



Monday Morning Report

November 18, 2019

INTERNAL

We're one month away from the next meeting of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council. The Executive Committee is scheduled to meet Wednesday, December 18, 2:00 pm at the Council offices in **San Marcos** (304 North C.M. Allen Parkway). For questions or to add items to the agenda, email council@thecorridor.org.

INFRASTRUCTURE

San Antonio mayor Ron Nirenberg has joined **Bexar County** judge Nelson Wolff and VIA Metropolitan Transit chairman Rey Saldana in calling for a vote next year to shift a 1/8 of-a-cent tax from Edwards Aquifer protection to creating a regional system of more frequent buses operating in dedicated lanes. [Story](#).

For several months now Nuro, a **Silicon Valley** company that aims to become the world's preeminent autonomous delivery service, has been delivering groceries to restaurants and homes in **Houston** using robotically piloted vehicles. Humans still accompany the vehicles at this time, but the company expects to go fully autonomous next year. [Story](#).

New developments in 'quantum computing' offer the promise of super-charged, interlinked computers that could machine-learn via artificial intelligence in real time and push out updates to self-driving vehicle fleets almost immediately as individual vehicles encounter unusual situations, according to **Forbes** magazine. [Details](#).

The US Department of Homeland Security in **Washington**, also tasked with protecting critical cyber security infrastructure, has released the final version of its '*Guide to Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience, November 2019*,' which includes recommendations on a laundry list of dozens of at-risk infrastructures, including transportation systems. The report is available online [here](#).

Transit advocates are squawking about last week's grants of \$900 million in Federal transportation BUILD funds (the former TIGER program), announced in **Washington**. Road grants doubled (as a percentage of funds available) but other modes shrank or disappeared, as indicated below:

	Obama FY14-FY16	Trump FY17-FY19
Road/Bridge	34.8%	70.4%
Mass Transit	27.8%	8.5%
Rail	15.7%	9.2%
Port/Maritime	11.2%	11.2%
Bike/Ped	10.5%	0.0%
Aviation	0.0%	0.7%

[More](#).

Here We Go Again, All Right: **Travis County** commissioner Gerald Daugherty - a long-time anti-rail activist in **Austin** - has already weighed in against whatever plan Capital Metro's Project Connect still-evolving process ends up proposing as a local high capacity transit system. [Opinion](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and 'Other' News)

"We will rebuild." That's the message from city officials in **New Braunfels** following fires that struck the Wurstfest complex on the Comal River at the end of last week. Scene of the city's iconic annual Oktoberfest celebration - attended by tens of thousands each year - the Marketplatz and Wursthalle buildings suffered damage. With fire engine help sent from **Seguin, Canyon Lake, San Marcos, Cibolo, Selma, and Schertz**, the fires were extinguished by Friday morning. [Story](#).

Harte Hanks Inc., a former media company lately turned into direct marketing services entity, is moving its headquarters from **San Antonio** - where it has been based for more than 50 years - to **Austin**, where it currently has 600 employees. [Details](#).

A new hotel and conference center catering to sports tourism is being planned in **San Marcos**. First step was a purchase agreement unanimously approved by the city council for a 30-acre, \$19.88 million site to host national tournaments and other events on eight baseball fields. The purchase will be funded through bonds and repaid via hotel occupancy taxes. [Details](#) (halfway down, left hand column).

If you've ever wondered about the potential value created through properly-constructed Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts (currently contemplated for Capital Metro transit stations in **Austin** and approved by several cities for the now-dormant Lone Star Rail project), you might want to read recent research by urban economists on the **New York** High Line project. Over \$3 billion in added value went back into the hands of nearby property owners, not the public jurisdictions that mostly financed the project. [Study](#).

A summit last week organized by the **Austin Business Journal** focused a spotlight on developments in booming **East Austin**, east of Interstate 35, including nine separate development projects - a mix of manufacturing, retail, and housing efforts - that the paper says will transform that part of the city. At least one of the projects features Opportunity Zone financing, federally tax leveraged efforts to boost development in historically underfunded areas. [Story](#).

An **Express-News** columnist uses **Bexar County** judge Nelson Wolff's recent moves to shift funding from Edwards Aquifer protection zones to mass transit in **San Antonio** as a case study in how political power - particularly exercised by a seasoned professional - is used to advance public policy consensus. [Opinion](#).

Thought of the Week

"A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for."

- John A. Shedd

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