmed, coastal homes and highways are collapsing, and dams are failing. *Story*.

It took less than a month for the Biden administration to reverse a Trump-era decision on the nationally important Gateway Project to build a new \$11.6 billion rail tunnel between **New York** and New Jersey. The Federal Transit Administration issued a notice last week that state funds expended or borrowed can

now be counted as a match for federal dollars, green-lighting the project after nearly three years of delays. [Story](#).

The Texas House Committee on Appropriations meets today and tomorrow at 9:00 am, with Tuesday's meeting (2/23) dedicated to transportation and infrastructure funding. Livestream available [here](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

Google Maps has added a handy new feature that allows users to pay for parking or transit tickets on their cellphones in 400 US cities. The feature uses a Google Pay button inside the app, and the company says its part of a panoply of new services launched to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Endgadget](#) website has details [here](#).

Large cities in the Inter-Mountain West and South are outperforming cities on the East and West Coasts, according to the Millken Institute 2021 study of the Best Performing US Cities, which last week left **Austin** in its Number 3 position for Best Regional Economic Performance, but displaced **Dallas, San Francisco, Reno, and Seattle** from their Top 10 positions in 2020. [Report](#).

General Motors' recent announcement that they're going all-electric (EV's) in vehicle manufacturing by 2035 ([here](#)), and Tesla's new factory in **Austin**, puts new focus on the supply chain for the battery components of EV's - for key ingredients, all foreign. Climate change, water supply depletion, corruption, and child labor laws are all factors, not to mention the ports and highways required to bring those ingredients to manufacturing centers. [Story](#).

Virgin Hyperloop's Director of Passenger Experience recently laid out a vision for the company's service and development plans, including her perception of a ride on the new trial track in **Las Vegas**, but seems to skip over the enormous engineering challenges the technology faces - even as cities the world over delay existing solutions and bank on hyperloop to solve their transportation problems. [Story](#).

Thought of the Week

"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination."

— Jimmy Dean

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