



## Monday Morning Report

May 17, 2021

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### INTERNAL

**This Wednesday**, May 19, at 2:00 pm, the Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council will meet by Zoom video conference for our regular monthly meeting. Email us at [council@thecorridor.org](mailto:council@thecorridor.org) for more information or to post an agenda item. **Draft Agenda here.**

**COVID-19 UPDATE:** Worldwide cases were up by about 5 million over last week as of this morning, with 163,147,111 confirmed cases and 3,381,069 total global deaths. US has now suffered 585,971 deaths with just under 33 million confirmed cases (5/17/21). (**Johns Hopkins**). Texas is reporting 2,497,892 confirmed cases today, with 49,877 deaths thus far, including in **Bexar County:** 182,467 cases with 3,534 deaths; **Guadalupe County:** 11,079 cases with 212 deaths; **Comal County:** 5,683 cases with still 296 deaths; **Hays County:** 18,683 cases with 217 deaths; **Travis County:** 83,261 cases with 1,015 deaths; and **Williamson County:** 39,426 cases with 472 deaths (5/17/21). (**TDHHS**).

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### INFRASTRUCTURE

The US quickly needs to find new supplies of lithium as automakers worldwide ramp up manufacturing of electric vehicles, reports **Forbes Magazine**, but the nation currently has just one large-scale lithium mine and it produces less than 2% of the global supply. Despite having some of the world's largest reserves, protests of environmentalists, ranchers and native tribes are choking back US production. **Story.**

A May 5th crash near **Los Angeles** became the fourth US fatality involving Tesla's Autopilot self-driving system - engaged at the time of the accident - and launches the 29th investigation into the automaker's navigation systems by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. And officials in **San Francisco** arrested a man last week sitting in the back seat of his Tesla as it drove itself down the highway. **Story.**

That Colonial pipeline ransom attack last week highlighted once again the critical role truckers play, particularly in a post-pandemic world, in the consumer spending that underlies 70% of the US economy. But higher fuel prices, shortages of certain goods and high driver-turnover rates are rattling the system, the **Washington Post** reports **here.**

**Gondolas for Austin?** That's what the local Tourism Commission is proposing as one of 16 new uses for the city's anticipated \$100 million in Hotel Occupancy Tax dollars. The gondolas are envisioned as a service to ferry tourists between hotels or the convention center to local attractions such as Zilker Park or Barton Springs. **Story.**

A "really, really huge transformation" is underway for commuter rail travel in a post-pandemic US with more stay-at-home workers, say transportation planners for regional systems in **Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia,** and other legacy-rail cities. The new networks will look more like light-rail systems with higher frequencies, shorter waits and travel times, and lower ticket prices. **Governing** magazine surveys the near-term horizon **here.**

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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

**San Antonio** made *Esquire Magazine's* "Top 5 Places You Should Visit After the Quarantine" list, calling the city 'unexpectedly awesome.' Also singled out for an 'abundance of cultural appeal' were **Milwaukee**, **Chattanooga**, **Tucson**, and **Bend**, Oregon. [Details](#).

Cuisine Solutions, a company that makes menu items and sauces for food providers like airlines and restaurants, has opened a 315,000-square foot manufacturing facility on the south side of **San Antonio** that will eventually employ 500 people, up from 200 now. [Details](#).

Not everyone is happy about the pace of growth in booming **New Braunfels**: according to the **San Antonio Express-News**, a city council meeting turned 'wild' last week when citizens showed up to protest a series of new development and re-zoning projects, particularly a 200-unit apartment complex downtown. The item passed, but not without some hard feelings and claims the city was turning into 'Austintonio, California.' [Details](#).

In happier news, construction began last week to repair the Lake Dunlap dam that failed two years ago near **New Braunfels**, product of a complex financing-compact between local landowners and public sector entities managing facilities in the Guadalupe River Valley. [Details](#).

A US Deputy Secretary of Defense visited **Austin's** Army Futures Command last week, prompting the **Statesman** to survey the unit's surprising growth and reach. The agency has grown from 40 staffers in **Austin** to more than 600, yet another 1800 employed indirectly, and more than 28,000 employed worldwide. They now have four facilities in the region working on modernization concepts and defense technologies. [Story](#).

Elon Musk Watch: With Tesla's primary Gigafactory in **Austin** nearing completion, the company filed plans last month for a second large facility next door ([here](#)); another Musk brainchild - Neuralink - released a video touting their wearable chip-implant technology to solve brain & spine problems ([here](#)); and the company reversed course on accepting bitcoin in payment for cars over environmental concerns ([here](#)).

## Thought of the Week

*"When something is important enough, you do it even if the odds are not in your favor."*

- Elon Musk

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