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I-35 Capital Express Central Project
Attn: Project Team
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February 28, 2023

The Travis County Commissioners Court wishes to submit the following comments on the I-35 Capital Express Central Project draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the Preferred Alternative as official comments for consideration.

- The Commissioners Court recognizes and concurs with the "Purpose and Need" stated in the draft EIS. As noted in the draft EIS,
    - "The proposed project is needed because I-35, between US 290 East and US 290 West/SH 71, does not adequately accommodate current and future travel demand and does not meet current federal and state design standards, which has resulted in safety and operational deficiencies and can impact crash rates and peak period travel times for all users, including emergency response vehicles and transit. "
    - "The purpose of the proposed project is to improve this critical local, regional, national, and international thoroughfare by enhancing safety within the corridor; addressing demand by prioritizing the movement of people, goods, and services through and across the corridor; improving operational efficiency; and creating a more dependable and consistent route for the traveling public, including people who walk and bicycle, emergency responders, and transit."
- It is important to continue progress on this badly needed project that will improve the failing conditions on the I-35 central section.
- The Commissioners Court appreciates TxDOT's efforts to improve the build alternatives by working with our region's diverse stakeholders, evaluating and incorporating components of the Community Concept, and improving multi-modal access and mobility. We appreciate your willingness to design the build alternatives so that they can accommodate the City of Austin's cap and stitch land bridges across I-35 in the downtown area, which supports healing the historical east/west divide within the City that was exacerbated by the current design of I-35.
- Modified Build Alternative 3 (the Preferred Alternative) is a big improvement over Alternative 2 and shows significant progress towards meeting the community's goals of eliminating or minimizing displacements, increasing east/west multimodal connectivity, and providing safe access and mobility for all ages and abilities.
- The draft EIS is our opportunity to provide feedback and highlight concerns, outlined here. Travis County would like to continue to work with TxDOT to further improve this project, and address concerns outlined below, prior to the issuance of both the final EIS and Record of Decision.

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- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should ensure that I-35 Central is designed and built in a way that does not preclude adding additional connections and additional capping in the future. I-35 needs more east-west street crossings that work for all users including cars, bikes, and pedestrians.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should include water quality controls to treat and filter runoff from I-35.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should continue to collaborate and prioritize reducing the environmental, traffic, and safety impacts of I-35, especially the frontage roads. Frontage roads and east west crossings should prioritize service to the local street network and should have speed limits and design speeds no higher than the adjacent local street network.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should minimize the number of properties impacted by eminent domain and provide as much mitigation as possible for the impacted businesses and residents.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should substantially revise the I-35 Draft Environmental Impact Statement to reduce the burdens of the project placed on residential communities in Travis County, prior to the release of a final EIS and Record of Decision.
- No TxDOT project should go forward that does not meet TxDOT's "Road to Zero" goals. The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should prioritize safety for all road users, including reasonable strategies specifically aimed at reducing injuries and death to vulnerable road users.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should conduct a study of existing and future particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5) in the I-35 corridor, with monitors placed directly adjacent to the highway and throughout the region. PM2.5 is a significant public health threat. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. This study should specifically analyze existing and future PM2.5 at schools and elder care facilities within 2 miles of I-35. This study should be included in the final EIS and inform this project moving forward.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should ensure that air quality projections in the final EIS are at least within up-to-date PM2.5 attainment levels at the point that the final EIS and Record of Decision are issued and should anticipate future changes.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should conduct a study of existing and future air pollution in addition to carbon monoxide (CO). This study should also include nitrogen oxides (NOx), which causes Ozone, as well as other pollutants that affect the population. Air pollution represents a significant public health threat. This study should specifically analyze existing and future air pollutant levels both adjacent to the highway and across the region and should be included in the final EIS and inform this project moving forward.
- The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should conduct a full study of non-tailpipe pollutants from traffic, including but not limited to brake dust, tire friction, and the impacts of a shift from internal combustion engines (ICEs) to electric vehicles (EVs). The expected proliferation of electric vehicles, as outlined in the draft EIS, are not guaranteed to reduce overall pollution levels from traffic. Pollution from tire friction and wear, for example, may worsen with an increase in EVs due to increase in vehicle weight from electric batteries. Research in this field is new and increasing each day, and TxDOT's study should take into account the most up to date research as of February 2023. This study should be included in the final EIS and inform this project moving forward.

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  - The I-35 Capital Express Central Project should mitigate future air pollution. This expansion represents 42 lane-miles of added highway capacity. This will lead to an increase of 320 million vehicle miles driven every year, burning the equivalent of 17 million more gallons of gasoline every year, and generating 150,000 tons of CO2.
  - TxDOT should support State investment in passenger rail service between Austin and San Antonio.
- TxDOT provided information that the driveway access from the southbound frontage road to the County's Palm Square site is preserved in the Preferred Alternative. This alleviates the County's concerns about possible loss of site access due to removal of driveway access on the frontage road.
- The Commissioners Court encourages TxDOT to work with the County and the City of Austin to refine the design of Modified Build Alternative 3 to address any outstanding concerns and maximize effectiveness of the final design.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and for offering the region the opportunity to substantially improve I-35, the transportation backbone of Travis County and the region. The Commissioners Court is confident that TxDOT and the region working together can realize significant mobility and access improvements while also improving the community fabric along the I-35 corridor.

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Judge Andy Brown
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