



Monday Morning Report

April 20, 2020

INTERNAL

COVID-19 UPDATE: As of 12:00 noon Sunday (4/19) there were worldwide confirmed cases of 2,374,141 and 163,372 deaths. US cases totaled 742,442 with 39,291 deaths. In Texas, 18,923 reported cases, 477 fatalities. **Bexar County:** 992 reported cases, 38 deaths; **Comal County:** 43 active cases, 6 deaths; **Hays County:** 109 cases, 1 death; **Travis County:** 1,092 reported cases, 23 deaths; Williamson County: 155 cases, 4 deaths.

The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council met last week (4/15) by teleconference to discuss COVID-19 and oil price impacts on the Texas state budget with Billy Hamilton, Deputy Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer of the Texas A&M System, and those same impacts on state transportation funding with Chris Shields, political consultant with The Capital Group. Pending votes at the state and regional level on the IH-35 Capital Expressway project in **Austin** were also discussed, short and long term funding scenarios for the Council were outlined along with updates on various Council projects, and **Dallas-Houston** high speed rail efforts reported. Congestion expert Tim Lomax of the Texas Transportation Institute also reported on the current and projected impacts of statewide pandemic quarantines on traffic counts for urban highways. For more information email council@thecorridor.org.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Recent dissatisfaction with the planning and financial modeling efforts of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization boiled over into a letter from the **Travis County** commissioners court to the agency last week (4/15), in which members criticized the methodology and transparency of efforts to divert \$600 million in local projects to the TxDOT plans for expanding IH-35 in central **Austin**. CAMPO members, including **Austin** mayor Steve Adler, had earlier signaled unhappiness with how and why those diversions were selected. [Letter](#). CAMPO meets today at 2:00 pm with a live stream teleconference [here](#).

After layoffs and postponed milestones attributed to the coronavirus pandemic by the folks behind Texas Central Railroad's **Dallas-Houston** High Speed Rail Project, state and US Congressional representatives called on US Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao and the Federal Railroad Administration to cancel the project before it could qualify for any federal stimulus funding. Now, the **Dallas Business Journal** says the whole effort is in jeopardy. [Story](#).

The third most-traveled structurally deficient bridge in Texas is along IH-35 at Eisenhower Road in **San Antonio**, according to the annual 'bridge report' by the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, a group with a vested interest in highlighting such things. Texas has identified over 11,000 bridges that require \$3.3 billion in repair or replacement work. The **Express-News** ran a graphics package last week on the report. [More](#).

Plans for a November election on increased funding for public transit in **San Antonio** - and a corollary decision on \$40 million in watershed protection funding - may end up being postponed due to the COVID pandemic, according to several sources. Mayor Ron Nirenberg is quoted as saying: 'Anticipating the timing of a transit election is premature, and that's an understatement.' [Story](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

San Antonio tech firm Rackspace could be in the early stages of an initial public offering of stock that would return the company to the public stock market. Reuters is reporting that the firm that acquired the company back in 2016, Apollo Global Management, had filed confidential documents suggesting a return to the markets but with no timetable given. The company could have an initial valuation of \$10 billion, the report said. [Story](#).

Texas had the highest number of approved loans under federal financing from the Small Business Administration provided due to the coronavirus pandemic, about 135,000 loans out of 1.6 million granted, before the roughly \$350 billion program ran out of funding last week, according to a report from **San Antonio** quoting federal officials. [Details](#).

Ten years after the Deepwater Horizon drilling accident that killed 11 people and dumped over 200 million gallons of petroleum crude into the Gulf of Mexico, a **Houston** journalist says there's an easy way to forestall a repeat of the environmental disaster: end offshore deep-water drilling for good. More turmoil for the oil industry [here](#).

The **Austin** Independent School District made national news broadcasts last week with an innovative program to improve distance learning during the COVID-19 school shutdown: the agency deployed 110 school buses equipped with Wi-Fi transmitters to assist students in neighborhoods with limited internet access. VIA Metropolitan Transit in **San Antonio** has a similar project underway. Props to both for ingenuity. [Story](#).

A new Harvard University study published earlier this month in **Boston** found that coronavirus patients in areas that had high levels of air pollution are more likely to die from the infection. The report looked at over 3000 US counties and correlated higher levels of toxic air particles with increased death rates from COVID-19. [Story](#).

Businesses shut down. Schools closed. Hospitals afraid of being overwhelmed. Face masks required everywhere. Sound familiar? So, it was in 1897, when fears of a yellow fever epidemic originating in **New Orleans** swept through Texas and citizens rose up to prevent trains with strangers aboard from stopping in their towns. A Corridor Council member wanted to share this fascinating piece of history from the **Copano Bay** Press. [Essay](#).

Thought of the Week

"Instead of worrying about what you cannot control, shift your energy to what you can create."

- Roy T. Bennett

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