



## Monday Morning Report

April 13, 2020

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### INTERNAL

Mark Your Calendar: The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council meets briefly via **teleconference only** *this Wednesday, April 15, 2:00 pm*. RSVP for meeting details to [council@thecorridor.org](mailto:council@thecorridor.org).

COVID-19 UPDATE: As of 12:00 noon Sunday (4/12) Worldwide: 1,833,685 confirmed cases, 113,296 deaths. US has 546,874 confirmed cases, 21,686 deaths. (*Johns Hopkins*) Texas has 13,484 reported cases, 271 fatalities (*TS DHS*). Various media reports for **Bexar County:** 723 cases, 27 deaths. **Comal County:** 37 cases, 4 deaths. **Hays County:** 89 confirmed cases. **Travis County:** 744 cases, 9 deaths. **Williamson County:** 113 cases, 4 deaths.

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### INFRASTRUCTURE

Pressure continued to build last week to delay funding decisions on a massive rebuild of Interstate-35 through Central **Austin**. TxDOT had been poised to approve portions of the \$7.5 billion project later this month - including a scenario that involved re-directing \$3 billion in statewide project-funding and \$600 million from local projects of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization - but key lawmakers objected (*here*), based upon financial uncertainties created by falling oil prices. Now, influential **North Texas** transportation official Michael Morris is proposing an alternative financing model involving new tolled lanes for IH-35. *Video here*.

A rare bright spot amid the glum pandemic news is that traffic congestion and fatalities have been reduced during the enforced lock down throughout the **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** and state. Fatalities dropped by over 15% this year compared to 2018, and single-vehicle trips have declined by 41% statewide since social restrictions were implemented. **San Antonio** saw a 43% decline in highway traffic; **Austin** is down by 49%, highest in the state. *Story*.

Texas will receive \$220 million of the \$3.06 billion set aside in the CARES Act for COVID-19 recovery programs via the US Department of Urban Development through block grants. **San Antonio's** share should equal \$13.1 million, **Austin** gets \$7.5 million. Funds can be used for a variety of purposes, including converting building to clinics or treatment centers. *Details*.

The **Austin Business Journal** suggested last week that both a major re-write of the city's development code and an ambitious Project Connect transportation plan are jeopardized by the current coronavirus pandemic and its impacts on local finances. They report that both efforts face 'an uncertain future.' *Story*.

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### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

With state and local tax revenues falling, those states most reliant on sales taxes are watching their budgets deteriorate even as costs due to the coronavirus pandemic - unemployment insurance and medical expenses - are rising. Texas falls in the mid-range of most states on sales taxes but is particularly

exposed on oil prices. Now, the Brookings Institution has looked at which cities are most impacted and projects that **Austin** will feel the financial hit sooner than **San Antonio** will. [Story. Report.](#)

Roland Swenson, chief executive officer of Austin's South By Southwest Conference, was interviewed by the New York Times in their weekend edition about what happens to events put on hold or canceled by the coronavirus pandemic. He says local city action was vital to SXSW's decision to call off this year's conference. [Story.](#)

**New York Times** chief diplomatic correspondent Steven Erlanger, in an interview with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs from **Brussels**, reflects on the European Union response to the coronavirus pandemic and finds 'symbolic' damage to the EEU, tensions over potential bonds-financing of a recovery effort, and a highly-targeted strategy for reopening economies based upon increased testing for income-generating entities such as factories. [Podcast here.](#)

**San Antonio** made national news broadcasts last week when 10,000 residents lined up for a grocery giveaway by a local food bank ([here](#)). City officials and **Bexar County** were quick to react, joining a coalition of state legislative officials in seeking additional emergency food funding from the state of Texas. [Story.](#) Meanwhile, the city received more bad pandemic news on the economic front: local officials were estimating a 'catastrophic' budget impact on **San Antonio** convention and tourism revenues of over \$100 million ([here](#)).

A survey of nonprofits in **Austin** by Mission Capital (supported by a consortium of community organizations) found that of 450 groups polled, 54% would not be able to operate at their current capacity beyond six months without additional funding and 80% would not be able to operate beyond a year without additional help. Forty-nine percent of those surveyed said there had also been an increased demand for their services recently. [Story.](#)

An internationally recognized pandemic expert at Texas A&M in **College Station** says we're in Stage Two - 'mitigation' - of a five-step recovery program for the coronavirus. Other stages include containment (phase one), therapeutic measures, vaccine development, vaccine deployment, and Stage Five: preparing for the *next* pandemic. He thinks more testing will be required before an economic restart. [Story.](#)

## Thought of the Week

*"The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it."*

- Neil deGrasse Tyson

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