



## Monday Morning Report

July 5, 2022

July 4<sup>th</sup> Holiday Edition

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### INTERNAL

The next meeting of the **Austin-San Antonio** Corridor Council Executive Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, July 20 at 2 PM by videoconference. To add an item to the agenda, contact [council@thecorridor.org](mailto:council@thecorridor.org).

**COVID-19 UPDATE:** Global cases this morning are at 550.1 million with 6,340,348 million deaths. US cases are at 87,886,589, with 1,017,915 deaths (7/5/22) ([Johns Hopkins](#)). As of Friday, July 1, Texas reported 5,819,509 confirmed cases with 87,147 deaths, including in **Bexar County:** 498,697 cases with 6,176 deaths; **Guadalupe County:** 27,410 cases, with 401 deaths; **Comal County:** 23,283 cases, with 554 deaths; **Hays County:** 55,416 cases, still with 435 deaths; **Travis County:** 221,751 cases, still with 1,744 deaths; and **Williamson County:** 116,884 cases with 883 deaths (7/1/22). ([TDHHS](#)). *Current regional hospitalization-rate data is found [here](#).*

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### INFRASTRUCTURE

Virginia Railway Express will contribute \$195 million in bond funds to a \$3.7 billion state-led deal to acquire 350 miles of CSX Railroad tracks and right-of-way, thus enabling hourly Amtrak commuter service between **Richmond** and **Washington DC**. The funds go to Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, managing the project. [Story](#).

In a program that could be ideal for **Austin's** ambitions to reconnect communities divided by Interstate 35, US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg launched a \$1 billion initiative last week to link cities and neighborhoods racially segregated or divided by road projects, with program elements that specifically include caps built on top of highways featuring green spaces and rapid bus lanes. [Story](#).

Just 28% of \$208 billion from the first funding tranche for state and local fiscal pandemic federal recovery funds had been obligated thru December 2021, according to a **Chicago** academic study, raising questions about how rapidly the total \$350 billion funding for the program can be deployed. Federal spending rules weren't finalized until April 2022, which might explain the slow roll out, researchers said. Lots of reporting required, too. [Details](#).

A 'perfect storm' of bad energy/environmental news (Ukraine, US Supreme Court limiting action on coal emissions, flawed state grid policies) has consumers reeling and policymakers conflicted. Increased global coal use in India and China has canceled the impact of US emissions reductions ([here](#)). Energy demand is soaring, but the best alternative to coal - nuclear - can't come online fast enough ([here](#)). And sticker shock has hit **San Antonio** energy consumers hard ([here](#)). 'Think globally, pay locally?'

The **San Antonio Express-News** provided an update over the weekend on the driverless trucks being tested on **Dallas** to **Houston** routes prior to a wider deployment to at least 20 autonomous trucks in

Texas next year. The story tracks other corporate developments in autonomous trucking as a solution to an estimated 100,000- driver US shortage. [Story](#).

Newly-confirmed chief of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in **Washington**, Dr. Steven Cliff, says it's time for closer scrutiny and new regulations for autonomous, self-driving technologies such as Tesla's Autopilot. There are currently no federal regulations on these systems, but the new administrator says that - based upon developing research and science - they are coming. [Story](#).

The **New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung**, citing state data, reports that one in every four traffic fatalities in Texas involved a drunk driver last year. And the state reported 25,261 overall drunk driving-related crashes in 2021, up 9% from the previous year. [Story](#).

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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (and Other News)

The '2022 Report on the State of Local News' by Northwestern University says two newspapers a week are disappearing from local media markets and that a fifth of the US population now live in 'news deserts.' They note: "In communities without a credible source of local news, voter participation declines, corruption in government and business increases, and local residents end up paying more in taxes and at checkout." [Report](#).

Here's some good news for another dry, hot week: University of Texas at **Austin** researchers have developed a gel coating that draws fresh water from the atmosphere even at humidity rates of as low as 15%. The process was created for Defense Department to provide drinking water to soldiers in desert conditions. [Story](#).

Dr. Kelly Damphousse, former chancellor of Arkansas State University, begins this week as the new president of Texas State University in **San Marcos**, replacing Dr. Denise Trauth, who stepped down in June. For more on Dr. Damphousse (pronounced DAM-fiss), go [here](#). Dr. Trauth's farewell statement can be found [here](#).

Tesla filed paperwork with **Austin** last week to add a 500,000 sq.ft. expansion building to its headquarters manufacturing 'Gigafactory,' apparently intending to develop two new auto assembly lines at the site. [Story](#). The Rocket Man himself, meanwhile, was in **Vatican City** meeting with Pope Francis. *No kidding.* [Photo](#).

## Thought of the Week

*"Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."*

- John F. Kennedy

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