



Monday Morning Report

March 15, 2021

INTERNAL

The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council meets *this* Wednesday, March 17, at 2:00 pm via Zoom Video Conference Call (details). There will be a guest presentation by Bruce Mann, from the Port of **Houston**. Draft **Agenda**.

COVID-19 UPDATE: Confirmed global cases will surpass 120 million today, with 2,654,847 million deaths. US cases now total 29,439,056 with 534,889 deaths thus far (3/15). (**Johns Hopkins**) Texas was reporting 2,345,024 confirmed cases as of yesterday, with 45,543 deaths, including **Bexar County:** 169,958 cases with 3,130 deaths (possible data lag); **Guadalupe County:** 10,291 cases with 198 deaths; **Comal County:** 4,961 cases with 276 deaths; **Hays County:** 16,668 cases with 198 deaths; **Travis County:** 77,408 cases with 909 deaths; and **Williamson County:** 36,253 cases with 421 deaths (3/14). (**TDHHS**).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Utah and Oregon are the only two states that currently have a mileage-based (rather than gasoline-based) tax on motorists, but as more car manufacturers shift from combustion engines to electric vehicles other states are rushing to get on board, reports the **Washington Post**. But opposition from environmental interests - who believe a mileage tax favors gas-guzzling cars and trucks - is slowing the transition, despite broad support from within the Biden administration. **Story**.

The signing last week in **Washington** of the \$1.9 trillion COVID American Rescue Plan Act provides \$30.5 billion to financially battered public transit agencies nationwide, but **The Atlantic** points out that the funding represents a shift in thinking about climate change being managed by the Biden administration: flourishing public transit is inseparable from a national climate policy. **Story**.

Progress on the public process for rebuilding IH-35 through central **Austin** continues apace with more comment input opportunities launching last week (**here**), and local television station KXAN takes a look at three design options being considered and previews what the Interstate will look like if TxDOT removes the upper deck through the Capital's urban core. **Story**. The **Austin** city council also weighed in on the project last week, urging TxDOT to prepare for 'caps' covering the highway through downtown. **More**.

The Capital Metropolitan Planning Organization has approved a new \$483,000 Travel Demand Management program for the **Austin**-area designed to incorporate lessons learned during the pandemic, a follow-up to a 2019 program that aims to work with business and agencies to move motorists' trips to off-peak traffic times and boost public transit use. **Story**.

TxDOT is dedicating more than a million-acres of public rights-of-way to creating habitat for the threatened Monarch butterfly through conservation programs orchestrated by a **Chicago**-based university. The project involves planting milkweed and other key nectar-producing vegetation and brush control operations to nurture the Texas state insect, whose population has been reduced by 90% in the US, Mexico, and Canada in recent years. **Details**.

More TxDOT news: Last month's ice storm and power blackouts reminded everyone of the vital role highways - and the folks at the Texas Department of Transportation - play in stocking stores shelves, providing medical help, and allowing access for emergency workers. **Abilene** decided to say 'Thanks' in this thought-provoking [video](#).

According to a study by the University of Maryland using cell phone data, traffic is already returning to pre-pandemic levels, despite the fact that many American cities are still under some form of lockdown. Researchers say the number of nonwork trips has increased by as much as 20% on some workdays.

[Story. Report.](#)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

Robert Rivard reports on an important new \$38 million fundraising effort to spur economic development in **San Antonio**, modeled by a new generation of local leadership on Gary Farmer's successful Opportunity **Austin** project (which Rivard credits with creating 465,900 jobs and a payroll of nearly \$30 billion). Key to the initiative is a new study of peer metro regions conducted by the **San Antonio** Economic Development Foundation, currently seeking to consolidate various organizations to centralize selling Alamo City worldwide. [Story. Study.](#)

Pent-up travel demand expectations are starting to rise. American Airlines just announced 10 new routes out of **Austin** to begin in May, including to **Nashville, Las Vegas, and Washington-Dulles**. [Story.](#) Allegiant recently announced seasonal routes to **Bozeman, Mon.** and **Bentonville, Ark.** And MySanAntonio.com last week posted 11 flights from San Antonio International Airport starting at \$29 for spots like **Minneapolis & Miami**. Details [here](#) and [here](#).

CPS Energy in **San Antonio** has sued ERCOT (the Electric Reliability Council of Texas) over last month's winter storm blackouts, alleging 'one of the largest illegal wealth transfers in the history of Texas.' In one ominous-sounding portion, the lawsuit says 'Extreme confiscatory prices have caused many providers...to become insolvent...' So far, CPS has been billed over \$1 billion by ERCOT, but the numbers keep changing, officials said. [Story.](#)

Detroit-based General Motors - now committed to become an all-electric car company by 2035 - has signed a deal with a Massachusetts Institute of Technology spin-off to develop new technology using lithium rather than lithium-ion that cuts electric battery costs by 60%. Direct challenge to Tesla sends stock soaring. [Details.](#)

Various federal agencies are pointing fingers at one another over who is responsible for overseeing Tesla's auto-pilot safety standards following a 2019 traffic fatality in **Del Ray, Florida** and five other crashes since 2016. The National Transportation Safety Board says a different agency, the National Transportation Safety Administration, didn't follow their advice, blasts Tesla, and urges a national auto-pilot industry standard. [Story.](#)

Thought of the Week

"Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does."

— William James

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