



Monday Morning Report

July 13, 2020

INTERNAL

The **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** Council Executive Committee meets for its regular monthly meeting by Zoom conference *this* Wednesday, July 15, 2:00 pm. RSVP to council@thecorridor.org. Preliminary draft agenda [here](#).

COVID-19 UPDATE: Total confirmed worldwide cases are nearing 13 million with 566,491 deaths. US cases are at 3,282,554 with 135,066 fatalities as of 1:30 pm yesterday (7/12). ([Johns Hopkins](#)) Texas was reporting 250,462 cases and 3,112 estimated deaths as of 3:35 pm Saturday (7/11). **Bexar County:** 18,602 cases with 166 deaths; **Guadalupe County:** 1,014 cases with 3 deaths; **Comal County:** 952 cases with 21 deaths; **Hays County:** 3,501 cases with 11 deaths; **Travis County:** 14,304 cases with 166 deaths; **Williamson County:** 3,654 cases with 51 deaths. ([TDHHS](#))

INFRASTRUCTURE

The **Austin Business Journal** convened a panel of local leaders last week - as one part of their 'Austin 2040' series - to discuss the long-term impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy, lifestyles, and transportation. Participants included Capital Metro CEO Randy Clarke, Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority director Mike Heiligenstein, and executives from the technology and real estate industries, and the consensus seemed to be that telecommuting is here to stay and that the shift toward density in **Austin** will continue. [Story](#).

CG/LA Infrastructure, a **Washington** trade association-backed advocacy group, rolled out their *Blueprint 2025* initiative program earlier this month, a \$1 trillion program of 550 projects nationwide that they say could generate 2.4 million jobs and spur new growth for a pandemic-damaged US economy. Included are projects in all infrastructure sectors such as transportation, energy, water, social, and technology. [Story](#).

As it continues to move forward with the environmental clearance phase of the roughly \$7 billion I-35 rebuild project through Central **Austin**, TxDOT remains committed to the effort despite a statewide reduction in traffic due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, with one official telling the **Austin Monitor**: "Even with telework, and even with changes in driving and those attitudes, we are still going to need this additional capacity." [Story](#).

Never bashful when it comes to making predictions, Tesla founder Elon Musk told a **Shanghai** tech conference last week that he expects the company to have a fully autonomous vehicle developed by the end of this year. His earlier prediction that Level 5 (fully self-driving) cars would be available by 2018 didn't quite pan out, but apparently, he's still trying. [Story](#).

Despite being advised otherwise by the mayor and **Bexar County** judge, **San Antonio's** VIA Metropolitan Transit Authority board (through their Advanced Transportation District) voted last week to proceed toward a November ballot initiative that would shift a 1/8-cent tax funding from a watershed and greenspace protection program to the city's transit agency - a move one local observer called 'stunning.' [Opinion](#).

Reading the **New York Times** during the last week, you might think that a war had been declared on highways and cars: one elaborately-illustrated piece asked readers to imagine a **Manhattan**, or any other major city, without automobiles and converting roads and parking into greenspace; another op-ed touted major infrastructure stimulus spending - but minus the highways. **Story. Opinion.**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

Budget woes for the state Texas drew the attention of the **Washington Post** last week, which reported that statewide tax revenues for May were down \$650 million compared to the same month last year. The article surveyed economic data for a number of southern and western states hard-hit by COVID-19, noting that the depressed consumer spending in Texas indicated that even the most economically healthy states were vulnerable to the pandemic. **Story.**

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Texas economy have also drawn the attention of the respected French journal **Le Monde**, which highlighted the effects of the pandemic on **Austin** and the cancellation of the South By Southwest music and technology conference. **Story.**

Add Fiesta Week in **San Antonio** to the list of cancelled events due to the pandemic, and **Fredericksburg's** Oktoberfest celebration. Both events have plans to return next year but officials thought the public health risk just too high this fall. **Story. More.** And **Austin's** live music scene is also suffering: a recent study estimates that 90% of the city's live music venues will be permanently shuttered by Halloween. **Still More.**

In an op-ed column yesterday in the **Dallas Morning News**, former US Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros (and former **San Antonio** mayor) urges urban leaders in the Texas Triangle to improve education, build more affordable housing, make major investments in transportation and water infrastructure, and develop more diverse and inclusive schools and neighborhoods. **Opinion.**

Thought of the Week

"There's a way to do it better – find it."

— Thomas A. Edison

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