



Monday Morning Report

September 14, 2020

INTERNAL

The **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** Council's Executive Committee meets by Zoom video conference *this* Wednesday, September 16, at 2:00 pm. Preliminary draft agenda is forthcoming with today's meeting notice.

COVID-19 UPDATE: Total global cases just passed 29 million this morning (9/14), with just under 1 million deaths. US confirmed cases have now topped 6.5 million, with 194,087 deaths. ([Johns Hopkins](#)) Texas is reporting 659,434 total cases with 14,190 deaths as of yesterday (9/13), including **Bexar County:** 39,320 cases (*disputed, see below*) with 1,204 deaths; **Guadalupe County:** 1,941 cases with 76 deaths; **Comal County:** 2,545 cases with 102 deaths; **Hays County:** 5,598 cases with 60 deaths; **Travis County:** 27,578 cases with 391 deaths; **Williamson County:** 8,143 cases with 134 deaths. ([TDHHS](#))

COVID-19 Data Issues: Just reported backlogged data brings **Bexar County's** active coronavirus count to 49,915 and, for the first time, a death count surpassing 1000 lives. [Details](#). Data discrepancies are raising alarm in Texas, with **San Antonio** mayor Ron Nirenberg telling the **New York Times** that "The changing of gears and data reporting at the state has a lot of public health departments feeling a significant case of whiplash." [Story](#).

INFRASTRUCTURE

The world is awash in plastic - grocery bags, milk and juice containers, yogurt tubs - much of it marked with three arrows forming a circle that designates a product as 'recyclable.' **National Public Radio** reports that almost none of the plastic generated over the last five decades can be profitably recycled. Instead, it is piling up in landfills or the oceans. Plastics production is set to triple by 2050 but a new plant in **Sweeny**, Texas may offer hope. [Story](#).

The scope and complexity of Capital Metro's plan for a \$7.1 billion light rail system in **Austin**, scheduled for a public vote on Nov. 3, is made evident in dramatic drone video images made available last week in the local **Austonia** newsletter. Large sections of the Project Connect effort will require underground tunneling and the drone footage traces the route through downtown with a bird's eye perspective. See it [here](#).

As a follow-up to an earlier story about how the COVID-19 pandemic might impact **San Antonio** highway construction, the **Express-News** has published an online graphics package depicting the status of some major highway projects currently underway in Alamo City and **Bexar County**. Lots of info in easily digestible format. [Slideshow](#).

San Antonio mayor Ron Nirenberg has proposed an alternative funding mechanism to maintain aquifer protection and greenspace trails, currently funded through sales taxes, in a push to gain support for redirecting those dollars toward workforce development programs in the November election. But not all of his city council is on board, yet. [Story](#).

The US Department of Transportation in **Washington** released its first-ever National Freight Strategic Plan last week, laying out a long-term vision for investments in infrastructure and other essential parts of the nation's freight system. Heavily focused on removing barriers - statutory and regulatory - to improved freight transportation, the plan includes a process for addressing multi-state projects and forecasts freight volumes for the next 5-20 years. [Details](#). [The Plan](#).

One of the big US ratings agencies has downgraded **Austin's** credit rating from Aaa to Aa1, but not to worry too much: the downgrade won't have much of a practical impact and is probably just the first of an avalanche of similar municipal downgrades to come as the full scope of pandemic-related economic effects cycle through the system. Moody's Investors Service pegged the ratings cut to pension issues. [Story](#).

A new mapping tool created by **Austin's** Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department allows users to explore affordable housing opportunities within the context of how close they are to existing or planned transit stops. The tool demonstrates that 25% of the city's 26,663 affordable housing units are within 1/4-mile of a proposed stop, but that 5,000 of those units are set to lose their affordability rating within five years. [Details](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

Pay Attention to This: A long-simmering war over water between the US and Mexico came to a boil last week in open clashes between Mexican National Guard troops and local farmers/ranchers who seized a dam on the Rio Grande near **Chihuahua**. The farmers say President Lopez Obrador is diverting water from their crops to please the Trump administration; experts say he is repaying water owed to the US - and desperately needed by citrus and vegetable farmers in the Rio Grande Valley. [Story](#). Why it's important right now: [More](#).

Four years into her role as CEO of **San Antonio's** Economic Development Foundation, 33-year old Jenna Saucedo-Herrera is reshaping the organization and changing its focus from selling the city as a 'low-wages opportunity' to pitching a high technology center for biosciences, advanced manufacturing, and cybersecurity. One part of that effort: making the shortlist for the military's headquarters for the US Space Command. [Interview](#). More on the US Space Command [here](#).

A 'patriotic demonstration' in **New Braunfels** that spun off into racist social media posts earned the ire of local mayor Rusty Brockman, who said the offensive comments 'caused angst and uneasiness in our community.' In a press release, he went further: "I do not condone any activity, symbolism, speech, or imagery with overt or implied racism or hatred." [Details](#).

An **Austin** nonprofit group is creating an 'angel' financial group of investors to fund startup companies led by Texas-based women. Called "Beam Network," the effort by Women@Austin will try to close the financial gap frequently faced by female entrepreneurs by investing up to \$1 million in woman-led startups. [Details](#).

Starting today, **San Marcos** residents can sign up to receive up to two free large maturing shade trees of various varieties, courtesy of their Community Forestry Program and its state and federal partners. Great program. [Details](#).

Thought of the Week

"I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it."

— Pablo Picasso

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