



Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council

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September 9, 2025

Mayor Kirk Watson
City of Austin
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767

Dear Mayor Watson,

As always, we appreciate the ongoing partnership between the city of Austin and the Greater Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council and look forward to working with you and the city staff during the coming year to improve long-term regional infrastructure development, ensure economic prosperity, and encourage cooperation among regional jurisdictions to save tax dollars.

We are enclosing summaries of the Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council's primary activities thus far in 2025 and our prospective workplan and suggested projects for 2026.

During the past year the Corridor Council continued to work with the State Legislature and the Texas Department of Transportation to improve transportation options available to residents of the Corridor, in particular, high capacity transit among Austin-San Antonio and the other Texas Triangle Cities. Those efforts included supporting two studies currently underway at TxDOT concerning improved speeds, reliability, and frequency of service for the Texas Eagle and the potential use of existing freight rail networks and/or highway rights of way for passenger rail services. We believe the successful implementation of passenger rail would be transformational for both transportation and economic development in the Corridor.

We've also been preparing for the wide deployment of autonomous trucking on Texas highways, which, as you know has already begun and is now being regulated under Senate Bill 2807. Because of the safety, liability, and enforcement issues surrounding this new development – and because state law limits the regulatory authority of local jurisdictions – we've organized an upcoming workshop for law enforcement, first-responders, and stakeholders to help insure a smooth implementation of the new statute locally.

In addition to transit and transportation activities, we've also worked toward electric fleet transitions, affordable workforce housing, collaborative emergency planning, and continuing to inform members about conserving and expanding regional water resources. These functions are addressed in the attached summaries, but please let us know of any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

John Thomaides, Chairman
Former Mayor of San Marcos

Ross Milloy, President
The Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council



The Austin–San Antonio Corridor Council
(Background)

The Greater Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council is a public/private, non-profit, non-partisan partnership founded in 1984 to promote long-term infrastructure development, economic development and regional cooperation. Members include cities, counties, political jurisdictions, universities, public authorities, and businesses along Interstate 35 from San Antonio to Georgetown. The Council serves as a safe harbor forum for discussion, research, advocacy, and action on issues of regional significance.

The Corridor Council's Executive Committee is evenly divided between elected officials and private sector representatives preparing to meet this region's unprecedented growth with vision, technical expertise, and the power of cooperative planning.

Current Project Highlights:

- Preparing jurisdictions for local impacts of autonomous trucking on Texas highways
- Proposing congestion mitigation measures during \$11 billion in construction along IH-35
- Coordinating efforts to bring passenger rail services to Austin-San Antonio
- Pursuing other high-capacity transit options between San Antonio/Austin/Dallas
- Promoting continuous High Occupancy Vehicle lanes on IH-35 from Austin-San Antonio
- Funding options for IH-35 "Cut & Cap" effort, including more private sector involvement
- Exploring inter-agency emergency response capacity for Union Pacific rail line incidents
- Raising awareness of rail/road crossing safety issues/traffic blockages in the Corridor
- Developing more connector routes from IH-35 to State Highway 130
- Continuing workshop series on Autonomous and Connected Vehicles
- Expanding Workforce Housing Initiatives throughout the Corridor
- Continued role on South Central Texas Regional Compact on EV transition
- Increasing awareness/advocacy regarding climate change/limited water resources

Past Projects:

- Hosted the first regional workshops on Electric, Autonomous and Connected Vehicles
- Drafted & passed state legislation creating Lone Star Rail District and secured \$60 million to develop preliminary engineering & environmental clearances for the project
- Negotiated Memorandum of Agreement with Union Pacific Railroad for rail joint-use
- Conducted original feasibility study and led campaign to build State Highway 130 project
- Have helped to secure over \$4 billion for regional infrastructure/economic development
- Drafted legislation creating a Rail Division at the Texas Department of Transportation
- Constant advocate for improvements to Interstate 35, a key NAFTA Trade Route
- Active participation in the creation of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
- Hosted international Quatro Caminos Conferences with presidents of US and Mexico
- Testimony to Legislature and US Congress on issues of regional significance
- Leading advocate for connector routes between IH-35 and State Highway 130
- Hosted over 100 regional conferences, workshops, advocacy events, & forums
- Publish a weekly newsletter for elected officials and civic leaders in the Corridor



2025-2026 Corridor Council Projects & Workplan

In preparation for the 2027 Legislative Session, work with allied advocacy groups and statewide stakeholders during 2026 to press for Interim Charges to the Texas House and Senate Transportation Committees for a Texas Triangle Cities Intercity Passenger Rail Funding and Implementation Plan through op-eds, and direct requests to the Speaker of the House, the Lt. Governor, and the governor.

With regional and statewide allies, help to create a bi-partisan Passenger Rail Support Caucus in both the Texas House & Senate for the purpose of funding and implementing a Texas Triangle Cities Passenger Rail plan, the House caucus to perhaps be led by Representatives John Bucy (D) and Pat Curry (R).

Work with Legislative allies and local support groups to fund a state-financed independent statewide study of the cost-effectiveness of highways versus passenger rail that incorporates life-cycle costs & maintenance, capacity comparisons/energy expended, environmental benefits, and economic development benefits.

In light of the anticipated traffic disruptions created during the reconstruction of IH-35, pursue the two distinct federally-designated types of passenger rail services needed in the Corridor: intercity Austin-San Antonio passenger rail and commuter rail services connecting smaller Corridor Cities to downtown Austin and San Antonio.

Continue to seek traffic congestion mitigation strategies for IH-35 during its reconstruction, working with TxDOT to include a pause in tolling for State Highway 130, improvements and diversion tactics to parallel routes, and increased Amtrak Texas Eagle service speeds and frequencies during the reconstruction.

Monitor developments statewide in alternative water supply resources, including desalinization and evaporation generation projects, to inform local jurisdictions and increase our awareness and advocacy efforts regarding climate change impacts on the Corridor by urging conservation, innovation, and emphasis on diversification of resources.

Convene a 2026 *'Extreme Heat Event Response Workshop'* with emergency planning officials and academic experts to prepare for and address the impacts on infrastructure and endangered populations of an increasingly likely heat emergency, including mapping of potential cooling centers and other resiliency efforts.

Maintain efforts urging TxDOT to include continuous High Occupancy Vehicle and Managed Lanes on Interstate 35 between Austin and San Antonio, opening the possibility for a viable, high capacity interurban public transit service along the IH-35 Corridor.

Monitor & participate where feasible in TxDOT's two study efforts currently underway on AUS-SAT passenger rail: enhanced Amtrak Texas Eagle service and conceptual use of existing roadway right of way for a state-run high capacity transit system between Austin and San Antonio.

Work with local jurisdiction emergency planning agencies to draw increased attention and coordination on railroad/highway crossings safety issues, traffic-blockages, and hazardous materials movements, including the possibility of a major fire/spill event and a table-top exercise for first-responders.

Prepare a follow-up workshop to the Corridor Council's 2025 '*Autonomous Trucking Preparedness Event*' to monitor progress on the successful implementation of state and local response to self-driving trucks on Texas highways, with particular emphasis on law enforcement and first-responders.



2025 Illustrative Activity Highlights

Initiated two-session strategy on intercity passenger rail workplan for 2025 State Legislative Session, engaging Hahn Public for public involvement campaign including creation of rail benefits brochure, opinion editorials, email/text action alerts to advocacy groups, newsletters.

Active participation in Travis/Bexar County Statewide Passenger Rail Advisory Committee, including producing series of action memos for leadership on alternative rail implementation strategies, funding, federal & state options, and an Austin-San Antonio rail trip demonstration.

Responding to state legislation effective in September 2025, organized Autonomous Trucking Workshop, *“Senate Bill 2807: From Statute To The Streets”* for a projected 100 first responders, policymakers, law enforcement, and local jurisdictions with bill authors, academics, and autonomous trucking industry representatives.

After years of advocacy efforts at the federal level with regional partners, helped to successfully overturn regulatory restrictions to allow non-stop flight service from San Antonio International Airport to Washington Reagan National Airport; inaugural flights began in March 2025.

Worked with TxDOT Rail Division to transfer preliminary engineering, ridership, economic impact data, station development, and feasibility studies to support TxDOT Chairman Bruce Bugg’s working group on Austin-San Antonio Passenger Rail, assisting analysis of enhanced Texas Eagle service and study of existing highway corridors for potential rail rights of way.

As part of a program to develop traffic congestion mitigation measures during the reconstruction of Interstate 35 between Austin-San Antonio, actively supported state legislation creating new highway connections between IH-35 and State Highway 130 (HB 2876) and urged Austin TxDOT District Engineer to study reducing tolls on SH 130, expedited Amtrak service.

Submitted multiple written comments during public involvement process advocating for continuous High Occupancy Vehicle lanes as part of IH-35 reconstruction between Austin and San Antonio – thus providing for a potential public, viable interurban bus service in the Corridor.

Successfully supported state legislation creating a Freight Railroad Crossings Improvement Fund (Senate Bill 1555) to eventually finance grade-separations of highway/rail crossings (of which there are 100-plus in the Austin-San Antonio Corridor) enhancing traffic flow, safety.

Added Austin city councilmember Paige Ellis and Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Interim Executive Director Sonia Jimenez to the Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council Executive Committee.

Monitored and alerted members to the impacts on Austin-San Antonio Corridor infrastructure funding and business projects affected by regulatory changes implemented by the Trump administration to transportation funding and cutbacks initiated by the Department on Governmental Efficiency (DOGE).

Developed briefing memoranda for members on *'Policy Considerations For Local Jurisdictions On The Implementation of Autonomous Trucking In Texas,' 'Incorporating AI-Generated Transportation Priorities & Strategy Planning For The Austin-San Antonio Corridor,' 'Cost-Effectiveness of Rail Vs. Highways In The Texas Triangle,'* and *'Potential Economic Impacts Of A 25% Mexican Trade Tariff On The Austin-San Antonio Corridor.'*

Continued weekly publication of the **Monday Morning Report**, an email newsletter produced about 50 times per year for Corridor Council members and regional opinion leaders with news of internal updates from the Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council, Infrastructure and Economic Development news, and articles of interest to our regional partners.