



Monday Morning Report

December 7, 2020

INTERNAL

The **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council's Executive Committee next meets on Wednesday, December 16, at 2:00 pm by Zoom. One guest will be State Representative Celia Israel, speaking about the upcoming Legislative Session and her legislation encouraging telecommuting by state workers. For more information, email council@thecorridor.org.

COVID-19 UPDATE: Worldwide infections leapt upward by 5 million cases over the last week to 67,189,474, with 1,538,097 million deaths. The US reports 14.7 million current cases, with 282,345 deaths, as of this morning (12/7). ([Johns Hopkins](#)) Texas reported 1,249,323 confirmed cases yesterday (12/6) with 22,594 deaths, including in **Bexar County:** 71,032 cases with 1,537 deaths; **Guadalupe County:** 4,653 cases with 87 deaths; **Comal County:** 3,466 cases with 117 deaths; **Hays County:** 7,644 cases with 87 deaths; **Travis County:** 39,925 cases with 475 deaths; and **Williamson County:** 14,012 cases with 175 deaths. ([TDHHS](#))

COVID-19 Hospitalization Update: Analyst Bill King says hospitalizations, intensive care unit-bed usage, and ventilated patients have all increased nationally over the last two weeks but that the rate of increase has slowed in recent days. [Details](#).

INFRASTRUCTURE

An 'existential crisis' is unfolding across the US transit landscape as ridership and revenues pummeled by the pandemic force cutbacks in cities where reliable transit is the lifeblood of the local economy, such as **New York, Boston, and Atlanta**. Profound cuts - in routes, services, people, and equipment - could limit economic recovery in a post-pandemic world. Officials say a minimum of \$32 billion is required now; they might get \$15 billion. [Story](#).

It's Official. Again. Interstate 35 in central **Austin** is the most congested highway in Texas, displacing **Houston's** West Loop for the top spot on a list of the state's worst traffic congestion. For every mile of roadway through the central city, drivers lose 1,647,353 hours in traffic delays - at a cost of \$288 million, says a Texas A&M study. More than a dozen spots along IH-35 appear on the list of top 100 congested spots in Texas. [Story](#).

Eleven of **San Antonio's** highways also featured in the 2020 Top 100 Most Congested roads in the same study (above), including four spots on IH-35 and the stretch from US 281 along Stone Oak Parkway to Loop 1604 - named most congested highway in the area for the second year in a row. Drivers there wasted an annual total of 1,161,562 hours stuck in traffic - at an annual cost of \$24-plus million - on that route. [Details](#).

Microscopic particles from recycled tires used to rubberize highway surfaces may be leaching into soil and drainage features (and from there into local waterways), flooding coastal areas with carcinogens harmful to the aquatic food chain, according to a **San Francisco** study. Related factoid: the average car sheds up to four pounds of tire fragments annually. [Story](#).

Driverless cars will be available between 2025 and 2030, says someone who should know, the head of the world's largest automaker by sales volume, Volkswagen. In a story datelined out of **Berlin**, Herbert Diess told a German magazine: "It is foreseeable that the systems will soon be able to master even the most complex situations of autonomous driving." [Details](#).

A **San Antonio**-led research coalition is working to protect the nation's electronics and communications systems from electromagnetic pulses that might accompany extraordinary sunspot activity or high-altitude nuclear blasts. It's happened before: the Carrington Event of 1859 - the strongest solar activity geomagnetic storm to hit Earth in 500 years - sparked fires, shocked telegraph operators, and fried communications lines. Those systems were 1000 times more resilient than today's fragile and complex electronics, says an official. [Story](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

Austin came out on top and **Dallas** placed second in an annual list of Best US Cities for Tech (or the Tech Town Index), based on a series of metrics including tech sector and open IT job postings, cost of living, and projected future jobs growth in the sector. **Austin** was named Number One for the second year in a row. [Details](#).

'Gone To Texas:' Multiple media outlets reported last week that Elon Musk - of Tesla and The Boring Company fame - is moving both himself and his companies to Texas, most likely to **Austin** or **Dallas**. Currently the second-richest man in the world after Tesla shares spiked nearly 700% this year, Musk reportedly wants out of high-tax, heavily regulated California. [Story](#). [More](#).

As part of a broader move by state leadership to limit the authorities of cities - and in a direct challenge to the conservative principle of 'local control' - Gov. Greg Abbott is considering a proposal, following city council cuts to local police budgets, to put the state in charge of policing a large area in **Austin**, including downtown, the Texas Capitol, and the University of Texas. [Story](#).

The **Washington Post** launched a hard-hitting series on Mexico over the weekend, including one that focused on the 79,000 people gone missing - or 'disappeared' - since 2006, victims of drug violence or police/armed forces corruption ([here](#)). Another story zeros in on official corruption in **Veracruz**, and the murder of a journalist investigating the relationship between two governors and the drug cartels. Worth reading ([here](#)).

The Texas Transportation Commission meets this Thursday, (12/10) at 9:00 am to discuss - among other items - TxDOT's Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Plan. Join the online live stream [here](#).

Okay, we're biased, but President Denise Trauth's video Christmas card from Texas State University in **San Marcos** definitely rates as our personal favorite this year. If *Jingle Bell Rock*, Mariachi-style doesn't make you smile, you're not ready for Christmas, Ebenezer. [Video](#).

Thought of the Week

"Life is a great big canvas; throw all the paint you can at it."

— Danny Kaye

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