



Monday Morning Report

September 21, 2020

INTERNAL

COVID-19 UPDATE: Worldwide cases have now reached about 31 million as of noon yesterday (9/20), with 958,314 deaths. The US has 6,782,083 confirmed cases of infection with just under 200,000 fatalities. (*Johns Hopkins*) The state of Texas was reporting 686,086 total confirmed cases with 14,848 estimated deaths as of Saturday (9/19), including **Bexar County**: 41,340 cases with 1,244 deaths; **Guadalupe County**: 1,958 cases with 76 deaths; **Comal County**: 2,600 cases with 102 deaths; **Hays County**: 5,736 cases with 60 deaths; **Travis County**: 28,375 cases with 399 deaths; **Williamson County**: 8,385 cases with 142 deaths. Total fatalities for the **Austin-San Antonio Corridor** counties have now surpassed 2,023. (*TDHHS*)

COVID-19 Hospitalizations: As of Saturday (9/19) there were 3,124 cases currently in Texas hospitals with 11,925 available hospital beds, 1,301 available intensive care beds, and 7,554 available ventilators. *More.*

INFRASTRUCTURE

A blockbuster piece in the *New York Times Magazine* over the weekend analyzed the impacts of climate change on human migration with some scary results: within 50 years, nearly half of all Americans will suffer negative environmental effects and millions will be forced to move from their by-then-uninhabitable homes along the coasts. Cities grappling with a flood of new climate migrants will face financial and political struggles. *Story.*

Along similar cheerful lines, *The Atlantic* magazine argues that a warming planet is also destroying global physical infrastructure systems and reports that the eventual costs may border on \$50 trillion. Writing from the ashes of her California neighborhood, author Annie Lowrey says: "Climate hell is here. We cannot stand it. And we cannot afford it either." *Opinion.*

A lawsuit in **Hays County**, which alleges that county judge Reuben Becerra improperly took payments for services he did not perform, has highlighted strange Texas laws that allow county officials to act as magistrates for certain courts - but with few oversight or accountability mechanisms. *Story.*

Like Texas, Nevada has for years dedicated all fuel taxes and auto-related fees toward building more roads. Until now. In a move to address both urban sprawl and environmental issues, a key state committee has proposed a constitutional amendment that would expand the use of those revenues to include 'other transportation infrastructure.' Labor unions and highway advocacy groups are not happy about it. *Story.*

For the last 20 years **San Antonio's** Howard W. Peak Greenway Trail System drew on 1/8-of-a-cent sales tax to create linear parks, accessible hike and bike trails along many of the city's waterways. But after the smoke cleared last week on deals to fund watershed protection and a new workforce development program geared to COVID recovery - but not yet the trails program - some parks advocates say they're feeling left out. *Story.*

The Texas Transportation Commission meets this Thursday (9/24) at 10:00 am to hear a report on the Gulf Inter-coastal Waterway, a required airing of issues surrounding TxDOT's role in maintenance of the cargo-bearing waterway in anticipation of the next Legislative session (2021). [Agenda](#). [Livestream](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

The head of high-flying electric truck maker Nikola, a partner with General Motors and a recent stock market favorite, has resigned after being accused by an investment fund of making false claims about the company's technologies - and just two weeks after signing a \$2 billion deal with the **Detroit** carmaker. [Story](#).

In a story datelined out of Energy City itself, **Houston**, a seasoned veteran observer of the petroleum industry notes that while European oil companies are pouring investment dollars into new energy technologies like solar and wind, their US counterparts are doubling down on their traditional sources, oil and coal. The trends highlight differing perceptions about the significance and political impact of climate change. [Story](#).

With a new Texas Restaurant Association survey predicting that half of the state's restaurants could be out of business within the next six months due to the COVID pandemic's economic downturn ([here](#)), and Washington deadlocked on new stimulus measures, **Austin** last week (9/17) ordered the city manager to find a funding source and procedures to financially support service industry stalwarts (bars, restaurants, music venues). [Story](#).

British Petroleum became the first major oil company to declare that the growth in oil demand is over and will not return to pre-pandemic levels. BP's influential **Energy Outlook** report says oil demand growth will fall 50-80% by 2050, driven by COVID-related behavior changes and increasing efficiency of electric ground transportation. [Details](#).

Thought of the Week

"The Earth is what we all have in common."

— Wendell Berry

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