



Monday Morning Report

February 20, 2023

INTERNAL

The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council met last week (2/15) for updates on the staff's legislative efforts on financing for the Texas Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund, recent Texas Electric Transportation Resources Alliance activities, and a robust discussion of intercity passenger rail programs currently underway by the Federal Railroad Administration. Recent progress on the 'Cap and Stitch' program for IH-35 in **Austin** was reviewed, as well as TxDOT plans for State Highway 45. Final agenda [here](#).

Reminder: This Wednesday (2/22) is the **San Antonio** Mobility Coalition's 'Day at the Capitol' in **Austin** from 9:45 AM to 5:00 PM, with multiple visits scheduled with legislators on transportation issues.

[Details.](#)

A previously scheduled staff discussion tomorrow (2/21) with the **Bexar County** Commissioners Court regarding enhanced Amtrak service has been postponed. The staff meets Wednesday (2/22) with a Regional Planning post-graduate seminar group at the School of Architecture on the University of Texas campus in **Austin**, and later that day with the North Texas Council of Governments (**Dallas**). And please welcome new Corridor Council member Gretchen Howell with SouthStar Communities.

INFRASTRUCTURE

With the public comment period set to end in just weeks, TxDOT continues to receive pushback on plans for the IH-35 Central Capital Expressway project through downtown **Austin**. Despite prolonged negotiations between the city and the state transportation agency, community and neighborhood interests say widening the freeway will displace too many people and businesses, all for little improvement in throughput capacity. [Story. More.](#)

In a story datelined deep in Virginia coal country, the **Washington Post** reports that the nuclear industry and the Biden administration are pitching coal communities on small, adaptable nuclear power plants that are safer, cheaper, and capable of being deployed all over the country in an effort to cut the electric power sector's contribution to climate change. [Story.](#)

Generation Z, loosely defined as people born between 1996 and 2012, are getting their driver's licenses at lower rates than their predecessors, apparently turning instead to ride-sharing apps and social media. The **Washington Post** reports that in 1997, 43% of 16-year-olds and 62% of 17-year-olds had driver's licenses. By 2020, those numbers had fallen to 25% and 45%. Reasons cited: anxiety, finances, and environmental concerns. [Story.](#)

Over 1000 US trains derail each year and, as the horrific images out of **East Palestine**, OH last week demonstrate, the resulting damage can be catastrophic and long-lasting. Though the number of derailments has declined since the 1970's, the costs of derailed trains carrying hazardous materials have

increased recently. Braking system requirements revised by the Trump administration may play a role, the **Times** reports. **Opinion**.

Airport News: Recently released designs for a new terminal at **San Antonio** International Airport signal billion-dollar changes to come (**here**); the airport also announced new SAT-LAX (**Los Angeles**) non-stop service (**here**). Meanwhile, **Austin** Bergstrom International airport had its busiest year ever in 2022 (**here**), and announced new non-stop service to **Panama City** by Copa Airlines, starting in July. **Story. More**.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

In a troubling signal for the US economy and supply chains, January imports at US ports fell by nearly 18% compared to last January, with the West Coast ports the most affected. **Long Beach** imports were down by over 32% year-over-year last month. Shippers don't expect a rebound until the second half of 2023. **Story**.

Texas state government action rejecting doing business with banks associated with so-called ESG policies (environmental, social, governance) is costing Texans at least \$416 million per year in higher interest costs, according to an **Axios** analysis of a report from the Wharton Business School. The rejected banks - JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs, and Citigroup - are among the nation's largest. **Story. Study**.

The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University in **San Marcos** has received a \$2.48 million federal appropriation for the center's Climate Change Impact on Water Initiative mapping project, **Community Impact** reports. "Climate change threatens everything we love about Texas." **Story**.

More Bad News About Traffic: Danish scientists have concluded that constant exposure to traffic noise can result in tinnitus, a ringing or whistling sound in the ears that plagues millions worldwide. 3.5 million Danish residents were studied between years 2000-2017; more than 40,000 were diagnosed with tinnitus. **Story. Study**.

Thought of the Week

"The consequence of pessimism in the life of a nation is the same as in the life of the individual."

– Helen Keller

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