



Monday Morning Report

February 1, 2021

INTERNAL

The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council will meet on Wednesday, February 17, at 2:00 pm via Zoom video conference. For questions or to add an item to the agenda, contact council@thecorridor.org.

COVID-19 UPDATE: Confirmed global cases are now 103,043,330, with 2,229,697 deaths, as of this morning (2/1). The US death total is 441,331, with 26,188,167 confirmed cases. (**Johns Hopkins**) Texas was reporting 2,059,143 cases as of yesterday, with 36,491 deaths. **Bexar County:** 2,348 fatalities, with 142,444 confirmed cases; **Guadalupe County:** 9,159 cases with 152 deaths; **Comal County:** 4,313 cases with 226 deaths; **Hays County:** 14,692 cases with 152 deaths; **Travis County:** 68,290 cases with 727 deaths; and **Williamson County:** 31,271 cases with 321 deaths (1//31/21). (**TDHHS**)

INFRASTRUCTURE

A new study reported by **City Journal**, conducted by **New York** University's Marron Institute, contends that US rail projects are vastly more expensive than they should be and cost many times over what other countries are spending to develop urban rail. The reason? Pointlessly fancy stations, the study says.

Story. Report.

The Federal Railroad Administration released a preliminary report on a proposed mag-levitation route that would transport passengers over a 40-mile stretch between **Baltimore** and **Washington DC** in 8-to-15 minutes, the first leg of a system eventually conceptualized to connect to **New York**. Initial cost estimates suggest a \$14-17 billion price tag and a 10-year implementation schedule, pending Federal approvals.

Story.

Long-time TxDOT Executive Director James Bass will leave the agency in May, following the 87th Legislative Session, to become the new director of the **Central Texas** Regional Mobility Authority, replacing an interim director appointed when Mike Heiligenstein retired. **Details.**

San Antonio has a new director of the city's Transportation Department this week, Tomika Monterville, most recently director of planning and regional development for the **Central Florida** Regional Transportation Authority and a planner for the Federal Transit Administration before that. Welcome aboard. **Details** (right-hand column).

Austin's Urban Transportation Commission - made up of citizens appointed by city council members - is urging TxDOT "in the strongest possible way" *not* to expand IH-35 through downtown, signaling there may be future council action on the project's design. The group's reasons include climate, safety, equity, and a desire for more high-capacity transit. **Story.**

Flying cars may seem like something out of cartoon-strip *The Jetsons*, but serious investors are jumping into the market and airport authorities in **Orlando**, **Cologne**, and **Dusseldorf** are preparing for their deployment (**here**). **Axios** has a 'state of play' review of the electric-powered, five-passenger vehicles

expected in service by 2023-25 and touts their functionality - unlike helicopters, they make less noise than motorcycles. [Story. More.](#)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

The Texas economy has pulled ahead of Brazil to become the world's 9th largest economy, with a Gross Domestic Product of \$1.9 trillion in 2019, which places the state between eighth-place Italy (\$2 trillion) and tenth-place Brazil (\$1.8 trillion). The total US GDP for 2019 was \$21.4 trillion, **Texas Government Insider** reports [here](#).

Project Silicon Silver, widely believed to be a \$10 billion expansion of Samsung's computer chip-manufacturing presence in **Austin**, received a preliminary go-ahead for further discussions with **Travis County** last week. Issues raised included local hiring practices, wages, and worker protections, but in the end, the deal moves forward. [Details.](#)

Gov. Greg Abbott gives his 'State of the State' speech *this* evening at 7:00 pm, in which he is expected to update Texans on the state's coronavirus response, name his legislative priorities and designate 'emergency items' for the 2021 Legislative Session. Watch it live [here](#).

Global computer semi-conductor manufacturing is increasingly shifting away from the US, with America's share of worldwide supply dipping to 12% today compared to 37% in 1990. The gap is seen as a key element of a national struggle with the rising economic and technology threats posed by China. Rapid development of artificial intelligence is the heart of the matter, officials told Congress last week. [Story. More.](#)

The Coup We're Not Talking About: The **New York Times** published a remarkable thought-piece over the weekend arguing that unregulated social media and American-style democracy cannot coexist simultaneously - an arguably unprecedented notion sure to produce an equally unprecedented backlash. As legislation looms on the notorious 'Section 230' regulatory framework for Big Tech ([here](#)), a Harvard Business School emeritus proposes three steps toward a solution. [Opinion.](#)

Congratulations to retiring **New Braunfels** Chamber of Commerce president Michael Meek, honored last week with the city's Besserung Award - often referred to as the 'New Braunfels Outstanding Citizen award.' Meek has led the Chamber for more than 26 years and the award came at the group's 102nd annual banquet. [Story.](#)

Thought of the Week

"A man's feet should be planted in his country, but his eyes should survey the world."

— George Santayana

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