



Monday Morning Report

June 13, 2022

INTERNAL

There will be no meeting of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council Executive Committee this week. The next meeting is set for Wednesday, July 20 at 2 PM by videoconference. To add an item to the agenda, contact council@thecorridor.org.

COVID-19 UPDATE: Global cases this morning are at 535.3 million with 6,309,616 million deaths. US cases are at 85.5 million, with 1,011,277 deaths (6/13/22) ([Johns Hopkins](#)). Yesterday, Texas reported 5,693,191 confirmed cases with 86,913 deaths, including in **Bexar County**: 486,431 cases with 6,154 deaths; **Guadalupe County**: 26,963 cases, still with 399 deaths; **Comal County**: 22,755 cases, with 552 deaths; **Hays County**: 54,048 cases still with 433 deaths; **Travis County**: 215,113 cases still with 1,738 deaths; and **Williamson County**: 113,866 cases with 880 deaths (6/12/22). ([TDHHS](#)). *Current regional hospitalization-rate data is found [here](#).*

INFRASTRUCTURE

Carlos Aguilar, president and CEO of Texas Central Railway - the corporate partnership behind that high speed 'bullet train' between **Dallas** and **Houston** - resigned suddenly over the weekend, possibly signaling the beginning of the end for the project. His resignation did not mention the entity's recent legal reversals or \$600,000 in delinquent property tax bills but cited instead unspecified "international news." [Statement](#).

Colorado is moving forward on \$9 million in planning funding for the Front Range passenger rail project between **Trinidad** and **Fort Collins**, connecting to Amtrak's Southwest Chief - another example of state-chartered rail agencies expanding passenger services to take advantage of Federally financed networks. [Story](#).

The US House authorized planning to begin last week for the \$31 billion 'Ike Dike,' a massive series of coastal barrier projects designed to protect communities along the Gulf of Mexico from **Galveston** to **Brownsville**. If approved by the Senate, it would become the largest civil engineering project in US history (why some called it the 'full-employment act for engineers'). Funding for the effort has yet to be identified. [Story](#). [More](#) (second item).

Yet another problem is appearing on the horizon for international supply chains, particularly in the US: a shortage of railroad workers. The news that CSX and other Class 1 railroads are having trouble recruiting new workers comes just as ports, forwarders and importers are expecting a huge surge in freight traffic from China with the end of **Shanghai's** pandemic lockdown. [Story](#).

The [Washington Post](#) is calling out state politicians in Virginia and Maryland for opposing highway expansions in the suburban areas surrounding **Washington**, unusually positioning the issue as one of economic inequality. In a debate similar to those in **Houston**, **Austin**, and **El Paso**, those opposing highway expansions favor neighborhood preservation over transportation efficiency, but the paper argues

that - in some cases - lack of easy access to job centers is another form of economic discrimination.

Opinion.

Some industry analysts predict that up to a quarter of roughly 1000 US shopping malls will close in the next 3-5 years, victims of internet retail, changing societal tastes, and ecological concerns, according to a recent **New York Times** editorial commentary. Built with easy auto access and vast parking lots, malls represent significant infrastructure investments that could be re-purposed into schools, housing, indoor parks, and more. **Opinion.**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

San Marcos and **Hays County** have approved local tax incentives for Hill Country Studios, a proposed \$267 million television and film production studio that plans to build 820,000 sq.ft. of production offices, workshops, back lots, and sound stages just off Center Point Road and Wonder World Drive. **Story.**

Austin has appointed former Public Works Director Richard Mendoza as interim Director of Transportation to replace (as if that were possible) Rob Spillar, who announced in May that he was stepping down to return to the private sector. **Details** (right hand column).

Founder Sir Richard Branson was on hand (in a cowboy hat, no less) last week as Virgin Atlantic airlines began promoting its non-stop service to **London** from **Austin's** Bergstrom International Airport. The service will expand from four-days-a-week to daily service next spring, he said. **Story.**

Austin is building more new single-family homes than any other US city, according to a Redfin real estate analysis reported in the **Austonia** newsletter. With 31.1 building permits per 10,000 residents, **Austin** topped the other Sun Belt cities that made the Top Ten list for housing starts per capita. **San Antonio** was in the Top Ten for building multi-family homes, at 11.5 new build permits per 10,000 residents. **Story. Report.**

Fascinating details about Elon Musk's 'Master Plan Part 3' (yes, that's what he calls it) emerged last week on newsletter **Electrek** from a private company meeting: "How do you get enough scale to actually shift the energy infrastructure of earth?" Never a small thinker, Musk envisions Tesla owners making money from their cars when they're not using them. Master Plan Parts 1 and 2 are already underway now. Read more **here**.

Thought of the Week

"The best way to predict your future is to create it."

- Abraham Lincoln

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