



Office of Council Member Paige Ellis, District 8

301 W. Second St, Austin, TX 78701 | (512) 978-2108 | austintexas.gov/district8

January 28, 2025

Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority
3300 N Interstate 35 Frontage Rd
Austin, TX 78705

Re: Public Comment for MoPac South Environmental Study

Dear Executive Director Bass,

I am submitting this Public Comment on the above referenced Environmental Study as the Elected Official who most directly represents the entirety of this proposed project.

There is no question that we need additional mobility options in Southwest Austin. We must be mindful, however, of the impacts such a highway expansion can have on the surrounding community, families, school children, and environment. Highway expansion projects typically lead to developmental sprawl and increased traffic, air pollution, and carbon emissions, which contradict the City's sustainability and smart-growth objectives and stand to impact the overall ecological health along the length of this project.

As such, on December 12, 2024, I introduced and passed City Council Resolution [20241212-066](#) (the "Resolution") encouraging CTRMA to align this project with the decade of smart-growth planning in the City of Austin and Travis County—including the goals to reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, avoid environmental harms, and offer a wider variety of mobility options to commuters. To implement the recommendations of the Resolution, I request the MoPac South project include:

- ***One Express Lane Only.*** Limit the project to a single express lane only and plan for extra shoulder space in the narrower parts to facilitate emergency response needs.

- **Minimized Impervious Cover.** Stay within existing impervious cover as much as practicable.
- **South MoPac Park & Ride.** Collaborate with CapMetro to create a Park & Ride south of William Cannon to create a dependable and consistent route for express transit service. Providing high-quality transit options to Southwest Austin will be critical to ensuring this project does not increase air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Continuous Shared Use Pathway.** Close gaps in the shared use pathway, especially from Gaines Ranch Loop to Southwest Parkway. I am very appreciative of the shared use pathways that have been included in the project thus far. There are many people in Southwest Austin who use such pathways for transportation or recreation. Filling gaps in the network will facilitate congestion management by increasing safe, attractive opportunities for walking and biking, a stated goal of the project.
- **Safe Zilker Park Connection.** I have been in conversation with Rollingwood residents as well as folks who utilize Zilker Park. We would love to see attention on the speed limits and other signage for the northbound exit ramp and access road to Barton Springs Road. The speed limit through Zilker Park is 35 MPH, and drivers routinely exceed that speed limit by 15-20 MPH.
- **Safe Cyclist Crossings.** In particular, there are underpasses at Rollingwood Drive and Barton Springs Road with multiple conflict points that I would like to make sure are addressed for safety. Many cyclists use these official city routes, but drivers are typically unaware that they are no longer in a highway zone and are in fact in a park space near the Zilker Botanical Garden.
- **Neighborhood Ingress/Egress.** Residents of the Treemont/Bee Cave Woods neighborhoods have asked for clarity on ingress and egress lanes. Currently, there is an exit southbound for Barton Skyway which is used by these residents, and it is unclear if there will still be a similar way to access those neighborhoods.
- **Tree Protection.** Protect as many trees as possible and consider relocating any larger trees which are determined to require removal from their current location from one part of the project site to another.

Thank you for your consideration. I recognize the importance of working collaboratively with regional partners to develop transportation solutions that align with the community's values and long-term vision for a sustainable and resilient future.

It is my hope that by working with the City of Austin, Travis County, members of the City Council, CapMetro, and school districts, CTRMA will weigh the concerns of various stakeholders and successfully harmonize their interests in order to maximize benefits to commuters and minimize environmental harms in the short and long term. I look forward to continued dialogue as this process moves forward.

Sincerely,



HON. PAIGE J. ELLIS
Austin City Council Member
District 8

RESOLUTION NO. 20241212-066

WHEREAS, the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA) is conducting the MoPac South Environmental Study, which is part of the required federal review process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for a highway project; and

WHEREAS, CTRMA is currently seeking input on their Recommended Build Alternative for the MoPac South Project and will close the comment period on December 29, 2024; and

WHEREAS, the MoPac South Project Purpose states in part “Create a dependable and consistent route for transit” and the Project Goals and Objectives states in part “Increase opportunities for transit, ridesharing, pedestrians, and bicyclists” and “Provide consistency with local and regional plans”; and

WHEREAS, it has been over 11 years since CTRMA held the initial scoping meeting for the MoPac South Environmental Study in 2013; and

WHEREAS, throughout the original environmental review process, Austin residents submitted hundreds of comments expressing concerns about the proposed highway widening; and

WHEREAS, on November 10, 2015, CTRMA selected a preliminary recommended build alternative to widen MoPac South from Slaughter Lane to Cesar Chavez, with up to four new tolled express lanes, as well as additional general-purpose lanes and auxiliary lanes in certain locations; and

WHEREAS, the current Recommended Build Alternative for the MoPac South Project has not changed substantially in size or capacity from the preliminary recommended build alternative chosen in 2015; and

WHEREAS, a decade of smart-growth planning has changed Travis County's and Austin's future, which should help guide transportation and planning decisions; and

WHEREAS, on November 3, 2020, Austin voters approved Project Connect, electing to create a dedicated source of local funding to build and operate a robust, citywide, high-capacity transit system, with the express intent to offer commuters mobility options that are not reliant upon driving personal vehicles; and

WHEREAS, complementing the public's vote to transform the transportation network, the City has transformed its land use regulations, embracing density within the urban core of the City and along transit corridors; and

WHEREAS, since 2015, the City has approved numerous plans embracing transit and reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, including the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, an update to the Urban Trails Plan, and the Austin Climate Equity Plan; and

WHEREAS, since 2015, the City has set an ambitious goal for 50% of trips to be non-drive alone by 2039, encouraging the use of multimodal transportation options such as buses, light rail, rideshares, carpooling, biking, and walking, as well as telework; and

WHEREAS, based on concerns about environmental health risks associated with PM 2.5 (fine particulate matter), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has strengthened the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for PM 2.5; and

WHEREAS, PM 2.5 measurements in Travis County currently exceed the threshold of 9.0 micrograms per cubic meter considered safe for human health by

the EPA, which could result in Travis County receiving a “nonattainment” designation if air quality does not improve; and

WHEREAS, the MoPac South project is anticipated to significantly increase the volume of vehicles traveling within the airshed of Austin High School, thereby potentially raising the exposure of school-aged children with developing lungs to harmful air toxins and car emissions; and

WHEREAS, on August 8, 2019, City Council declared a climate emergency; and

WHEREAS, transportation is responsible for the largest share of carbon emissions in Travis County; and

WHEREAS, the entire stretch of the MoPac South project traverses through the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone and encroaches upon sensitive karst features and caves, which are known to be the habitat to several threatened and endangered species; and

WHEREAS, construction related to MoPac South, including excavation, will encroach upon and be built across several creeks and the Recharge Zone which flow to Barton Springs, a federally protected endangered species habitat for the Austin Blind Salamander and the Barton Springs Salamander, which the City is responsible for protecting under an established habitat protection plan; and

WHEREAS, construction of the MoPac South project will significantly impact the public parkland located within Zilker Park and along Lady Bird Lake; and

WHEREAS, the City desires to work with CTRMA, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Travis County, CapMetro, and other regional

transportation and governmental entities on major highway projects to ensure consistency with the City's environmental and mobility goals and to promote mode shift away from single-occupancy vehicles; and

WHEREAS, the City is interested in ensuring that whatever changes are made to MoPac South are consistent with the City's mobility goals and receive a full environmental review that considers alternatives to avoid environmental harms and promotes mode shift away from single-occupancy vehicles; and

WHEREAS, the City is committed to sustainable growth, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and promoting multimodal transportation options to improve the quality of life for all residents; and

WHEREAS, highway expansion projects have typically led to developmental sprawl and increased traffic, air pollution, and carbon emissions, which contradict the City's sustainability and smart-growth objectives; and

WHEREAS, the City has set ambitious goals to reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and to shift towards more sustainable transportation modes, including public transit, biking, and walking; and

WHEREAS, expanding highway capacity may undermine these goals by encouraging more car travel, increasing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and exacerbating environmental and public health issues; and

WHEREAS, the proximity of MoPac South to environmentally sensitive areas, such as Barton Springs and the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, raises significant concerns about the potential negative impacts on federally protected endangered species and the overall ecological health of these areas; and

WHEREAS, the City recognizes the importance of working collaboratively with regional partners to develop transportation solutions that align with the

community's values and long-term vision for a sustainable and resilient future;
NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to work with CTRMA to refine the proposal for the MoPac South project to align with the goals and intent of the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, including the Urban Trails Plan, the Austin Climate Equity Plan, the Watershed Protection Strategic Plan, and the Project Connect System Plan. Per the goals of these plans, the refined MoPac South proposal should support express transit service to a park and ride facility, provide continuous, safe pedestrian/bicycle trails and crossings, reduce or not increase vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions, reduce or minimize increases in impervious cover, minimize the loss of tree canopy, and minimize the widening of the existing roadway.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to invite CTRMA, CapMetro, CAMPO, the Texas Department of Transportation, Austin Community College, and any other necessary agencies or parties to meet at the earliest possible opportunity to create an action plan for delivering the Southwest Austin elements of the Project Connect System Plan approved by the voters in November 2020 and included as Exhibit A to Council Resolution No. 20200807-003, the Proposition A Contract with the Voters. These elements include new Express bus service on MoPac South to a new park and ride facility south of William Cannon, new Rapid bus service on US 290 to the existing Pinnacle Park & Ride facility in Oak Hill, and new Pickup neighborhood circulators.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The most urgent priority of this interagency collaboration shall be to identify a location for the new park and ride facility on MoPac South to be served by Express bus, per the Project Connect System Plan and in fulfillment of the MoPac South Project Purpose and Project Goals and Objectives. The new park and ride facility location should preferably utilize existing impervious cover, such as through a shared parking agreement. This work should be undertaken with utmost haste to ensure the final design of MoPac South can be as transit-supportive as possible, ideally including the park and ride as part of CTRMA's project.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to ensure official staff comments for the MoPac South Open House #6 align with this Resolution and are submitted by the December 29, 2024, deadline. The Manager shall also submit a copy of this Resolution as official comments from Council by the deadline.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to deliver a written update to Council on the Project Connect Southwest Austin action plan no later than May 6, 2025.

ADOPTED: December 12, 2024

ATTEST: Stephanie Hall for
Myrna Rios
City Clerk