



Monday Morning Report

May 4, 2020

INTERNAL

COVID-19 UPDATE: As of 12:00 noon Sunday (5/3) the global total count of confirmed COVID-19 cases stood at 3,462,682; total global deaths were 244,911. In the US, total cases were 1,138,690, total deaths are now 66,570 ([Johns Hopkins](#)). Texas had 31,548 reported cases of infection and 867 fatalities. **Bexar County:** 1585 cases, 48 deaths; **Comal County:** 58 cases, 6 deaths; **Hays County:** 167 cases, 1 death; **Travis County:** 1714 cases, 51 deaths; **Williamson County:** 313 cases, 10 deaths. ([TXDHS](#))

COVID-19 Origins: A disturbing report in today's (5/4) [Daily Telegraph](#) in Australia cites data from a combined Western governments' 'FIVE-EYES' intelligence dossier that alleges China's involvement in covering up key information regarding the novel coronavirus' origins. China 'deliberately suppressed or destroyed evidence' of the outbreak in 'an assault on international transparency' that has cost thousands of lives, the report says, including **Beijing** officials refusing in January to share virus samples with University of Texas researchers. [Story](#).

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Texas Transportation Commission voted to approve an additional \$3.4 billion to the reconstruction and expansion of Interstate 35 through **Austin**, though officials described the move as a 'planning technique' rather than a funding commitment to the \$7.5 billion project. In a rare dissenting vote, one commissioner - Alvin New of **San Angelo** - urged a delay in the decision because of falling oil prices and gas tax revenues. [Story](#). [More](#). [Still more](#).

Local media are raising questions about the prospects of a proposed public vote in November to increase funding for VIA Metropolitan Transit in **San Antonio**. The combined impacts of business shutdowns and coronavirus fears have slammed revenues and ridership in the last quarter, but the agency says their services will be even more important for the city's post-pandemic recovery. [Story](#).

Facing a 60% decline in system-wide toll revenues due to local 'stay at home orders,' the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority serving the **Austin** area is slashing spending, deferring various projects and initiatives, and otherwise girding for a tough financial year. "We're in unprecedented times," director Mike Heiligenstein told the [Austin Monitor](#) recently. [Story](#).

Austin's Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization policy board meets by teleconference *today* (5/4) at 2:00 pm to vote on adoption of the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan, although some environmental interests are pushing for a delay on the vote over issues with the public outreach program behind the plan. [Livestream](#).

Along with statewide traffic counts and gas tax revenues, air pollution is falling in major Texas cities because of pandemic quarantine 'stay at home' orders, according to NASA satellite data. Similar improvements in air quality are being experienced in urban centers throughout much of the world. A **San Antonio**-based analysis explains why [here](#).

Amid the awful human toll of the COVID-19 pandemic the corresponding national quarantine lockdown has incidentally created a grand experiment on commuting patterns - with startling impacts on urban traffic congestion and air quality. Two **Washington** economists from the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings examine the possibility of retaining the positive benefits of reduced traffic beyond the pandemic [here](#). The magazine **Car and Driver** reports on an IBM survey showing people abandoning Uber, Lyft, and public transit in droves in a post-pandemic world. [Story](#).

In exchange for about \$8 billion in financial assistance the French government is requiring Air France, the national airline, to quit competing with the national train network on certain time-competitive routes as a part of efforts to reduce carbon emissions. The **International Railway Journal** says the ban on short-haul domestic air travel will apply to routes where trains offer a trip-time of 2 hours 30 minutes or less. [Story](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

The federal Paycheck Protection Program inspired by the COVID-19 business shutdown may have sparked concerns over either the process or the impact on the national debt, but one thing is becoming clear: it has been a lifesaver for many regional businesses. Frost Bank alone has worked with 2000 businesses in **Bexar County** to secure over half a billion dollars from the program. The **Express-News** surveyed **San Antonio** participation over the weekend. [Story](#).

With more than 20 colleges and university campuses in the **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** - collectively creating a community of over 320,000 students and faculty - the issues surrounding a re-opening of those facilities have major economic importance but also a lot of implied health risks: crowded dorms, group classes, and sports events critical to local economies. **Axios** has a national summary of re-opening strategies [here](#).

As attention shifts nationwide from the pandemic to the economic recovery, economists from Drexel University in **Philadelphia** have surveyed federal and local economic relief efforts across the US and developed a list of what is, and what is not, working. They suggest targeting economic programs on places and products, neighborhoods, and financial ecosystems. [Essay](#).

The pandemic-battered global tourism industry - vital to both **San Antonio** and **Austin** - may not recover until 2023, experts have told the **Associated Press**, and even that may come with a lot of new restrictions. Eight million tourism related jobs in the US alone have been lost since January, and the UN World Tourism Organization predicts a 30% reduction in 2019's record 1.5 billion tourist trips. [Story](#).

Thought of the Week

"They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."

— Andy Warhol

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