



Monday Morning Report

May 18, 2020

INTERNAL

The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** Council meets by teleconference *this* Wednesday, May 20, at 2:00 pm. Our guest will be Tracy Loh, with the Brookings Institution in **Washington**, who has been writing lately on issues of regional governance. The specific topic we will be discussing is how **Austin** and **San Antonio** might eventually be joined together as a single Metropolitan Statistical or Combined Statistical Area by the US Census Bureau. Ms. Loh's latest piece on related issues is [here](#). RSVP to council@thecorridor.org. [Agenda](#).

COVID-19 UPDATE: Total confirmed worldwide cases stood at 4,686,012 as of 12:00 noon yesterday (5/17), with 313,127 global deaths. US cases reached 1,444,815 with 89,023 deaths. ([Johns Hopkins](#)) In Texas, statewide confirmed cases were 46,999 with 1,305 fatalities. Over the weekend, the state recorded the highest number of new cases since the pandemic began ([here](#)), due to infection-clusters linked to meat plants in **Amarillo**. In **Bexar County**, confirmed cases are at 2,120, deaths at 62, as of 3:00 pm (5/16); **Comal County** had 70 cases, with 6 deaths; **Guadalupe County** 109, with 0 reported deaths; **Hays County** 219, with 3 deaths; **Travis County** 2,381, with 77 deaths; **Williamson County** 451 cases, 19 deaths. ([TDHHS](#))

COVID-19 Data Discrepancies: Various media outlets are reporting differences between state coronavirus database-reporting and federal websites such as the Center for Disease Control ([here](#)). Texas has been mentioned as one of the states where such conflicts exist. [Story](#)

INFRASTRUCTURE

A report from an auto-tech oriented website said over the weekend that **Austin** has been chosen as the next site for a Tesla 'Cybertruck Gigafactory,' previously described as being built somewhere in the 'central US.' Tesla already has some connections to **Austin**, where some engineers working on its Autopilot project work. The factory discussed in the report is apparently unrelated to threats last week by Tesla CEO Elon Musk to move his manufacturing operations from California in a dispute with local officials over pandemic restrictions. [Story](#). [More](#).

2020 was supposed to be the year that driverless cars would be widely deployed nationwide, with profound impacts on driving habits, traffic, and the economy. But the technology companies developing autonomous and connected vehicles, centered largely around **San Francisco**, found that the complexity of human behavior behind the wheel was difficult to simulate. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted funding and talent. [Story](#).

People may be driving less because of pandemic quarantines but that's only causing roadblocks (sorry) for state Departments of Transportation across the US, according to [Engineering News-Record](#). A summary survey of various state and national transportation officials reports that budgets are being slashed by up to 30%, projects are being deferred or canceled, and that there are no easy answers ahead. [Story](#).

But on a more optimistic note, [Forbes Magazine](#) believes that the pandemic creates a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity for big spending programs on energy, infrastructure, and economic development.

One of their columnists suggests using the Eisenhower Interstate Highway program as a model to rebuild America and putting a tax on imported fuels - plus selling off large US government land holdings in the West - to pay for it. [Opinion](#).

More details are emerging on **Travis County's** plans to broadly encourage more telecommuting by county employees. Officials have asked their staff for a detailed strategy within the next month that would allow up to 75% of 3,000 eligible county employees to telecommute from their homes, making permanent a temporary reaction to pandemic quarantines. [Story](#).

Add the Texas Department of Transportation to the list of government agencies targeted by 'ransomware' attacks. An **Associated Press** story out of **Dallas** says the hack - which locks operators out of their own systems by encrypting files until ransom demands are paid - came last week and followed a series of similar incursions on Texas appellate courts. The FBI is said to be investigating. [Story](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

There's a lot of head-scratching going on in **San Antonio** after the US Department of Agriculture gave a \$39.1 million contract for food distribution to local event-planning group CRE8AD8 (pronounced 'create a date') with, reportedly, little experience in that field. The chief of the **San Antonio** Food Bank is 'hugely skeptical' of the deal. [Story](#).

A key figure in **San Antonio's** public health infrastructure, assistant city manager Colleen Bridger, is stepping down from her position to launch a private sector consulting business. She formerly served two years as the director of the Metropolitan Health District. [Details](#).

Incoming mayor-elect Rusty Brockman won't officially take over in **New Braunfels** until May 26, but he's already showing up to council meetings and making plans for guiding the city's economic recovery from recent COVID-19 business shutdowns. Formerly a chairman of the **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** Council's economic development committee, Brockman told his new constituents: "We're working hard to be prepared for you...by offering not a handout, but a hand up." [Story](#).

If you're interested in how our friends in **Houston** are dealing with their transportation challenges, mayor Sylvester Turner presents his 5th Annual "2020 State Of Mobility" address by webcast next week, May 28, at 12:00 noon. Learn more and register [here](#).

David Freeman, a well-known energy executive who took over the **Austin**-based Lower Colorado River Authority following a scandal in the mid-1980's, died last week in **Washington DC**. Freeman had formerly headed the Tennessee Valley Authority and led a series of major power utilities after he left LCRA. [Details](#). Obit from the **New York Times** [here](#).

Thought of the Week

"A national debt, if it is not excessive, will be to us a national blessing."

— Alexander Hamilton

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