



Monday Morning Report

November 16, 2020

INTERNAL

The Executive Committee of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council meets *this* Wednesday, November 18, 2:00 pm by Zoom teleconference. Presentations will include data from the **Austin**-Ford Motor Company collaboration on self-driving and electric vehicles, and an update from Capital Metro on pandemic-impacted ridership and Project Connect. For dial-in data, contact council@thecorridor.org. For a draft agenda, click [here](#).

COVID-19 UPDATE: Global cases rose by one million in the last week alone to 54,506,165 with 1,319,098 deaths. After 13 straight days with new cases exceeding 100,000, infections in the United States topped 11 million for the first time this morning, with 246,236 fatalities. ([Johns Hopkins](#)) As of last night (11/15), Texas was reporting 1,020,721 cases with 19,554 deaths, including in **Bexar County**: 58,596 cases with 1,451 deaths (although localized reports were higher, see [here](#)); **Guadalupe County**: 4,075 cases with 83 deaths; **Comal County**: 3,000 cases with 108 deaths; **Hays County**: 6,616 cases with 76 deaths (adjusted); **Travis County**: 34,504 cases with 458 deaths; and **Williamson County**: 10,410 cases with 160 deaths. ([TDHHS](#))

COVID-19 Hospitalization Data: Hospitalizations appear to be rising over the last few days in **Austin** and **San Antonio**, although from relatively low levels compared to other areas of the state. Analyst Bill King's data report can be found [here](#).

COVID-19, As Others See Us: The **Houston** bureau chief for the **Los Angeles Times** surveys Texas - the first state to surpass one million new cases last week - and our response to the coronavirus pandemic, concluding that the most dangerous element in the trying times ahead will be 'quarantine fatigue.' [Story](#).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Virtual public meetings began this week (11/12 thru 12/12) for the IH-35 Capital Express project to rebuild the Interstate through downtown **Austin**. TxDOT has proposed three potential designs for an effort that would add two non-tolled High Occupancy Vehicle lanes in each direction and eliminate the long-problematic upper deck. One design places the HOV lanes underground. The \$4.9 billion first phase addresses an 8-mile section from US 290 East to State Highway 71/Ben White Blvd. Designs, timetables, and more [here](#). [More](#).

The 500-meter test run last week of a hyperloop system near **Las Vegas** had some enthusiasts giddy about the prospects of a new high-speed technology whisking passengers around at 600 miles-per-hour. Virgin Hyperloop became the first company to successfully transport two employees in a pod levitated by magnets within a vacuum tube at 107 mph for 6.25 seconds. Backers expect the technology to be commercialized within 10 years. [Story](#). But others believe hyperloop technology is just a more expensive, clunkier version of high-speed trains. [Opinion](#).

Capital Metro president Randy Clarke and **Austin** assistant city manager Gina Fiandaca announced their next steps to further the \$7-plus billion Project Connect initiative: first, create the Austin Transit Partnership, which will manage the effort; next, recruit professionals to manage technical elements of

delivery, 'such as NEPA, design, engineering, permitting, utilities, and integration into the Capital Metro transit system.' [Memo](#).

McKinsey & Company's latest 'Voices On Infrastructure' series installment says that the entire infrastructure delivery ecosystem needs to change because profits in the construction industry have been lower than the cost of capital, a situation that can't improve as long the sector's 0.5% annual productivity growth continues - as it has for decades. The multi-story issue discusses 'agile capital' and alternative funding models for the future. [Details](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

COVID-19 has caused widespread unemployment and business failures, but it has also sparked a surprising upsurge in new business creation: Census Bureau data shows business applications for new employee identification numbers have risen in recent months. **San Antonio's Express-News** reveals why. [Story](#).

Austin is reviving one of the trademark programs of the Depression-Era New Deal, putting \$2 million into an effort to create a Civilian Conservation Corp that will employ people financially effected by COVID-19 in conservation jobs cleaning up parks and trails. [Story](#).

In a model that may provide temporary relief for the hard-hit international airline business, United Airlines has announced a new twist this week for their **New York to London** service: rapid testing every passenger and employee for COVID-19, for free, before they board their flights. [Details](#).

China signed a trade agreement with 14 other Asian nations yesterday (11/15), cementing **Beijing's** economic dominance in the region and a direct result of **Washington's** uncertain leadership following withdrawal by the Trump administration from the Trans-Pacific Partnership four years ago. Just in terms of population size, it is the largest such trade deal ever successfully negotiated. [Story](#).

Austin billionaire and philanthropist Robert F. Smith, who made a name for himself by paying off an entire college graduating class's student debt and was widely regarded as the nation's richest black entrepreneur, has a new title: 'cooperating witness,' in the largest tax-avoidance scheme in American history, according to **The Washington Post** this weekend. [Details](#).

Later *this* week (Friday (11/20) 10:30-11:30 am) the **Austin** Chamber of Commerce will host a livestreamed webinar entitled '*The Future of Air Travel 2021 and Beyond*' with leadership executives from various airlines and Bergstrom International Airport. [Details](#).

The **Rivard Report** says the multi-year, \$450 million partnership between **San Antonio** and the state of Texas to redevelop Alamo Plaza is an 'inconvenient marriage' that is 'on the rocks' because of interference from 'the state's biggest homewrecker, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick.' A **Fort Worth** philanthropist, the project's largest fundraiser, is even more blunt, calling the Alamo Master Plan 'dead.' Pass the popcorn. [Opinion](#).

Thought of the Week

"A man has to live with himself, and he should see to it that he always has good company."

— Charles Evans Hughes

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