

Dear Mr. Williams, Mr. Abrego, Mr. Ferguson, and Mrs. Ashley-Nguyen,

I-35 as it stands now represents the physical manifestation of racially and economically segregationist policies of the past. When first built in the 1950s, it physically disconnected the traditionally Black and Latino neighborhoods of East Austin from the higher opportunities found in communities west of the highway. Furthermore, the noise, pollution, and reduced safety associated with the highway have reduced the quality of life for neighbors, depressed property values and tax revenue along the corridor, and discouraged investment and redevelopment in the area.

I often hear concerns from constituents regarding I-35 expansion when I attend neighborhood meetings and our office hosts events. Neighbors are worried about their homes, communities, and livelihood. They're worried about their safety crossing the corridor and feeling further divided from their city. There are many apprehensions District 9 feels, but I can not ignore the critical community resources majorly impacted by the plans of this project.

Escuelita del Alma is an early childhood daycare serving residents in Cherrywood and the surrounding area that will be displaced by the current I-35 expansion plans TxDOT has proposed. The families in the immediate vicinity will no longer have an accessible childcare option that has long been viewed as a community staple. It is inexcusable to remove cornerstone resources in communities without adequate plans to alleviate displacement by providing funds and comparable locations for these resources to relocate. We, as public servants, can stop the pain and suffering in our community or be the reason that current and future generations suffer.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to alleviate the mistakes of the past and build a better future for our community. The final proposal put forward by TxDOT should mirror the collective values and vision of Austin residents as reflected in our Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, our Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, our Vision Zero Plan, our Climate Equity Plan, and our community's overwhelming desire for racial reconciliation.

I appreciate that TxDOT has, throughout this process, collected and incorporated community feedback to bring forward improved iterations of the plan. However, at this time, I do not support the project as proposed. I suggest the following revisions given that we only have one shot at getting this city-defining project right:

- TxDOT must engage in more robust community engagement and revisions based on community feedback on the design. While TxDOT staff have improved the design, many questions, concerns, and suggestions to improve the project remain.
- More frequent and improved crossings for all road users, especially pedestrians and bicyclists. Currently, proposed crossings are too infrequent. Pedestrian/bicyclist designs are circuitous and unsafe with multiple switchbacks, tunnels, and intersections to finally cross the corridor. The current proposal must be revised for Airport, Woodland, and 51st Street crossings. New crossings could be added at:

- Philomena Street, with additional stitch to carry across the greenbelt;
- Mariposa Street; and
- St. Edwards Drive.
- Minimize displacement as much as possible and ensure displaced businesses, community facilities, and residents are effectively compensated to relocate within 1 mile of their current location if they so choose.
- Revise the Draft Environmental Impact Statement to analyze harmful Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and nitrogen oxide emissions. Minimize added main lane and frontage road capacity, and deploy air monitors along the North, Central, and South Corridors. The Capital Express North, Central, and South Projects will undermine the specific climate goals laid out by the Climate Equity Plan with the additional traffic generated due to added roadway capacity.
- Commit to prioritizing safety instead of speed for all road users, including walking, biking, and rolling in assistive devices. Both the City of Austin and TxDOT share a goal to eliminate traffic fatalities on their respective roadways. Yet the I-35 corridor currently accounts for roughly 25% of all traffic fatalities within the City of Austin. According to City of Austin Vision Zero crash statistics from 2016-2021 on the I-35 corridor, more than 40 drivers were killed and over 350 seriously injured in vehicle crashes on I-35 main lanes or frontage roads. Additionally, over 40 pedestrians and bicyclists were killed trying to cross I-35 in Austin, and more than 20 were seriously injured in the same timeframe.
  - Design all surface level elements of this corridor, including frontage roads, bridges, shared use paths, and crossings to NACTO standards and in compliance with the City of Austin Transportation Criteria Manual (TCM).

I look forward to collaborating with the community and TxDOT on further design iterations for the I-35 corridor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Zo', is positioned below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Council Member Zohaib “Zo” Qadri, Austin City Council District 9