



City of Austin

Kirk Watson, Mayor

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July 19, 2023

Mr. Jay Crossley
Jay@FarmAndCity.org

Dear Mr. Crossley:

I'm writing at the request of the legislators you met with recently to discuss the I-35 project. Last week, I convened a meeting at City Hall with Senator Sarah Eckhardt and Representatives Gina Hinojosa, Sheryl Cole, Donna Howard, Vikki Goodwin, Lulu Flores, John Bucy and Jimmy Talarico. They represented you well by asking questions you had posed, drilled down on items and advocated positions. It was a very productive meeting that lasted over an hour and a half. They asked that I share with you some important updates as well as the [presentation materials](#) that I provided to them.

TxDOT has continued to work closely with the City of Austin since the close of the public hearing in February and has agreed to several significant changes to the project, including:

- [Additional capping opportunities at Hancock or Cherrywood](#)
- Direct connect for buses at the Tech Ridge Park and Ride
- Bat boxes on the new bridge over Lady Bird Lake
- Water quality treatment at Cesar Chavez outfall
- Commitment to build the boardwalk along Lady Bird Lake in front of the Hyatt (about \$25 million)
- Sound walls for City of Austin community garden

TxDOT will also be constructing a new tunnel and drainage system that will run along the project corridor between Airport Boulevard and Cesar Chavez Street. Overall, the enhanced drainage system will improve water quality by reducing runoff and decreasing the trash and debris flowing into Lady Bird Lake. An additional benefit will be the cost savings related to clean-up and maintenance of the Waller Creek Tunnel. Given the current lack of any water quality infrastructure for I-35, this new drainage system will be a significant improvement.

Regarding safety, TxDOT has committed to posting speed limits of 35 mph along the frontage roads through downtown, consistent with the speeds on adjacent city streets. Safety modeling suggests overall crashes will be reduced by 24 percent with the project.

The City of Austin and the University of Texas are both exploring how to finance the foundational infrastructure needed for the caps, which are being designed to accommodate two-story buildings. Additional infrastructure funding would be required if we want to build taller buildings on the caps. There will be ample time for a robust community conversation about how to best use the newfound public space atop the caps.

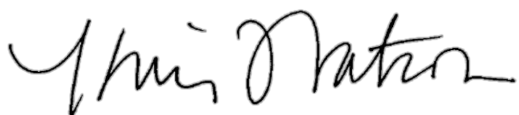
In addition, the city has been offered a building south of Woodland Avenue that could be repurposed for homelessness response or whatever we choose. TxDOT must now acquire the property because on-site parking will be greatly reduced due to changes made at the request of Rep. Flores. The building itself, however, will remain untouched.

In 2011, the Legislature approved a \$300 million budget rider provided to study and begin designing solutions to address the state's most congested roads and segments of roads. I formed and chaired the Central Texas Mobility Improvement Priorities Working Group that directed a significant chunk of our region's slice of the pie to I-35. In partnership with the City of Austin, a feasibility study was conducted to see if we could make improvements to I-35 through the urban core without taking huge swaths of right of way as had been previously proposed. We wanted to find a way to address congestion without destroying our community.

The extensive community process led to important design changes, including the elimination of the upper decks and the lowering of the main lanes from Airport Boulevard to Oltorf Street. Even without the caps, these two factors will have a transformative effect on our community as will the "stitches" that greatly improve east-west connectivity. In addition, the implementation of the boulevard concept — in lieu of the standard frontage road — will both improve traffic flow on downtown streets and better accommodate light rail and bus routes.

This project now both addresses our mobility needs and reflects our values, in large part due to the strong community voices that have been a part of this process.

Sincerely,



Kirk Watson

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