



Monday Morning Report

March 8, 2021

INTERNAL

The **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council Executive Committee is scheduled to meet Wednesday, March 17th at 2 PM by video conference. For questions, contact council@thecorridor.org.

COVID-19 UPDATE: Confirmed global cases stood at 116,712,556 as of yesterday (3/7), with 2.6 million deaths. US cases totaled 28,985,707 with 524,935 deaths. (*Johns Hopkins*) Texas was reporting 2,320,857 confirmed cases, with 44,451 deaths, including **Bexar County:** 3,038 fatalities, with 168,931 cases; **Guadalupe County:** 10,230 cases with 195 deaths; **Comal County:** 4,906 cases with 271 deaths; **Hays County:** 16,490 cases with 192 deaths; **Travis County:** 76,507 cases with 882 deaths; and **Williamson County:** 35,865 cases with 413 deaths (3/7). (*TDHHS*) Total deaths for the counties listed will top 5,000 sometime today (3/8).

INFRASTRUCTURE

San Antonio joins the likes of **Boston, Los Angeles, Atlanta,** and **Raleigh-Durham** on the *Business Insider* list of the Top 10 US Cities paving the way for the future by investing in technology, sustainability, and infrastructure. The magazine cited the city's Office of Innovation Smart Streetlights project and the Cybersecurity Manufacturing Institute, among other investments. *Story.*

President Biden and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg met in **Washington** last week with Republican and Democratic Congressional leaders to discuss an as-yet-unwritten infrastructure spending plan to update the nation's aging roads, rails, bridges, and dams. Even as some Republicans warned that the plan would require 'pay-as-you-go' financing (*here*), Biden pledged the US would 'lead the world across the board on infrastructure.' One funding recommendation discussed: a carbon emissions tax. *Story.*

A traffic jam of ships off US ports like **Los Angeles, Houston,** and **Corpus Christi** is stretching the global supply chain to the breaking point, says the *New York Times*, another byproduct of the COVID-19 pandemic as Americans locked down in their homes are buying overseas products at an unprecedented rate. And at the epicenter of a series of shortages is that symbol of globalization, the lowly shipping container. "I've never seen anything like it," said one shipping official. *Story.*

The IH-35 Capital Express Central project through downtown **Austin** should get some attention this week, as TxDOT briefs the city's Mobility Committee this Thursday (3/11) at 1:00 pm (live stream *here*). That same day, TxDOT opens another part of the public involvement process with a web event (*here*). For more information on the project go *here*.

As both **Austin** and **San Antonio** struggle to contend with the seemingly endless problem of homelessness, *Axios* reports that cities across the US are increasingly turning to solutions other than sending in the police to clear out unsafe, unhealthy, and unsightly encampments from urban centers. Efforts in **Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul,** and **Charlotte** are cited for solutions ranging from tiny homes to hotels. *Story.*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

The little-known but important Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area Standards Review Committee at the US Census Bureau is contemplating a significant change to 70-year-old rules that would downgrade 144 cities from Metropolitan Statistical Area status to Micropolitan - thus requiring 100,000 population in the core city rather than 50,000. In Texas, **San Angelo**, **Victoria**, and **Wichita Falls** are among those cited. [Story](#).

Something strange is happening in US housing markets: home prices and rents are going in opposite directions. In 2020, for the 100 largest metros in America, home values increased, but in some of the richest cities - **Austin** among them - rents fell, sometimes by double-digits, according to [The Atlantic](#). A single-family home shortage, low interest rates, and COVID-19 are all part of the trend. [Story](#).

That \$450 million project to redevelop the site of the Alamo in **San Antonio** has had an 'on again, off again' aspect for the last several years, but recent moves by city and state leaders appears to have righted the effort. Although the [Express-News](#) said the project was 'on life support' over the weekend ([here](#)), mayor Ron Nirenberg has installed new leadership, resolved design disputes, and dealt with quarreling state leaders. [Story](#).

The search for a new police chief in **Austin** to replace Brian Manley is being hampered by local politics, a nationalized debate over police force funding and mission, and a shortage of qualified candidates due to personnel changes in major US cities, according to the [Austonia](#) newsletter. **Houston** police chief Art Acevedo - who once held the **Austin** post - adds his thoughts [here](#).

Austin's Capital Metro president and CEO Randy Clarke took the spotlight in last week's [Texas Government Insider's 'Lone Stars'](#) profile. Most interesting reveal: he's a dual US/Canadian citizen and a vegetarian living in barbecue country. Who knew? [Details](#).

Wimberley gets a new city administrator this month, Michael Boese, formerly city manager of **Keene** and a police chief in **Venus** (no kidding). [Details](#).

Congratulations to the **New Braunfels** Public Library, winner for the sixth consecutive year of the 2020 Achievement of Excellence Award, given by the Texas Municipal Library Directors Association (and yes, more proof that there is an association for just about everything). [Details](#).

Impatient with his progress toward revolutionizing automobiles and conquering Mars, billionaire Tesla and SpaceX founder Elon Musk has announced another more mundane undertaking: building a completely new city in South Texas near **Boca Chica** to be named '**Starbase**,' apparently friendly to dogs. The local judge in **Cameron County** indicated that there might be some earthly permits required. [Details](#).

Thought of the Week

"Fraternity is more durable than fratricide."

— Pope Francis, in **Mosul**, Iraq

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