



**Austin-San Antonio  
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***Monday Morning Report – September 28, 2009***

## **Internal**

### **NOTICE OF REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS (RFQ):**

The **Austin-San Antonio** Rail District (Rail District) seeks statements of qualifications from consulting attorneys to provide the Rail District with **freight rail negotiation services** to assist with negotiations and agreements with freight railroads regarding operations, use, real estate matters, and right-of-way acquisition. The RFQ is available through this link: **RFQ**. Responses to the RFQ must be received by the Rail District no later than **2:00 p.m. CDT, October 22, 2009** to be considered.

## **Infrastructure**

The Texas Transportation Commission last week approved funding for **Williamson County's** O'Connor Drive and State Highway 45 interchange project. Work on the \$44 million project - in the discussion and planning stages for years - could begin by next summer, officials said.

The *San Antonio Express News* reported over the weekend on the joint filing by TxDOT and the Austin-San Antonio Commuter Rail District's filing with the Federal Railroad Administration for high speed rail funding. The **San Antonio-Austin** project's year one request was for \$17.85 million. **Story**

According to the IRS, 1.4 million people have used the \$8,000 federal tax credit for first-time home buyers. Dec. 1 is the deadline for first-time buyers to purchase a house to qualify for the tax credit which equals 10 percent of the purchase price of a home, up to \$8,000. It reduces the individual's tax payment or will be returned as a higher refund the following year. The program is designed to ease the housing crisis by reducing inventory of homes on the market.

Federal stimulus funding from the Transit Investments for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction grant program awarded \$5 million to VIA Metropolitan Transit to purchase and operate three electric powered buses in downtown **San Antonio**. VIA is one of 43 transit agencies from across the nation slated to receive this funding and is also the only transit agency in Texas to be awarded in this process. **Press Release**.

*USA Today* that reported \$10 billion in stimulus aid to repair highways has bypassed dozens of metropolitan area roads in need of immediate repair, largely because of 'shovel-ready' requirements for eligible projects. The nation's worst roads are in counties that will only receive about 20% of the stimulus money allocated for street repairs (rather than the 11,000 miles of metro-area pavement so rough the government says they're unacceptable). **Article**

The first 48 miles of State Highway 130 is exceeding revenue projections, according to this morning's Ben Wear column in the *Austin American-Statesman*. His account is based upon quarterly reports of revenue from cash and toll-tags, but does not include those who pay by mail. More 'glass half-full' commentary **here**.

## Economic Development (and ‘Other News’)

The NCAA’s Division I Men’s Basketball Committee has selected **San Antonio** to host its 2011 Men’s Southwest Regional basketball tournament. This event draws fans from across the country, a big contribution to the local economy.

The BBVA Compass US Regional Watch third-quarter reports indicate the Texas economy is predicted to begin a slow, steady recovery in 2010. Home sales across Texas are predicted to increase by 4.5% in 2010 after declining by 12% by the end of 2009.

Car dealership chain CarMax Inc. said last week its fiscal second quarter profit surged on higher sales and a one-time gain related to its auto financing business. CarMax operates four locations in the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor. For the first half of the year, the company has lowered its expenses by 9.4%, or \$43.8 million, compared with the year-ago period.

The Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) will host a Hydrogen Education Workshop on September 28 in the AACOG Al J. Notzon III Board Room, 8700 Tesoro Drive, Suite 100, **San Antonio**. The workshop will be open to anyone interested in the latest in hydrogen technology such as fuel cells, and applications including transportation.

### *Details.*

Philips, the Dutch electronics giant, announced that it is the first company to submit an entry in the **L Prize**, a **US Department of Energy** contest to create a viable LED-based alternative to a 60-watt light bulb. If the product passes the specs, Phillips will win the \$10 million prize and potentially huge federal purchasing agreements.

On Thursday (9/24), the Labor Department offered a bit of good news about the job market, reporting that first-time claims for unemployment insurance fell 21,000 last week to a seasonally adjusted 530,000.

**San Antonio** mayor Julian Castro has formed a Green Jobs Leadership Council to recommend public policy that will help create jobs in the new “green” economy and appointed Larry Zinn – one-time aide to former mayor Phil Hardberger - as chairman. . The council will meet regularly for the next six to nine months and then present its recommendations to the City Council.

Concordia University-Texas, based out of its new campus in west **Austin**, announced the expansion of its **San Antonio** facility to accommodate enrollment growth. The renovation and expansion will double the original square footage of the **San Antonio** Center. Concordia is also contemplating adding an additional facility in southern **San Antonio**.

**Austin's** economy was the nation’s 37th largest, generating a gross metropolitan product of \$80.1 billion in 2008, according to a new report from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. That's up two spots from the city's ranking last year. **Austin** falls just behind **San Antonio**, which was ranked 36<sup>th</sup> largest with a GMP of \$80.7 billion.

## Thought for the week:

*“It is hard to understand how a cemetery raised its burial cost and blamed it on the cost of living.”*

~ Bumper Sticker