



## Monday Morning Report

May 20, 2019

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### INTERNAL

The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council met last week (5/15) in **San Marcos** to review the results of last month's Five-Year Strategy Workshop. Committee members requested further work on mission and vision statements, formed a subcommittee to refine the policy and projects list, and set another meeting for Wednesday, June 19 in **San Marcos**.

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### INFRASTRUCTURE

Friends of the Southwest Chief, a passenger rail advocacy group, have released an internal Amtrak planning document that identifies current and future growth scenarios for a national passenger rail network. Among the future service corridors projected are routes connecting **Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston**. Also discussed are upgrading the current fleet of Acela trains used in the Northeast Corridor, now more than 20 years old. [Presentation](#).

Responding to environmental community criticism about the recently approved \$8 billion Capital Express expansion project for IH-35 through central **Austin**, mayor Steve Adler admitted that just adding lanes to the congested highway would probably make traffic worse. "I do not believe that adding lanes to I-35 ... is the answer to congestion," he told KUT Radio. Adler said he favored tolled, managed lanes in the center of IH-35 for express bus service, something currently banned by state policy toward tolling. Approving the IH-35 project was part of a broader strategy to build support for public transit, he said. [Story](#).

That high-speed rail project between **Dallas** and **Houston** dodged another legislative bullet last week when language that would have limited TxDOT's ability to work with Texas Central Partners on highway crossings impacted by the project. Eminent domain issues still plague the project following recent court decisions, however. [Story](#). Remaining optimistic about their prospects for eventual success, Texas Central has released a new, updated ridership study that indicates 13 million passengers will ride their train annually by 2050. [Link](#).

Motorists in **North Texas** have seen a massive expansion of tolling and congestion-priced lanes in the last two decades, particularly in the **Dallas-Ft. Worth** area. And the system - while expensive for drivers - appears to be working to manage congestion in some places. How those tolls are set and calculated is the subject of a Channel Five **Dallas** report [here](#).

The Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority made its annual report to **Travis County** last week, receiving kudos from the commissioner's court for the success of managed lanes on Loop 1 (Mopac), major expansions on US 183, and the opening (last weekend) of the new State 45 Southwest. Commissioner Gerald Daugherty said his vote to create the agency, in 2003, was the best of his political career. [Story](#).

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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and 'Other' News)

The failure of a 91-year old dam, and subsequent 'de-watering,' on Lake Dunlap near **New Braunfels** last week ([story](#)) made us wonder about overall US spending on water infrastructure in recent years. According to a recent study, US investment on water infrastructure has fallen \$5.6 billion since 2007, from \$147 billion in 2007 to \$141 billion in 2017, with a 'precipitous drop' in capital spending over the last five years. [Report](#).

**Austin** billionaire Robert Smith, chairman of private equity firm Vista Equity Partners, made national news last week by agreeing to pay off the college loans of the entire graduating class of Morehouse College in **Atlanta**. Various news outlets estimated the potential range of his contribution at between \$10-40 million for the current 2019 graduating class of over 300 students. [Details](#).

Attention, real estate developers: Two social trends researchers at the American Enterprise Institute in **Washington** have concluded that living close to public amenities - anything from parks to libraries to grocery stores - can increase trust in public institutions, decrease loneliness, and restore faith in local governments. Residents in high-amenity urban areas are twice as likely to say people are 'very willing' to help their neighbors than those in low-amenity areas, for example. [Study](#).

Mark Your Calendars: The '5th Annual US/Mexico Gas Summit' takes place in **San Antonio** this year, May 29-30. [Details](#).

## Thought of the Week

*"A developed country isn't a place where the poor have cars. It's where the rich use public transportation."*

- Gustavo Petro

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