



The Cherrywood Neighborhood is bounded by I-35, 38 ½ Street, Airport Boulevard, and Manor Road. It is a flourishing neighborhood of homes, businesses, and green spaces in Central Austin.

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July 18, 2023

Mayor and Councilmembers:

The Cherrywood Neighborhood Association (CNA) has participated in the engagement opportunities offered by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) on the Interstate-35 Capital Express Central Project (CapEx Project) for the last several years, including the latest feedback opportunity in early 2023 on the CapEx Project Preferred Alternative and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). All of our prior feedback is available at cherrywood.org/i35capex.

Last week, Councilmember Qadri's office contacted us to seek feedback on a graphic showing new design ideas drafted by TxDOT for 'Northern Cap Iterations' (dated April 2023) between Airport Blvd. and E. 32nd St. On July 18, 2023, the CNA Steering Committee held a special meeting to review and approve this letter regarding the 'Northern Cap Iterations'. We will share and invite further feedback at the next CNA General Meeting on August 16, 2023.

Before addressing the Northern Cap Iterations, we again note our alignment with those questioning the premise of expanding interstate highways, such as I-35, through major urban areas, such as Austin. A growing body of research demonstrates that urban highway expansions induce more driving and worsen congestion which negatively impacts residents' health and well-being. We support the ongoing and justified efforts to reevaluate the health and climate impacts of the CapEx Project.

Nonetheless, for pragmatic reasons, we comment below on the Northern Cap Iterations. We are working from the knowledge that additional, significant refinements to the Preferred Alternative are still possible as the DEIS is being reviewed, finalized, and taken into the construction documents phase in Summer 2024.

First, we must say a sincere thank you to TxDOT and the City of Austin for pursuing these Northern Cap Iterations in earnest. Our most ambitious request over several years of the CapEx Project has been for a North Central Deck, or at least to not preclude capping of some or all of the section between Dean Keeton and Airport Boulevards. These Northern Cap Iterations reflect significant design effort on TxDOT's part in that direction and we acknowledge that effort and welcome further engagement to ensure the implementation of some evolution of these design concepts.

Broadly, we offer these comments:

- Names are important, but we put no weight on 'Development Capture Option' vs. 'Neighborhood Option' as both support neighborhood goals and we imagine the City will evaluate development capture strategies with either
- We note that both options include ramping changes that make the caps difficult to access from the Cherrywood side, but we support the larger benefit of northern caps to central Austin

Specifically, we offer these comments:

- The 'Texas Turnaround' at E. 32nd St still does not seem to serve a substantial purpose and we recommend removal to further enhance this section under all design options, including the current DEIS design
- In the 'Development Capture' option, the cap seems to extend through the railroad tracks, which seems impractical and suggests the small cap on the northern side of the railroad is inaccessible from any direction

In the spirit of ongoing collaboration, we offer several additional design refinements that we have also heard discussed in other circles as well that suggest a hybrid of the iterations provided. We offer broad strokes of this hybrid iteration below and welcome an opportunity to discuss further:

- Keeping the Wilshire Blvd. crossing and the two larger caps north of E. 38 ½ St.
- Removing the Texas Turnaround at E. 32nd St.
- Shifting the managed lane on- and off-ramps southward toward E. 32nd St.
- Shortening the cap from E. 38 ½ St. to the area of Concordia Ave. to create an additional east-west connections
- Designing portal ramps to facilitate access to the caps from both sides of the interstate



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Additional comment on the hybrid options:

North of E. 38 ½ St.

Responding primarily to the ‘Development Capture’ option.

- We encourage keeping the Wilshire Blvd crossing (noting strong desire for the City to mitigate potential cut-through traffic between I-35 and Airport Boulevard)
- The integration of the railroad into any cap seems to invite additional unnecessary complexity, but the value of a full cap between E. 38 ½ St. and Wilshire Blvd. seems like a clear benefit
- We encourage designing a portal ramp on both sides of the cap to enable safer access from the Cherrywood side to the east and from the Hancock side to the west
- We believe it is very likely that both the Fiesta site and Hancock Center will undergo major redevelopment within the timeframe of the CapEx Project which increases the value of a cap in this location for future residents and the importance of improving pedestrian access to it

South of E. 38 ½ St.

Responding primarily to the ‘Neighborhood’ option and keeping the managed lane on- and off-ramps in their current locations, but shifted southward.

- We encourage every effort to enable another east-west crossing between E. 38 ½ St. and E. 32nd St.
- We encourage shifting ramps southward to enable a cap from E. 38 ½ St. to as far south as possible.
 - o The most difficult aspect seems to be the rising of the managed lanes to enable the southbound off-ramp to E. 32nd
 - o We encourage shifting the northbound managed lane on-ramp southward, even so far as to have the ramp come off the the E. 32nd St signalized intersection.
- We encourage designing a portal ramp on the east side of the cap to enable safer access from the Cherrywood side to the east and/or shifting the main lane, northbound exit-ramp southward to engage frontage road further south of Concordia Ave.

E. 32nd St Crossing

- We strongly encourage reevaluating the E. 32nd intersection to connect across the freeway and thereby creating a fully functional east-west connection.
- We encourage removing the ‘Texas Turnaround’ at 32nd St, and allowing this movement to proceed through the standard intersection.

One additional question on these iterations relates to what size buildings, if any, could be placed on the caps in this section.

Again, we are grateful to CM Qadri (and notably CM Vela and CM R. Alter) and the Mayor’s Office for their support for continuing to seek improvements to the CapEx Project in the northern section. We offer the above support and comments for the ‘Northern Cap Iterations’ in the spirit of ongoing collaboration and refinements on this generational project, and we look forward to further conversations and advocating for implementation of some evolution of these design concepts.

Sincerely,

Cherrywood Steering Committee