



Monday Morning Report

November 20, 2023

INTERNAL

The **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council Executive Committee met last week (11/15) for discussions of TxDOT's Carbon Reduction Strategy and deployment of \$641 million in federal emissions reduction funding, IH-35 Central Expressway reconstruction and 'cap and stitch' developments, a proposed list of Council projects for 2024, inter-urban bus services, Amtrak inter-city rail potential, and more. Information: council@thecorridor.org.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Corridor Council Executive Committee is set for December 20 at 2:00 pm, via Zoom.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Peter LeCody, president of **Dallas**-based Texas Rail Advocates, told the Texas Transportation Commission meeting last week (11/16) that the agency's Texas Carbon Reduction Strategy - released Oct. 25 - will 'take the state in the wrong direction' by spending federal emissions reduction funding on more highways. He urged commissioners to consider instead using the funds to match federal dollars made available by the Amtrak Corridor Identification and Development Program. [Video](#) (starts at 41:00).

Meanwhile in **Washington**, Congressional budget talks last week continued posing a threat to Amtrak funding in 2024, with one proposal suggesting a 64% cut to the agency. Routes potentially affected in Texas could be those stopping in **San Antonio, Austin, Dallas-Ft. Worth, and El Paso**, among others. [Details](#).

Non-profit news service **ProPublica**'s series on US railroads offers a story about Union Pacific firing employees rather than heeding their safety warnings ([here](#)), a look at the derailment dangers of miles-long 'monster trains' currently sweeping the industry ([here](#)), and the worsening problem of US trains blocking intersections ([here](#)).

Responding to a rapidly changing climate, the US Department of Agriculture released an updated 13-zone '*Plant Hardiness Zone Map*' last week, moving parts of the **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** from Zone 8-a to Zone 9-a-b, indicating anticipated extreme temperature range changes of up to 10 degrees. The map is considered a 'Bible' for agricultural interests, gardeners, and managers of public lands, **Axios** says. [Story](#). [Interactive Map](#).

A fire that closed down a one-mile stretch of the I-10 freeway in **Los Angeles** last week has many in the car capital of the US rethinking the city's approach to traffic, the **Washington Post** reports. More than 300,000 daily motorists have been affected - at least enough to remember **Monahans**, Texas-native Guy Clark's lyrical hopes: 'If I can just get off of this L.A. freeway, without getting killed or caught,' the **Post** writes. [Story](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

Austin's *South By Southwest* music and film conference is back to pre-pandemic levels - in terms of economic impact at least - generating \$380.9 million in economic activity for the city in 2023, up \$100 million from the 2022 edition, the **Austin Monitor** reports. [Story](#).

Congratulations to Texas State University in **San Marcos** researchers, who made national news with a project conducted using the James Webb Space Telescope that confirms a possible theory of planet formation involving the aggregation over time of drifting ice and pebbles. Andrea Banzatti led the research ([here](#)). More [details](#).

A **Wall Street Journal** survey says **San Antonio** has the second-best mid-sized airport in the country and ranks at the very top for ease-of-access through security and availability of ride-share and taxi services. [Details](#).

Joby Aviation and Volocopter joined **New York** mayor Eric Adams last week to demonstrate electric vertical-takeoff-and-landing aircraft scheduled to be deployed by 2025 from **Manhattan** to regional airports. The aircraft will cut down travel time from downtown to John F. Kennedy International airport to just seven minutes. [Story](#).

In addition to beer-, bratwurst-, and barbecue-, **New Braunfels** can now add 'film-friendly,' thanks to a designation from the Texas Film Commission awarded last week. The statewide program highlights areas with a combination of locations, housing, and hospitality attractive to the film and television industry. [Story](#).

Thought of the Week

"Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known."

- Carl Sagan

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