

Public and Agency Virtual Scoping Meeting #1 Comment Themes and Responses

The following themes are the primary topics expressed by the public and agencies in comments submitted to TxDOT Nov. 12 through Dec. 31, 2020 as part of virtual scoping meeting #1. The comment themes, listed in alphabetical order, represent the most frequently mentioned subjects and are not intended to summarize all feedback given by project stakeholders during the official meeting comment period. All comments received have been documented and are being considered by the project team.

For more information about virtual scoping meeting #1 and current or future input opportunities, visit My35CapEx.com.

Comment Themes	Response
1	<p>Air Quality: Assess air quality as part of public health analysis.</p>
2	<p>Build Alternatives: Include in the build alternatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban Land Institute’s I-35 recommendations • Reconnect Austin proposal • Rethink35 proposal <p>Among additional alternatives being considered, ensure deck plazas, or caps, over sections of the lowered highway are included.</p>

I-35 CAPITAL EXPRESS CENTRAL



Comment Themes		Response
3	Capacity: Add capacity, including people-carrying and multimodal capacity.	All three build alternatives propose to add capacity for vehicles, transit, pedestrians, bicyclists and other modes by adding two high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) managed lanes and bicycle and pedestrian paths in each direction from US 290 East to SH 71/Ben White Boulevard. The HOV lanes would be reserved for use by carpools, vanpools, transit vehicles and emergency responders. TxDOT is also evaluating access-controlled frontage roads and an intersection bypass lane system in downtown Austin. These design options would improve operations by allowing vehicles to bypass frontage road intersection signals in certain areas. Additionally, the alternatives propose to add a frontage road lane, where feasible. Improving overall operations benefits transit, which provides enhanced people-carrying capacity.
4	Climate Change: Assess climate change and greenhouse gases.	TxDOT has conducted a greenhouse gas (GHG) analysis for the statewide on-road transportation system and associated motor vehicle emissions and published the Statewide On-Road Greenhouse Gas Emissions Analysis and Climate Change Assessment technical report. This report also discloses how TxDOT is responding to a changing climate, and strategies that reduce on-road GHG emissions. A brief summary of this report will be incorporated in the Environmental Impact Statement.
5	Comment Period: Provide a 60- to 90-day comment period.	<p>While the formal comment period for the Public Scoping Meeting ended on December 31, 2020, TxDOT welcomes feedback at any time. TxDOT is hosting a second Public Scoping Meeting from March 11 through April 9, 2021. The documentation of feedback will continue throughout the development of the project.</p> <p>TxDOT is developing a Community Working Group open to the public beginning in spring 2021 to address relevant topics based on community feedback.</p> <p>TxDOT will also host an open house later in 2021.</p>
6	Community Engagement: Conduct enhanced outreach by providing more details of the proposed designs and ensure that Austin’s communities of color are included in outreach.	<p>TxDOT is making extensive efforts to reach out to vulnerable populations through a variety of notifications about public input opportunities. Since late 2019, TxDOT has met with organizations and agencies regarding the I-35 Capital Express Program and continues to meet with stakeholders and community groups.</p> <p>TxDOT will be conducting outreach and engagement as part of the upcoming Community Impacts Assessment, in addition to hosting a public open house later this year. Representative organizations and populations to be further engaged as part of the analysis include but are not limited to: people of color, minority populations, low-income populations, people with limited English</p>

I-35 CAPITAL EXPRESS CENTRAL



Comment Themes		Response
		<p>proficiency, elderly populations, people with disabilities and children.</p> <p>TxDOT is developing a Community Working Group open to the public beginning in spring 2021 to address relevant topics based on community feedback.</p> <p>If your civic or neighborhood organization would like to invite TxDOT attend and present at your meeting, call (512) 832-7357 or email My35CapEx@txdot.gov.</p>
7	Construction Impacts: Evaluate construction impacts and mitigation strategies.	Impacts from construction, such as noise and vibration, impacts to travel patterns, air quality and any mitigation strategies will be evaluated as part of the environmental process and included in the Environmental Impact Statement. A detailed traffic control plan will be developed prior to construction to minimize traffic disruption and outline how access will be maintained during construction.
8	Context-Sensitive Solutions: Include context-sensitive design into the project.	In 2017, TxDOT published <i>Mobility35 Aesthetic Guidelines</i> to identify aesthetic concepts and solutions along the I-35 corridor from Georgetown to San Marcos. The guidelines identify a Capitol-themed concept as the preferred aesthetic treatment for the I-35 Capital Express Program area, based on public input and feedback from a cross-organizational Aesthetics Working Group .
9	Design Speed: Lower design speed and posted speeds.	TxDOT is evaluating the design guidance and will be hosting a workshop as part of the Community Working Group to discuss design speeds with the public. TxDOT must comply with federal and state standards for highway design, including TxDOT's Roadway Design Manual, the AASHTO Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets and the Texas Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Posted speeds are determined once construction is complete.
10	Direct Transit Connections: Explore connecting the managed lanes to planned transit facilities, including the intersections at Riverside Drive and Dean Keeton Street.	Design options include direct transit access considerations at Riverside Drive and Dean Keeton Street. TxDOT is coordinating with CapMetro and the City of Austin and will continue to work with the agency to facilitate transit access. Direct access will be incorporated if funding is provided by others.
11	Equity: Consider past, present and potential future equity impacts through an equity impact assessment.	The Community Impacts Assessment, which will begin spring 2021, will explore and evaluate the needs of adjacent communities and document the existing and projected social environment with and without the proposed action. The assessment will include an analysis of mobility, safety, access to employment, relocation, isolation and other community issues. As

I-35 CAPITAL EXPRESS CENTRAL



Comment Themes	Response
	<p>part of this assessment, TxDOT will focus on determining the potential impacts to people of color, minority and low-income populations those with limited English proficiency, elderly populations, people with disabilities and children. Among the elements to be analyzed are displacements and relocations, the availability of affordable housing, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements as connections between the east and west sides of I-35. Additionally, the Environmental Impact Statement will evaluate the project as well as past, present and future actions by TxDOT and others.</p>
12	<p>Railroad, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Crossings: Separate the railroad and bicycle and pedestrian facilities from the frontage roads at Fourth Street and CapMetro railroad locations.</p> <p>TxDOT is studying the current rail crossing at Fourth Street. Options for a grade-separated frontage road at this location are being evaluated.</p>
13	<p>Health: Evaluate health impacts, especially for adjacent low-income communities, through a health impacts assessment that includes vehicle-related deaths and injuries, air quality, noise and climate change, among other considerations.</p> <p>TxDOT is undertaking the most rigorous level of environmental analysis with the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the I-35 Capital Express Central project. The studies conducted as part of the EIS process that relate to human health impacts include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air quality • Community impacts, including changes in access for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians; impacts to community facilities, such as shopping areas, community centers, childcare, healthcare and emergency response; and impacts to environmental justice populations, including people of color, minority populations, low-income populations and those with limited English proficiency • Hazardous materials within the corridor • Safety of the existing facility and design changes to improve safety of the facility for the traveling public, including drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians • Traffic noise <p>TxDOT will measure and evaluate existing traffic noise levels and predicted noise levels for each Build Alternative. The potential for noise barrier abatement will also be evaluated for sensitive areas and structures, including residential housing, medical facilities and other facilities per Federal Highway Administration guidance.</p> <p>More information on the methods used to conduct these studies can be found in TxDOT's Environmental Compliance Toolkits.</p>

I-35 CAPITAL EXPRESS CENTRAL



Comment Themes		Response
14	Homelessness: Provide support for people experiencing homelessness.	<p>TxDOT funding is designated for the mobility and the safety of the traveling public. Since 2017, TxDOT's <i>Be Safe Be Seen</i> Pedestrian Safety Initiative has worked to address pedestrian injuries and fatalities occurring along I-35 in high-traffic pedestrian areas and construction zones. This proactive outreach effort focuses on some of the most vulnerable populations, including students, mature adults and those experiencing homelessness. Through the program, TxDOT shares safe pedestrian behaviors and provides ways for pedestrians to <i>Be Safe and Be Seen</i> on Austin roadways.</p> <p>As part of the <i>Be Safe Be Seen</i> program, TxDOT has been convening service providers, agencies and elected leaders for four years through the agency's Initiative to Address Homelessness. The goals of the initiative are to share information on upcoming construction activities and community resources, to assess specific needs for assisting individuals experiencing homelessness, and to identify potential opportunities for temporary and permanent shelter or housing alternatives. Additionally, in 2019, TxDOT made five acres of land available in southeast Austin to be used for Camp Esperanza, a homeless encampment.</p> <p>Outreach for the I-35 Capital Express Central environmental analysis has also included TxDOT's Initiative to Address Homelessness network. TxDOT will also conduct focused engagement of agencies and nonprofit providers supporting people experiencing homelessness through additional outreach as part of the Environmental Impact Statement.</p>
15	Intersection Bypass Lane System: Construct collector-distributor system with direct unsignalized access from Austin streets to the mainlanes and managed lanes.	<p>As one of four design options, TxDOT is evaluating a downtown bypass system, which would include lowered intersection bypass lanes at the same level as the mainlanes and managed lanes. An intersection bypass lane is a dedicated lane for traffic exiting the mainlanes or traveling on the frontage road to bypass a signalized intersection. In another design option, TxDOT is also evaluating access-controlled frontage roads, which are similar to intersection bypass lanes but with potential underpass exits to cross streets, where feasible.</p>
16	Impacts: Mitigate environmental and community impacts.	<p>The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is a balanced transportation decision-making approach that assesses any potential project impacts on the human and natural environment taking the public's need for safe and efficient transportation into account. The technical analyses included in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will include a comprehensive assessment of potential project-related effects on a broad range of resources. In accordance with NEPA, the EIS will</p>

I-35 CAPITAL EXPRESS CENTRAL



Comment Themes		Response
		evaluate and determine the impacts that could result from implementation of the proposed project and will include measures taken to avoid and minimize any adverse impacts. For any adverse community impacts that could not be avoided or minimized, mitigation will be considered. More information can be found in Section 4.4 of TxDOT's Environmental Handbook for Community Impacts, Environmental Justice, Limited English Proficiency, and Title VI Compliance .
17	Local Plans: Align with local plans, including the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, City of Austin Vision Zero goals, Austin's Climate Equity Plan, adopted neighborhood plans adjacent to the I-35 corridor, among others.	TxDOT is coordinating with the City of Austin and other local agencies on aligning with plans, where feasible and appropriate, while conforming with state and federal requirements. TxDOT is complying with the City of Austin's current Bicycle Master Plan and supporting several other plans, either partially or in full, including the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, City of Austin Vision Zero goals, Austin's Climate Equity Plan, adopted neighborhood plans adjacent to the I-35 corridor and others.
18	Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements: Improve pedestrian and bicyclist accommodations along and across I-35 as well as additional east-west crossings.	<p>See response to comment theme 17.</p> <p>Continuous bicycle and pedestrian paths in both directions are included in all build alternatives. TxDOT is evaluating multimodal enhancements to east-west crossings, including wider and more accessible cross-streets at multiple locations. TxDOT is also coordinating with the City of Austin to tie into the city street network as well as the Butler Hike and Bike Trail at Lady Bird Lake for continuity of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.</p> <p>Additional east-west crossings are being evaluated based on the distance between existing crossings and available right-of-way. TxDOT is evaluating multimodal enhancements to east-west crossings, including the feasibility of a pedestrian bridge between 51st street and US 290 East area.</p>
19	<p>Purpose and Need: Include in the Purpose and Need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improving safety ● Crash data ● Bicycle and pedestrian data ● Reducing vehicle miles traveled ● Community priorities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Addressing impacts of the original I-35 construction ○ Safe local access 	<p>Federal regulations require that the purpose and need statement "briefly specify the underlying purpose and need to which the agency is responding in proposing the alternatives including the proposed action." TxDOT has revised the purpose and need statement based on community feedback to further emphasize safety; improving east-west connectivity across I-35; and addressing travel demand by prioritizing the movement of people, goods and services through and across the corridor. The Purpose and Need Technical Report includes crash data, including safety related to bicyclists and pedestrians.</p> <p>TxDOT will coordinate with partner agencies to share comments that are outside of TxDOT's jurisdiction.</p>

I-35 CAPITAL EXPRESS CENTRAL



Comment Themes		Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community engagement ○ Minimizing the roadway footprint ○ Mitigating environmental and community impacts 	<p>Many of the community priorities brought forward in the comments from Public Scoping Meeting #1 are part of the overall Mobility35 Program goals (http://www.my35.org/capital-goals-objectives.htm) and will be considered during the development of the Environmental Impact Statement.</p>
20	Ramping: Evaluate ramping scenarios.	TxDOT is considering multiple ramping configuration scenarios as well as access needs and operational considerations throughout the project corridor.
21	Right of Way: Minimize the I-35 footprint.	Minimizing the necessary amount of right of way is one of the major objectives of TxDOT's Mobility35 Program, which includes the I-35 Capital Express Central project.
22	Roadway Elevation: Do not elevate any sections of the roadway.	All build alternatives include removing the upper decks between Airport Boulevard and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. Build Alternative 3 proposes an overpass at Airport Boulevard to accommodate the CapMetro Red Line as well as an overpass at Woodland Avenue due to geometric constraints. These overpasses would be at the same height as the existing roadway. To maximize operational efficiency, the flyovers at I-35 and US 290 East would be elevated to provide a direct connection to the managed lanes.
23	Transportation Demand Management/Intelligent Transportation Systems/Connective Vehicles: Consider transportation demand management, intelligent transportation systems and connective vehicles.	Transportation demand management and intelligent transportation systems are being evaluated as part of project development. One of the purposes of the project is to address demand by prioritizing the movement of people, goods and services through and across the corridor. Managed lanes efficiently use the available roadway to improve reliable operations for transit, carpools and vanpools, and serves as a transportation demand management strategy that increases the traffic-carrying capability of the I-35 corridor. These lanes also provide the potential opportunity for future connected and automated vehicle use.
24	Traffic Demand: Reevaluate traffic demand models using alternate data.	Traffic forecasting methodology will follow Federal Highway Administration standards and procedures. Project traffic forecasts are based on a variety of data sources, including historical traffic counts, Texas Department of Transportation forecasts, and the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization travel demand model. Together, these sources incorporate long-range and recent traffic volume trends, regional population and employment forecasts and future land-use types and locations to generate future roadway volumes.

I-35 CAPITAL EXPRESS CENTRAL



Comment Themes		Response
25	Toll Alternative: Use tolls on managed lanes.	The current Unified Transportation Program (UTP) is a 10-year plan to guide transportation project development. This project is currently fully funded in the 2021 UTP (\$4.9 billion). Tolling is not currently a funding option and tolled lanes are not currently under consideration.
26	Transit Operations: Optimize transit operations by including direct transit access and designating one of the managed lanes for transit only.	TxDOT is collaborating with CapMetro to study feasibility of direct transit access provided funding is identified by others. Transit would have access to the managed lanes in the proposed build alternatives, which could improve transit operations.
27	Trucks: Re-route trucks or all through-traffic to SH 130 or other corridors.	<p>Studies conducted by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute found that rerouting truck traffic from I-35 to SH 130 would have limited impact on I-35 congestion. Two major reasons for this are: 1) most of the truck traffic has either an origin or destination near the I-35 corridor; and 2) truck drivers passing through on the way to their destination generally find I-35 to be the most efficient route.</p> <p>The report recommended a hybrid approach to solving congestion on I-35 that included additional capacity, less commuters (with more working from home), the use of technology to reduce trips, a shift toward off-peak periods and increased use of alternative modes of transportation.</p>
28	Tunnel: Bury or tunnel I-35.	Build Alternative 1 includes some tunneled sections for the managed lanes. All build alternatives would lower the mainlanes and managed lanes below the frontage roads and cross streets through downtown.