



## Monday Morning Report

October 5, 2020

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### INTERNAL

**COVID-19 UPDATE:** 35 million cases were reported worldwide as of noon yesterday (10/5), with, for the first time, over one million deaths (1,034,687). The US has now topped 7.4 million confirmed cases of infection with just under 210,000 fatalities. ([Johns Hopkins](#)) The state of Texas was reporting 763,010 total confirmed cases with 15,992 estimated deaths as of Saturday (10/3), including **Bexar County:** 47,566 cases with 1,329 deaths; **Guadalupe County:** 3,643 cases with 78 deaths; **Comal County:** 2,754 cases with 103 deaths; **Hays County:** 5,951 cases with 66 deaths; **Travis County:** 29,647 cases with 423 deaths; and **Williamson County:** 8,706 cases with 144 deaths. ([TDHHS](#))

**COVID-19 Issues:** Data issues continued to confuse Texas state government reports, with new methodology changes and even as the state reported nearly 10,000 new student and faculty infections within a week after reopening schools statewide ([here](#)). Reporting issues also sparked complaints from **Bexar County** officials. [Story](#). Local reporting from the **San Antonio** dashboard (including hospital data) can be found [here](#).

**More COVID-19:** An artificial intelligence expert writing in *The Atlantic* magazine suggests that current approaches to COVID case contact-tracing are exactly backwards: rather than tracking forward from infected patients to their contacts while contagious, officials should be tracking backwards to find the original source of the infections. A complex analysis of 'super-spreader' carriers suggests why. [Details](#).

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### INFRASTRUCTURE

President Trump signed a bill in **Washington** last week extending the FAST Act - the nation's transportation funding measure - for another year and insured that the Mass Transit account in the Highway Trust Fund would remain solvent. This marked the first time in 30 years that the transportation spending bill was extended, rather than re-authorized with new funding levels. [Details](#).

The University of Texas at **Austin** continues to develop ground-breaking solutions in the energy and transportation fields. One project involves a mapping and data tool which helps state departments of transportation to calculate how much highway right of way might be available for solar energy collection ([here](#) - left hand column near end); another is a next-generation alternative to Geographic Positioning Satellites (GPS), which is cheaper and more accurate. [Details](#).

That Central Texas Railway project to develop high speed rail between **Dallas-Houston** got some environmental approvals from the Federal Railroad Administration last month, according to the company, which said it expected to now begin construction in the first half of 2021 ([here](#)). But plenty of questions and issues remain, including equipment safety designs ([here](#)), eminent domain problems and complaints from opponents that the company's land leases have been mortgaged to the Bank of Japan through a Cayman Islands banking front. [Details](#).

After a year-long legal battle, Uber has once again received regulatory clearance to operate in **London** after the company addressed safety concerns similar to those raised in **Austin** several years ago. Uber's

regional manager admitted during the reconsideration process that the company's driver security/identity protocols had been inadequate. [Story](#).

The City of **Austin** is contributing \$46 million to improve Loop 360 intersections. TxDOT will be holding a virtual public hearing on **Austin's** Loop 360 at Courtyard Drive/RM 2222 project beginning tomorrow, Tuesday, Oct. 6, at 10 a.m. [Link](#).

The **Austonia** newsletter kicks off a week-long series on Project Connect in **Austin**, with this morning's segment focused on just how much of a tax increase the average homeowner can expect to see if a ballot measure on the \$7 billion transit effort is approved on Nov. 3. Read it [here](#).

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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

A report by two economists at the Brookings Institute in **Washington** finds that Latin Americans, heavily represented in the hospitality, construction, and service industries, are being impacted disproportionately by the COVID-19 pandemic and suggests that unemployment payments are more effective relief than Paycheck Protection Program loans as a solution. [Study](#).

The Trump administration issued an Executive Order last week in **Washington** that targets 'rare earths' (17 minerals crucial to military technologies and consumer electronic products, such as cellphones) for expedited US production and adding security measures aimed at China - which controls much of the world's supply. Increased electrification of the US domestic auto fleet could also be impacted by developing shortages. [Story](#). [More](#).

The Army Futures Command announced the opening of a new robotics lab in **Austin** last week, a \$50 million joint effort with the University of Texas to spur military-related research and collaboration with academic experts on both robotics and advanced location tools. [Details](#).

The **San Antonio Report's** annual CityFest conference starts today (10/5), with this year's events focused on the theme of *resiliency*. Topics include public health, transportation, economic development, and economic recovery from the COVID pandemic. [Details](#). [Schedule](#).

Tesla, in the midst of building a new \$1.1 billion manufacturing facility in **Travis County**, is seeing a 44% surge in global demand for their electric vehicles, which in turn is driving its fifth straight quarter of profitability - the longest streak in 17 years. [Details](#).

The home improvements chain Lowe's will open a new 120,000 sq. ft. facility at the **Kyle** Crossing Business Park, adjacent to Amazon's sorting center, becoming the fourth major employer to locate in part of Plum Creek. [Details](#).

Citing low crime rates, low cost of living, and bountiful employment opportunities, **Money Magazine** named **New Braunfels** as one of the *50 Best Places To Live* in the United States for 2020. But then, we all knew that. [Story](#).

## Thought of the Week

*"How often misused words generate misleading thoughts."*

— Herbert Spencer

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