



City of Rollingwood
403 Nixon Drive
Rollingwood, Texas 78746

July 23, 2015

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Texas Division
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Mr. Russell Zapalac, P.E.
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Mr. Mike Heiligenstein
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Mr. Ashby Johnson
Executive Director
Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
505 Barton Springs Road, Suite 700
Austin, TX 78704

Re: MoPac South Project

Dear Sirs:

On February 18, 2015, Mike Heiligenstein spoke to the City of Rollingwood (the "City") to provide a general overview of the MoPac South Project (the "Project"), and to solicit comments about its initial design. He accurately observed that the Project was in "our backyard"

and since then, both the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (“CTRMA”) and the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (“CAMPO”) have received numerous comments from Rollingwood residents, and the City voiced its concerns in various meetings about the Project.

The City sent a letter, dated April 1, 2015, detailing what it considers to be the *pros* and *cons* of the Project, and on April 15, 2015, the City of Rollingwood adopted a Resolution Opposing the Current Plans to Construct Elevated Lanes on MoPac.

CTRMA representatives have repeatedly said the initial design, which included elevated lanes, was simply “lines on a page.” CTRMA has also consistently maintained that it is open to alternative design approaches, like the alternative submitted by the City of Austin on May 18, 2015.

In its May 12, 2015 Newsletter, CTRMA said it was extending the MoPac South Environmental Study process in order to allow for additional community input and engineering analysis on the Project, based on comments and other feedback from the public. On behalf of the citizens of Rollingwood, we wish to thank you for extending the process to fully allow for increased transparency into the planning process, and additional public input.

The City of Rollingwood is a municipal corporation and political subdivision of the State of Texas. Consistent with current Federal Highway Authority (“FHWA”) and Texas Department of Transportation (“TxDOT”) National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) guidance, the City should be included in the environmental review process for the MoPac South Project as a “Participating Agency.” Under FHWA and TxDOT guidelines, the roles and responsibilities of Participating agencies include, but are not limited to:

- Participating in the NEPA process starting at the earliest possible time, especially with regard to the development of the purpose and need statement, range of alternatives, methodologies, and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives.
- Identifying, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the Project’s potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts. Participating agencies also may participate in the issue resolution process described later in this guidance.
- Providing meaningful and timely input on unresolved issues.
- Participating in the scoping process. The scoping process should be designed so that agencies whose interest in the project comes to light as a result of initial scoping activities are invited to participate and still have an opportunity for involvement.

It appears that the City has already been designated as a Participating Agency in the MoPac South NEPA planning process. The City of Rollingwood is specifically identified on CTRMA’s MoPac South website (www.MoPacsouth.com) as one of the governmental agencies participating in the MoPac South Environmental Study as part of the National Environmental Policy Act Technical Working Group (“NEPA Technical Working Group”). The members of the NEPA Technical Working Group are specifically responsible for “providing input on the: Purpose and Need for the project; screening and development of alternatives; methodologies to define impacts; and identification of the preferred alternative.” In addition, the members of the

NEPA Technical Working Group are responsible for review of both the draft and final EA before they are issued publically.

The City welcomes this formal role as a Participating Agency in the MoPac South planning process and looks forward to coordinating closely with TxDOT, CTRMA, CAMPO, the City of Austin and other federal, state, and local agencies and providing early input into the NEPA process. Although we expect that there will be a structure for coordination with the Decision Making Agency, TxDOT, the Lead Agencies, CTRMA and the TxDOT Austin District, and the other Participating Agencies, as well as ample opportunity for input from the City into the planning process, we want to take this initial opportunity to raise a few topics of importance.

Rollingwood supports a sustainable solution to improve mobility and safety.

Rollingwood has previously expressed its support for a number of aspects of the Project, including improved traffic flow on MoPac near the City, increased safety at the entrance and exit ramps to and from FM 2244 and, although not specifically described in any proposed plan, improvements to the intersection of Rollingwood Drive and Barton Springs Road/MoPac Access Road, as well as the developments of hiking and biking trails between Rollingwood and Zilker Park.

The City's April 15 Resolution expressed our opposition to CTRMA's plan to construct elevated lanes on MoPac. It was our position, and it remains our position, that the design and construction of elevated lanes on this portion of MoPac will have unacceptable and irreversible negative impacts on both the human and natural environment in an area, which is in many ways the ecological and recreational heart and soul of the greater Austin community. The negative impacts of elevated lanes across Lady Bird Lake, and directly adjacent to Zilker Park, the Austin Botanical Gardens, and the City would be felt by Austinites, and visitors, alike. However, our opposition to constructing elevated lanes should not be interpreted as opposition to the needed improvements to MoPac South that serve to increase mobility and safety, while being sustainable and sensitive to both the human and natural environment.

The City still believes that a "direct connect" to or from Cesar Chavez via elevated lanes will not improve traffic flow into or out of downtown Austin, and has not been provided with any studies that demonstrate otherwise. Unless and until Travis County and the City of Austin choose to make improvements to Cesar Chavez, a tolled "direct connect" to Cesar Chavez will only serve to increase traffic problems near Austin High School.

Rollingwood does not oppose the construction of two express lanes in each direction.

CAMPO and CTRMA have indicated their desire to construct two express lanes in each direction on MoPac South. While the City remains adamantly opposed to the construction of elevated lanes near the City of Rollingwood, we are not generally opposed to the construction of two express lanes in each direction.

Rollingwood is not currently in a position, however, to comment on the use of tolled lanes because we have only seen one proposed design. Rollingwood has not seen any plans

indicating how CAMPO or CTRMA intend to deal with the intersection between MoPac and FM 2244. As you know, the citizens of Rollingwood, and West Lake Hills, will be inconvenienced for a significant period of time during the construction of the Project, and our residents already contend with an inordinate amount of special event traffic (e.g. ACL, Blues on the Green, Trail of Lights, etc.). Despite our repeated efforts to convince TxDOT to modify the special event traffic patterns in and around Rollingwood, the traffic plans are consistently *rubber stamped* by TxDOT without regard to the impact to the residents of Rollingwood, West Lake Hills, and the rest of the traveling public. Rollingwood has previously raised these concerns with CTRMA, but we have yet to see any plans that would address these concerns.

Rollingwood supports the design of a “Signature Bridge” over Lady Bird Lake.

Austin is home to creative and talented minds who love the vibrancy of our growing economy, the natural resources, as well as the recreational opportunities that abound in our region. Our downtown skyline has become a canvas for architectural creativity and expression, which our community has worked hard to foster as we experience unprecedented growth. Lady Bird Lady and the hike and bike trail serve as an oasis for people who seek to paddle, run, hike, or bike in a natural setting. This area is iconic in its representation of the value we place the environment as well as the places that make Austin a special community.

We have serious concerns that if the Project, including the bridge, is built using the standard design-build project delivery method, the eventual construction and delivery of the bridge will prioritize a product that meets mobility needs as inexpensively and quickly as possible, without regard for aesthetics. We are certain that the greater Austin area does not want to create a roadway bridge design that fails to take into account the uniqueness of Austin, and the surrounding environment.

We have the opportunity to work together to create an architecturally significant bridge that serves the purpose of addressing the need for increased mobility and safety while being an aesthetically pleasing gateway to downtown. This approach is by no means novel. The City of Dallas recently partnered with Dallas Area Rapid Transit, Dallas County, North Texas Tollway Authority, Texas Department of Transportation - Dallas District, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to design and build not one, but three architecturally significant bridges for highway projects as a part of the Trinity River Corridor Project (see www.trinityrivercorridor.com). Our creative, vibrant, and unique community has an opportunity to work together with our partner agencies create something that is iconic and lasting. We should work together to plan for, design, and build a MoPac South Bridge spanning the lake that respects the architectural beauty, innovation, and mobility this area needs and deserves.


In conclusion, the City is very supportive of the goals of increased mobility and safety. However, the City remains firmly opposed to elevated lanes. The City is also supportive of improvements to MoPac South that will enhance traffic flow around the intersection of FM 2244 and Rollingwood Drive and looks forward to reviewing designs that take into account traffic flows during construction, anticipates future traffic increases, and improves mobility during special events. The City of Rollingwood welcomes its enhanced role as a Participating Agency in

the planning process and its future involvement on the NEPA Technical Work Group. We urge TxDOT, CTRMA, CAMPO, and our fellow Participating Agencies to take advantage of the opportunity to plan, design and build an architecturally significant bridge over Lady Bird Lake, which will over time become an iconic part of the heart and soul of our community.

Finally, we look forward to working closely with the other Participating Agencies to fully participate in the NEPA process, especially with regard to the development of the purpose and need statement, the screening and development of the range of alternatives, methodologies to define impacts, and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives, and the eventual identification of the preferred alternative for the MoPac South Project.

In that regard, please let us know as soon as possible about the next NEPA Technical Working Group meeting, which we expect will occur prior to the Open House scheduled for some time in August.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thom Farrell', written over a horizontal line.

Thom Farrell, Mayor
City of Rollingwood