



**CITY OF ROLLINGWOOD  
403 NIXON DRIVE  
ROLLINGWOOD, TX 78746**

November 27, 2017

Mr. Mike Heiligenstein  
Executive Director  
Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority  
3300 N IH-35, Suite 300  
Austin, TX 78705

Re: MoPac South Project

Dear Mr. Heiligenstein:

Thank you again for hosting our recent meeting at your offices. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss various aspects of the Mopac South Environmental Study (“MoPac South Project” and “MoPac South”) planning process and design alternatives with you and Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (“CTRMA”) staff. We also appreciate the involvement of CTRMA board chair Ray Wilkerson and CTRMA board member David Armbrust at the meeting. This letter provides comments on several of our highest priority issues related to the MoPac South planning process, alternatives analysis, and design elements.

**I. The MoPac South process and design should ensure that the Bee Cave Road (RM 2244) intersection functions efficiently and can be improved in its existing configuration in the future.**

We appreciate CTRMA staff’s willingness to think seriously and creatively about how best to improve the Bee Cave Road (RM 2244) intersection (“Bee Cave Intersection”) for both the present and the future. As you are aware, this is a vital intersection for our City, our residents, and local businesses. It represents a gateway to not only Rollingwood, but much of Western Travis County.

We understand that the Bee Cave Road intersection is not currently part of the project area and design, however, we want to inform you that the City of Rollingwood does not support the elimination of the Bee Cave Road intersection by creating a “Right-in Right-out” traffic pattern where RM 2244 meets the MoPac access road. The elimination of the Bee Cave Road intersection and shift to this “Right-in Right-out” traffic pattern would negatively impact our residents and local businesses; exacerbate existing traffic problems related to the existing location of MoPac on-ramps and off-ramps; create new traffic issues at the Rollingwood Drive/Andrew Zilker underpass; and, encourage an increase in cut-through traffic along Rollingwood Drive through the heart of our City.

Historically speaking, it appears that the traffic flows and travel times of those traveling north or south in the Austin area take priority over those traveling east or west. With a “Right-in Right-out” traffic pattern at Bee Cave Road/MoPac, those traveling east on Bee Cave Road and attempting to go north on MoPac would have a significant distance and, at certain times of the day, minutes added to their travel times as they made their way south to Barton Skyway to make a turnaround to head north.

Given that this intersection at Bee Cave Road and MoPac sees more traffic than at the Cesar Chavez/MoPac intersection, we believe that the Bee Cave Road intersection should be given highest priority. While “Right-in Right out” is an option, we do not think that it is the “right one” (pardon the pun).

Similarly, the City of Rollingwood does not support a “Diverging Diamond” or “Continuous Flow” intersection at the Bee Cave Road intersection. We think that this type of design in this location would be too confusing for drivers and would not adequately address the traffic problems now or in the future.

In addition, with respect to the Bee Cave Road/MoPac intersection, the City of Rollingwood respectfully requests that any configuration of toll road options proximate to Bee Cave Road use as little of the right of way as possible to allow for flexibility in future improvements of this vital intersection.

**II. The City of Rollingwood continues to support the development of an alternative design for MoPac South which incorporates “underpasses” similar to the underpass design utilized on the Mopac Improvement Project (“MoPac North project”) or the “cantilever approach” proposed for the I-35 Improvement Project.**

We appreciate your willingness to study the feasibility of all potential congestion relief options that are at or below grade level – specifically, an express lane underpass design between Bee Cave Road (RM 2244) and Barton Springs Road that we discussed with you at our recent meeting. This alternative would mirror the express lane underpasses that were constructed as part of the MoPac North project, which have been touted by CTRMA representatives in media reports as being both less expensive to build and having less visual and sound impact to surrounding neighborhoods than braided, elevated overpasses.

We ask that this express lane underpass option be fully designed and studied as a part of the ongoing alternative analysis for MoPac South. If the design of express lane underpasses for MoPac South will require any design waivers from TxDOT, we request that CTRMA staff meet with us to discuss it and to work cooperatively to see if there are any design changes or improvements that would reduce or eliminate the need for waivers from TxDOT. In the meantime, we request that you provide us with copies of the “as-built” design layouts and drawings for the North MoPac express lane underpasses.

Recently, in TxDOT reports to the media regarding the I-35 project, TxDOT proposes eliminating the upper deck that runs between Martin Luther King Jr. and Airport Boulevards, replacing the two free lanes on each side with added freeway lanes tucked under the frontage lanes using a cantilever approach. We ask that this cantilever design option proposed for I-35 be fully considered as a part of the ongoing alternative analysis for MoPac South.

**III. The City of Rollingwood remains opposed to the “Two Express Lanes + Elevated Ramps near Barton Skyway” alternative in its current configuration.**

We appreciate CTRMA presenting to the City during one of the recent meetings preliminary sketches of a potential adjustment to the design of the “Two Express Lanes + Elevated Ramps near Barton Skyway” (“Wishbone”) alternative.

The preliminary sketches propose reducing the elevation of the elevated ramps down to the grade of the existing main MoPac travel lanes north of the Bee Cave Road intersection, and shift the higher elevations to the south of the Bee Cave intersection. In spite of this, the City of Rollingwood continues to have serious concerns regarding the Wishbone alternative in its current configuration and in the preliminary sketches. As we indicated in previous correspondences to you, the City remains unconvinced that the Wishbone alternative with elevated ramps near Barton Skyway will improve traffic flow into or out of downtown Austin, or on MoPac.

Most importantly, it appears that the current design of the Wishbone alternative presented to the public and the preliminary sketches provided during the meeting would place the elevated braided overpasses in a configuration that would conflict with general use traffic using the northbound MoPac entrance ramp to the north of the Bee Cave intersection and the southbound MoPac exit ramp to the north of the Bee Cave intersection. Our concern is that the current placement of the elevated express lanes will only serve to exacerbate traffic issues associated with the entrance and exit ramps, rather than improving them.

We also are highly concerned that the proposed Wishbone alternative design will create a “static” situation that will result in a deterioration of the traffic flow in and around the Bee Cave intersection without any acceptable way to improve this critical and highly utilized intersection in the future.

As we have mentioned in previous correspondence to you, Dallas (I-345) and Houston (I-45 Pierce Elevated) are actively engaged with TxDOT in planning efforts to remove elevated portions of highways that are eyesores, divide neighborhoods, create noise and light pollution, are expensive to maintain, and add little or no transportation efficiency. TxDOT has proposed that

the I-35 project focus on eliminating the upper deck that runs between Martin Luther King Jr. and Airport Boulevards, replacing those two free lanes on each side with added freeway lanes tucked under the frontage lanes using a cantilever approach.

As to MoPac South, the Wishbone alternative design will cost an additional \$30 million over and above the two express lane design without elevated, tolled lanes and will not achieve any real benefit to justify either the financial cost or the significant impacts to the human and natural environment.

**IV. The City of Rollingwood continues to support the “Two Express Lanes Without Downtown Direct Connections” as the best option that has been presented by CTRMA, and asks that it be fully “optimized” consistent with the “Wishbone” alternative.**

The City of Rollingwood continues to take the position that the alternative which contains two express toll lanes in each direction without “double decker” elevated lanes (“Two Express Toll Lanes Without Direct Connection To Downtown” alternative) (“Two Express Toll Lanes”) should be the preferred option at this time. We are disappointed that this alternative has not been improved or “optimized” since it was first presented to the public at the November 10, 2015 Open House despite repeated requests to do so.

By contrast, the Wishbone alternative has been “optimized” in several ways in which the Two Express Toll Lanes alternative has not. We are hopeful that this does not mean that CTRMA has prematurely abandoned a reasonable alternative in favor of a predetermined outcome or alternative.

CTRMA has represented that the optimizations that have been added to the Wishbone alternative yield travel times on the express lanes that are the same as the travel times estimated for the “double decker” plan: 9 minutes. We think that once the Two Express Toll Lanes alternative is fully optimized like the Wishbone alternative has been, it will show that the travel times are comparable. These two alternatives in their current state cannot be fairly compared to each other or reasonably evaluated by the public.

Currently, Two Express Toll Lanes without a direct connection alternative is merely the same plan proposed for the original double decker configuration over Lady Bird Lake without the infrastructure for the double decker. Optimizing the Two Express Toll Lanes alternative to include TSM improvements and additional capacity will improve the travel times without requiring elevated lanes. Optimizing the Two Express Toll Lanes alternative should, at a minimum, include the following:

1. Improvement of the design and placement of the on-ramps and off-ramps surrounding the Bee Cave Road and MoPac intersection given the available R.O.W.
2. The Wishbone alternative includes an extra general-purpose lane on each side between Cesar Chavez and Bee Cave Road. These additional capacity lanes should be integrated into the Two Express Toll Lanes between Bee Cave Road and Cesar Chavez. Consistent

with the Wishbone alternative, adding the additional lanes of capacity to each side of the bridge across Lady Bird Lake (from 5 lanes each direction to 6 lanes each direction) will remove one of the existing merging bottlenecks for southbound MoPac traffic entering from the southbound MoPac frontage road, 5th Street, Cesar Chavez and Lake Austin Blvd. The southbound additional capacity lane could serve as a dedicated exit lane for the Bee Cave Road exit. The northbound additional capacity lane could serve as an additional on-ramp lane from the Bee Cave Road/Barton Springs frontage road. Adding these lanes provides more opportunities for studying alternative designs for improving the on and off ramps accessing Bee Cave Road.

3. The Wishbone alternative includes a dedicated lane for traffic entering southbound MoPac from Lake Austin Blvd and 5th Street. This configuration of 2 lanes removes a known bottleneck where inbound Lake Austin Blvd/5th Street traffic and Cesar Chavez traffic merge before entering MoPac. Removing this bottleneck from the Two Express Toll Lanes alternative will improve travel times for southbound traffic between Cesar Chavez and Bee Cave Road.
4. Improvement of the routes on and off of MoPac used by both toll lane and non-toll lane traffic.

As stated above, the City of Rollingwood continues to posit that the Two Express Toll Lanes Without Downtown Direct Connections alternative is the option which fully meets all MoPac South project "goals and objectives" while having the fewest adverse impacts to the human and natural environment and significantly improving travel times. This alternative is fully consistent with the CAMPO 2040 Regional Transportation Plan. As noted in the past, the CAMPO 2040 plan does not include the provision of direct, tolled access into downtown as a goal. Likewise, the provision of direct, tolled access into downtown is not part of the purpose or need for the MoPac South Project. Furthermore, this alternative is more fiscally responsible because it would cost an estimated \$30 million less than the Wishbone concept and an estimated \$40 million less than the double decker over Lady Bird Lake, all while achieving similar results in transportation efficiency. This alternative would provide tolled express lane users and emergency vehicles plenty of time and ability to safely maneuver and exit downtown.

As previously stated, we are hopeful that CTRMA has not prematurely abandoned a reasonable alternative in favor of a predetermined outcome or alternative. We note that the following FAQ was published on the "MoPacSouth.com" website on or before October 29, 2017, but was removed as of November 3, 2017:

*"Why do we need a connection between downtown and the Express Lanes?"*

*Four of the Express Lane configuration options presented in November 2015 include a non-weaving or direct connection between the proposed MoPac South Express Lanes and the downtown Austin core. Two configurations utilized direct connector ramps that elevated over the existing bridges at Lady Bird Lake. Two other configurations utilized "wishbone" ramps that elevated over the general purpose lanes in the area of Bee Cave*

*Road/Barton Springs Road and would allow Express Lane traffic to merge easily into the correct lane for accessing/exiting downtown.*

*A non-weaving connection like these between downtown Austin and the Express Lanes would serve the approximately 40% of MoPac South drivers that head downtown in the morning, or the approximately 51% of traffic leaving downtown in the evening to travel on MoPac South. This type of connection increases the safety of all users by eliminating a potentially dangerous weaving condition that would [be] exist in the two [of the] Express Lane configurations under consideration that require Express Lane traffic to merge into the general purpose lanes south of Lady Bird Lake to access existing downtown ramps.*

*Direct connections to/from downtown would improve travel times for Express Lane users by up to four minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the evening. These connections would improve travel times for each general purpose lane user by up to 3 minutes in the morning and 7 minutes in the evening."*

We continue to have concerns that the MoPac study process has included positions like the one presented in the FAQ to the public regarding elevated lanes on the MoPac South Environment Study website, when the non-elevated alternatives have not yet been similarly optimized. In addition, we request that you provide us with the traffic data that was used as the basis for calculating the statistics in the FAQ statement of: "*A non-weaving connection like these between downtown Austin and the Express Lanes would serve the approximately 40% of MoPac South drivers that head downtown in the morning, or the approximately 51% of traffic leaving downtown in the evening to travel on MoPac South.*"

V. **The City of Rollingwood requests that CTRMA update all proposed alternatives for the MoPac South project to show interconnection with the MoPac North project as currently constructed and the MoPac Intersections Environmental Study as finalized, with a dedicated public comment period for review and comment on the proposed interconnections.**

We respectfully request that prior to any final environmental decision as part of the MoPac South Environmental Study, CTRMA release at least one alternative design reflecting the interconnection between the MoPac South Project and the MoPac North Project because the MoPac north of Lady Bird Lake portion is now constructed. A dedicated period of time for the public to review and comment on such design should be provided.

Recently, CTRMA completed a portion of the MoPac North Project that included restriping the general purpose lanes of southbound MoPac between Enfield and Lady Bird Lake to remove the previously dedicated, general purpose southbound Winsted entrance ramp. CTRMA reassigned the general purpose entrance ramp lane to be a dedicated southbound toll exit lane.

The City of Rollingwood, its residents, and its businesses have been negatively impacted from the reassignment of the southbound Winsted entrance ramp as a dedicated southbound toll exit lane. This reassignment has introduced a new bottleneck into the general purpose lanes in southbound MoPac, causing more travel delays for southbound traffic exiting at Bee Cave Road

into the City's commercial and residential areas. Rollingwood residents attempting to leave the downtown Austin center through alternative routes to access the City of Rollingwood through Barton Springs and Stratford Road are encountering more delays.

In the MoPac North project, as currently constructed, the southbound lanes terminate with a toll lane exit south of Enfield Road, and the northbound lanes start with a toll lane entrance north of Enfield Road. In the proposed alternatives for the MoPac South project, the newly constructed southbound toll lane exit south of Enfield Road does not appear, however, a southbound toll lane entrance is shown south of Enfield Road. In addition, in the proposed alternatives for the MoPac South project, the newly constructed northbound toll lane entrance north of Enfield road does not appear, however, a northbound toll lane exit ramp is shown south of Enfield.

The City of Rollingwood, in participating in Technical Working Group meetings and other meetings with CTRMA officials regarding the MoPac South Environmental Study, has frequently commented on and requested clarification of how the proposed alternatives for the MoPac South project will connect with the final design in the 2012 FONSI for the MoPac North Project, which is now nearing completion. CTRMA has not provided the City of Rollingwood or the public with clarification on how the MoPac South project will connect with the MoPac Improvement Project, as MoPac north of the Lady Bird Lake is now configured and built. Both the Technical Working Group for the MoPac South Environmental Study and the public should have an adequate opportunity to review proposals for interconnecting the MoPac North Project, as approved in the FONSI, and the MoPac South Project.

In an Austin-American Statesman article dated October 26, 2017, titled "On southbound Mopac, toll lane drivers win, Winsted drivers lose," Ben Wear reports on the reassignment of the Winsted entrance ramp as a toll exit lane and states:

Furthermore, mobility authority officials said, the new configuration is the safer option and aligns with typical highway design.

"Normally a ramp has to merge when it comes into a major highway like this," said Steve Pustelnyk, director of community relations for the mobility authority, noting that is the case on most of southbound MoPac's other entrances northward to RM 2222 and beyond. The crunch on southbound MoPac's four-lane bridge over Lady Bird Lake, Pustelnyk said, generally causes afternoon slow-and-go traffic for several miles north of the river.

Had the striping remained the same near the Winsted entrance, Pustelnyk said, what is expected to be high-speed traffic from the toll lane would have to come to a sudden stop to merge into a lane of much slower MoPac traffic.

"Either way, this is a problem for everybody driving the southbound MoPac corridor," Pustelnyk said. "And the backups won't be resolved until we add capacity on the bridge, and south of the bridge."

The statements by CTRMA's representative in the Statesman article indicate that CTRMA has a plan for resolving the backups caused by reassigning the Winsted entrance ramp, but that the

plan will not be in place until “we add capacity on the bridge and south of the bridge”. This plan for resolving the backups has not been released to the public as part of the MoPac South Project. CTRMA’s representative’s statement also indicates that the effectiveness of the MoPac North project to relieve traffic backups caused by the reassignment of a general purpose lane to a toll lane is tied to, and dependent upon, the MoPac South Project being built. Clearly the two projects are intended to rely on each other. Thus far, however, the public has only been presented with these two projects as separate endeavors and has not been provided with an adequate opportunity to comment on proposed interconnections of the two projects.

We respectfully request that CTRMA provide the public with proposed alternatives that clarify the design interconnecting the MoPac South and MoPac North projects, and provide evidence to support the statement that adding capacity on the bridge and south of the bridge will solve the current backup caused in the general purpose lanes by CTRMA’s reassignment of a general purpose lane to toll traffic on southbound MoPac north of Lady Bird Lake.

It is unclear from the current proposed alternatives in the MoPac South Environmental Study whether CTRMA’s plan to resolve the backups caused by reassigning the Winsted entrance ramp would: (1) include adding an additional lane of capacity to the bridge to replace the Winsted entrance ramp; or, (2) remove the current southbound toll lane exit point south of Enfield on southbound MoPac, instead routing the toll lane traffic across the bridge in a new toll lane and returning the lane space to the Winsted entrance ramp.

In addition, the statements by CTRMA’s representative in the Statesman article indicate that CTRMA chose to realign the Winsted entrance because “it is the safer option and aligns with typical highway design” and, without the realignment, the high-speed traffic on the toll lanes would have to come to a sudden stop to merge with the slower general lane traffic on MoPac South. The current proposed alternatives for the MoPac South project are inconsistent with this. All 6 alternatives show a proposed exit point for the northbound toll lane traffic just prior to the Enfield lane exit, and require drivers to merge from the inner toll lane into the slower general lane traffic on MoPac North *without* a dedicated toll exit lane. It appears that inconsistent safety and highway design principles are being applied to the MoPac North project and the MoPac South project with regard to toll lane egress.

Currently, the proposed alternatives for the MoPac South project for northbound traffic south of the Enfield exit add an unsafe condition in which northbound toll lane traffic would come to a halt when attempting to merge into the slower northbound general lane traffic just prior to Enfield lane. It is unclear whether CTRMA has a plan to address this safety issue. In addition, the proposed exit point for the northbound toll lane traffic prior to the Enfield exit, without a dedicated toll exit lane, introduces a new bottleneck into general purpose lanes that would negatively impact traffic flow on northbound MoPac, thereby negatively impacting the flow of eastbound traffic from Bee Caves Road attempting to head northbound on MoPac.

Along a similar vein, we respectfully request that prior to any final environmental decision as part of the MoPac South project, CTRMA also release at least one alternative design for, and provide a dedicated period of time for the public to review and comment on, proposed



interconnections between the MoPac South Environmental Study and the MoPac Intersection Project, as finalized in the FONSI issued on December 22, 2015.

While the MoPac Intersections project has the goal to improve intersections at Slaughter and La Crosse, which do not directly abut the City of Rollingwood, Rollingwood is impacted by changes throughout the MoPac South project that potentially change the volume of traffic expected on MoPac South. Currently, none of the proposed alternatives for the MoPac South project show interconnectivity with the final design in the MoPac Intersections study, including the removal of traffic lights that currently control the flow of traffic on the lanes of MoPac South. In addition, the MoPac Intersections study does not show interconnectivity with any alternative of the MoPac South project, including toll lanes that run along the inner lanes of MoPac South in its current configuration.

**VI. The City of Rollingwood continues to request implementation of Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure to provide consistent, direct access to and from downtown Austin as part of the MoPac South improvements**

As part of Technical Working Group meetings and other working group meetings hosted by CTRMA, representatives of the City of Rollingwood have commented on the lack of consistent, direct bike and pedestrian connectivity traveling from the south end of the project to connect with downtown Austin in the alternatives presented. In particular, CTRMA has proposed the bike and pedestrian path for the MoPac South project running alongside the northbound lane of MoPac, terminate on the south side of Barton Springs Road, however, the MoPac South project terminates at Cesar Chavez.

Currently, the proposed bike and pedestrian connection in the MoPac South project alternatives from the south side to the north side of Barton Springs Road requires 3 cross walks in an area with high speed traffic and topography that creates blind spots. A bike and pedestrian bridge over Barton Springs Road has been proposed by the City of Rollingwood with support from City of Austin staff. The proposed location (where bike traffic now crosses under MoPac) is in TxDOT right of way. This necessary connection point should be considered as a bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvement through the MoPac South project. It is important to have multimodal transportation options to give south Austin bikes and pedestrians cross street bicycle connectivity accommodations.

In addition, representatives of the City of Rollingwood have requested clarification on whether the current bike and pedestrian path that connects Barton Springs Road to Stratford Road, running on the east side of MoPac, will be replaced or updated as part of the MoPac South project. On 5 of the 6 alternatives, the current bike and pedestrian connection is removed, and in the “City of Austin” alternative, the bike and pedestrian connection is relocated.

We ask that infrastructure improvement options for providing bike and pedestrian connections from the south side of Barton Springs to the north side of Barton Springs and from the north side of Barton Springs to Stratford Drive, parallel with and proximate to MoPac, be fully designed and studied as a part of the ongoing alternative analysis for MoPac South. Additional bike and pedestrian infrastructure could help address special event traffic issues around and near

Zilker Park and Barton Springs Road and may minimize the need for temporary road closures and barricading during special events by providing separate, permanent facilities for bike and pedestrian traffic across Barton Springs Road.

Finally, we very much appreciate the opportunity to work closely and candidly with CTRMA staff on the process and design of MoPac South improvements, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with the CTRMA, as well as other state and local governmental officials and employees to fully participate in the NEPA planning process for the MoPac South Project.

Please continue to keep us informed about the next NEPA Technical Working Group meeting, as well as any additional Open Houses or other public meetings scheduled for this important Project.

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters.

Sincerely,



Roxanne McKee, Mayor  
City of Rollingwood

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