



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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December 30, 2020

Dear Mr. Bass, Mr. Ferguson, Ms. Fraser, and Ms. Behunek,

The Cherrywood Neighborhood Association (CNA) Steering Committee met on December 29, 2020, to finalize our response to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Interstate-35 Capital Express Central Project (CapEx Project) Virtual Public Scoping Meeting phase of engagement. CNA is a founding member of the North Central I-35 Neighborhood Coalition (NCINC) and we support NCINC's advocacy as outlined in the NCINC letter dated December 21, 2020.

This letter is to show the CNA support for the project-scale advocacy points of NCINC and several other organizations as well as to begin identifying neighborhood-scale points specific to the Cherrywood area where we will focus our efforts in 2021 and throughout the project. These issues are loosely grouped around accessibility to, along and across I-35, land use opportunities along the frontage road, and attending to the current social considerations as the project proceeds.

The creation and elevation of I-35 pre-dates the CNA. For the past sixty years, homeowners, renters and business owners have chosen to live and work in Cherrywood and have endured I-35 as their 1.13-mile western boundary. Some see it as a physical and psychological barrier and a problematic edge; others see it as an inhospitable, under-realized commercial corridor. We all see the CapEx Project as an opportunity to reimagine the roadway and its impact on our neighborhood and generations of future Cherrywood residents and business owners.

At a city scale, CNA supports the work of the Downtown Austin Alliance coalition and its effort to improve the functionality and aesthetics of I-35 along the downtown section. We hope to see those same principles of design and connectivity for the construction project extended north to East 51st Street.

CNA also supports the work of Our Future 35 "focused on how to guide and leverage this major investment to achieve positive outcomes for the Austin community" and the five desired outcomes they have outlined for TxDOT

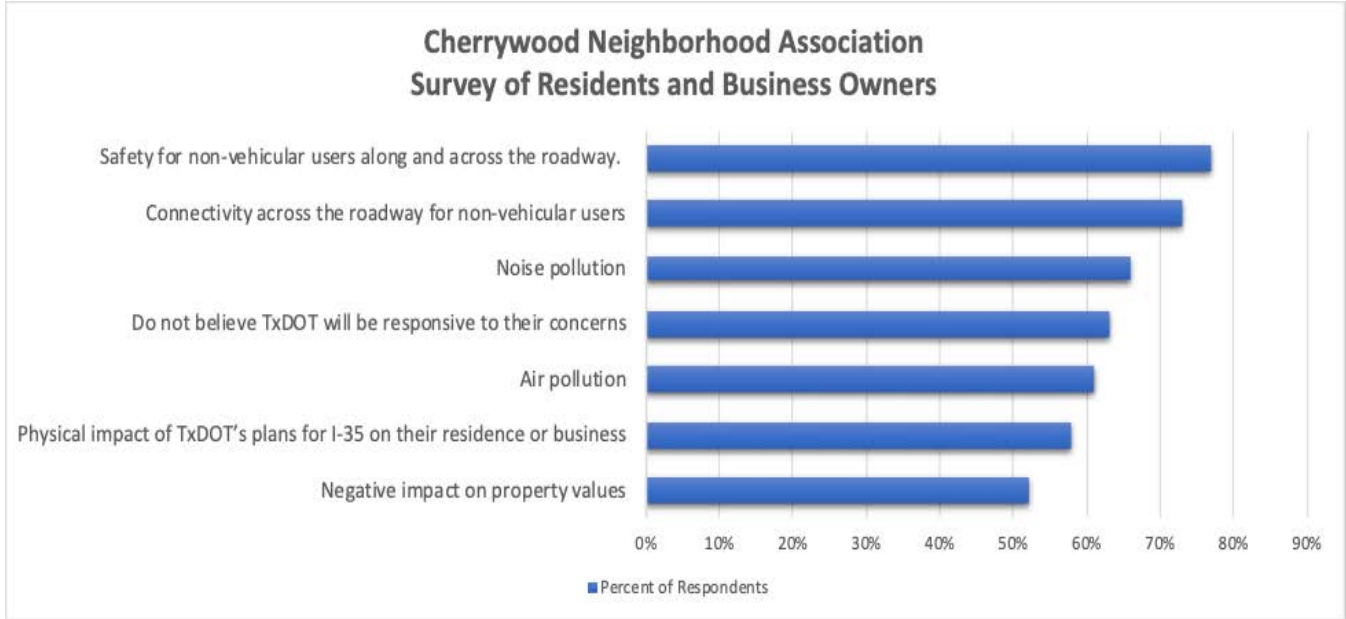
to incorporate into the planning process. While the Cherrywood area is, and has always been, predominately white and trending upward in affluence relative to the city, we recognize I-35 is a physical embodiment of Austin’s on-going struggle with institutional segregation and racism. CNA believes the CapEx Project can and should include positive community goals beyond mobility within the TxDOT right-of-way.

CNA supports NCINC’s advocacy as put forth in its December 21, 2020, submittal outlining changes needed in the Draft Coordination Plan and Schedule, Draft Project Purpose and Need, and Draft Range of Alternatives to accurately outline the necessary environmental, social, and cultural metrics that will ensure this project improves the quality of life for Cherrywood residents, residents of North Central Austin, and residents in surrounding areas.

CNA also agrees with NCINC that the public has not been given sufficient information on the Draft Range of Alternatives to provide meaningful comment on the designs. Cherrywood residents have voiced confusion over the omission of key design details including expansion of the right-of-way, design and character of the frontage road, ramp design, collector-distributors, intersection design, surface street design speeds, and character and frequency of crossings.

CNA will continue to partner with NCINC, as we have for twenty years, in pursuing collaboration among neighborhoods in response to—and toward enhancement of—TxDOT’s plans for I-35. The CNA would like to further outline several points of particular importance to our residents and businesses. In preparing this letter, the CNA fielded a survey in early December specifically targeted to residents and business adjacent I-35, but also open to any Cherrywood resident or business owner.

Of the fifty-six respondents, 98 percent were residents and 2 percent were both residents and business owners. Respondents expressed moderate or high concern about impacts of the I-35 project as shown below (see end of letter for additional survey results):



The CNA will continue to create opportunities for our residents and business owners to discuss the CapEx Project in general and in specially convened meetings in 2021 and throughout the CapEx project duration. In this early phase of engagement, the CNA views three general domains of concern and opportunity: accessibility, land use, and social considerations.

Accessibility

The NCINC letter raises several points related to the scope assumptions on a region-scale and we support further information and discussion of those points.

Relative to the Cherrywood section, I-35 currently impairs safe and equitable access to, along, and across the corridor for pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, persons with disabilities, the elderly, the health-vulnerable, and children. Whatever the final number of lanes and design approach, we expect an improved experience for all modes and users to, along, and across I-35.

General feedback from residents focuses on:

- induced demand resulting from more lanes, thus mitigating any congestion reduction
- the diversion of traffic through the neighborhood during construction
- diminished access into and out of the neighborhood
- safety for bicyclists and pedestrians
- necessity for increased access across the roadway for vehicles and multi-modal users
- improved east-west connections at least at every half-mile, or at reasonable crossing opportunities

Land Use

The NCINC letter raises several points related to land use, and particularly to common efforts to mitigate the impacts of an interstate freeway on adjacent residents and business owners.

Relative to the Cherrywood section, we appreciate TxDOT's commitment to removing the upper decks. The upper decks loom over the neighborhood and contribute significant noise and air pollution, as well as traffic-induced vibration. While removing the upper decks is a huge positive step in reshaping the corridor, improvements made to the reconstructed frontage road may have an even more significant impact on Cherrywood residents.

We support the NCINC call to revisit design approaches that work within the existing TxDOT right-of-way. However, if expansion of right-of-way along the north-bound frontage road is pursued, the CNA expects the minimum amount of land possible be dedicated to transportation use in order to maximize the amount of land that could be dedicated to neighborhood land use.

The CNA recognizes that a great deal of conversation in this early stage of engagement is focused on impact-mitigation, including but not limited to sound walls. We are withholding opinion on impact-mitigation strategies until other, more adaptive strategies have been appropriately pursued.

CNA will concentrate much of our collaborative efforts in the coming years on the redesign and creative re-invigorating of our frontage road section (from Dean Keeton Blvd to Airport Blvd) to function as a thoughtfully designed urban commercial corridor. We view a lively and vibrant commercial area as our urban neighborhood's natural buffer from the interstate.

General feedback focuses on:

- worries about use of eminent domain
- impact on current and future property values
- increased proximity of the highway and frontage road to residences
- increased noise and air pollution; increased traffic-induced vibration
- capacity for productive, commercial use of redesigned frontage road
- lower design speeds and timed signals
- safe shared use paths, trees, city-street design

Social Considerations

The NCINC letter raises several points related to historic social inequity; as stated above, CNA supports all efforts to leverage the CapEx Project to achieve positive outcomes for the entire Austin community, not just our central Austin neighborhood.

Relative to the Cherrywood section, CNA recognizes larger societal forces that have contributed to TxDOT right-of-way becoming a refuge of last resort for persons experiencing homelessness. We support recent City of Austin efforts to find more humane, permanent approaches to homelessness. We welcome the opportunity to examine how those approaches could unfold in our neighborhood.

Generational business owners along the frontage road are stalwarts of the neighborhood, many having persisted in spite of the conditions along I-35. If commercial tenants must be relocated, CNA will advocate for ensuring they are compensated at fair-market value for their businesses and that buy-outs are assessed at neighborhood comparative value, not artificially devalued by their adjacency to an encroaching roadway construction project.

We also recognize that safe, accessible means of walking and cycling to and from, along, and across I-35 is necessary to facilitate positive social connectivity. Cherrywood is one of few neighborhoods in the CapEx Project scope whose residents and business supporters frequently travel to, along, and across I-35 on foot or by bicycle.

General feedback focuses on:

- support for existing locally owned and neighborhood serving businesses (including but not limited to: Escuelita del Alma, Stars Cafe, Taqueria Los Altos, Wormley's Printing, Dreamers, Le Rouge, Las Chicas Bonitas, Zebra's Smoke Shop, Nature's Treasures, as well as businesses on the west side of I-35 and north and south of our neighborhood)
- humane support for relocating the homeless population currently living under I-35

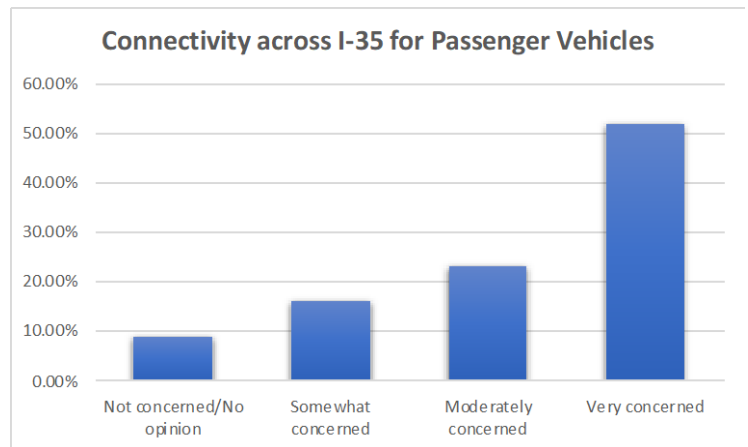
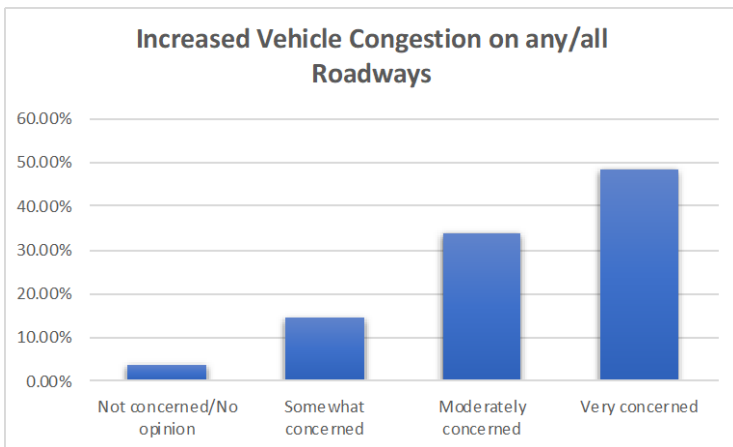
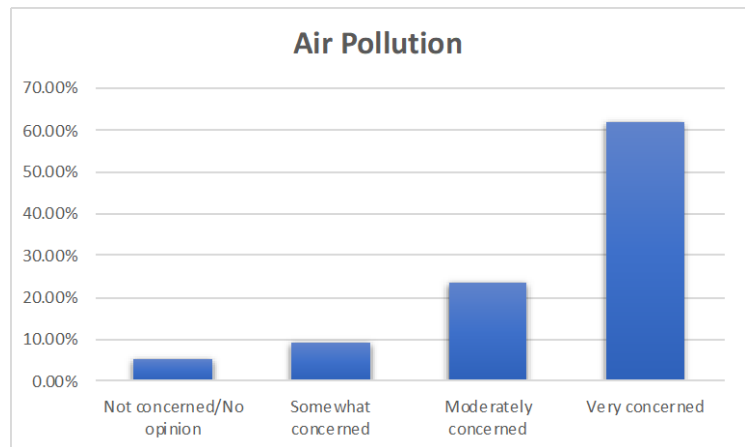
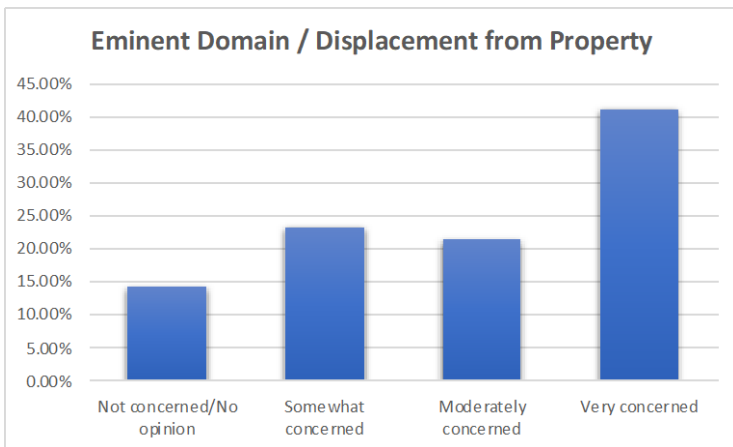
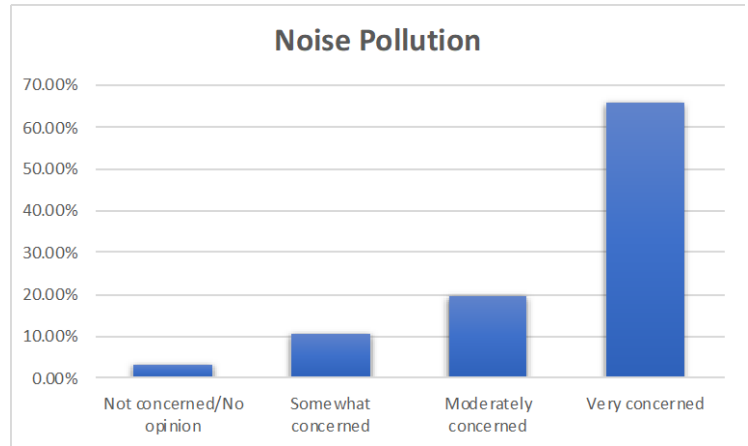
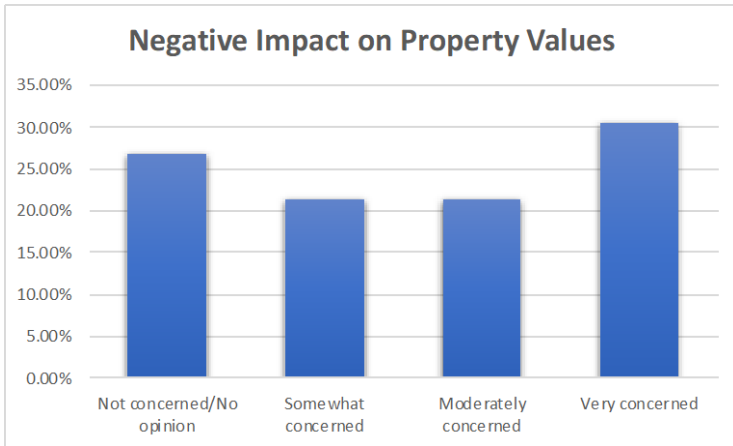
Due to time constraints of the Public Scoping Period (even with the deadline extension), the holidays, and the constraints of holding public meetings during pandemic-mandated social distancing, the CNA views this letter and our responses as only a first step in working with TxDOT, NCINC, elected officials at the city and state levels, and the many other residents and businesses impacted by the CapEx Project over the coming years.

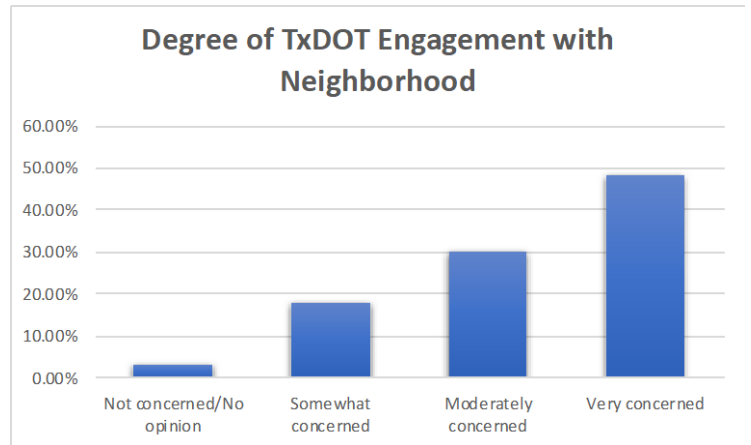
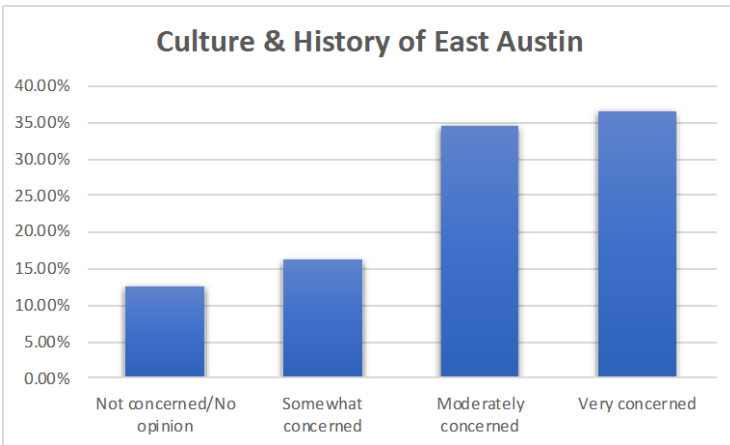
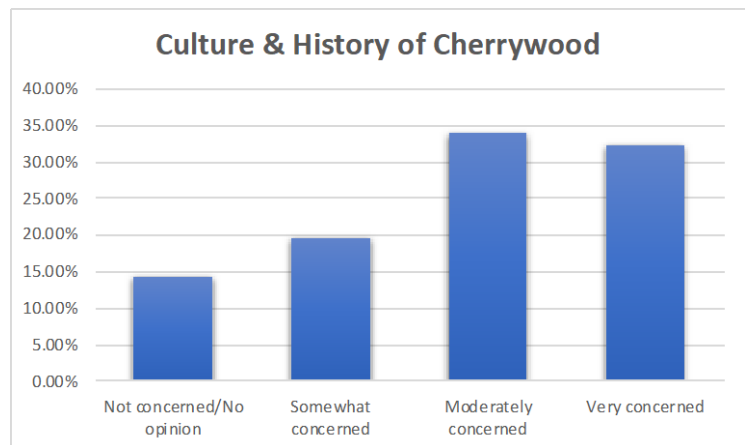
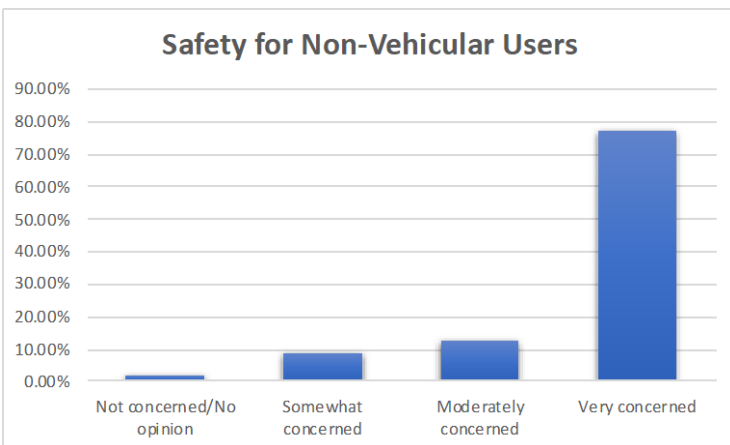
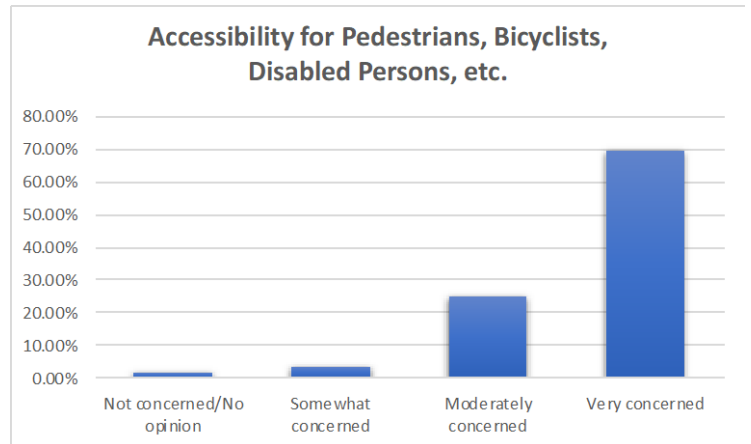
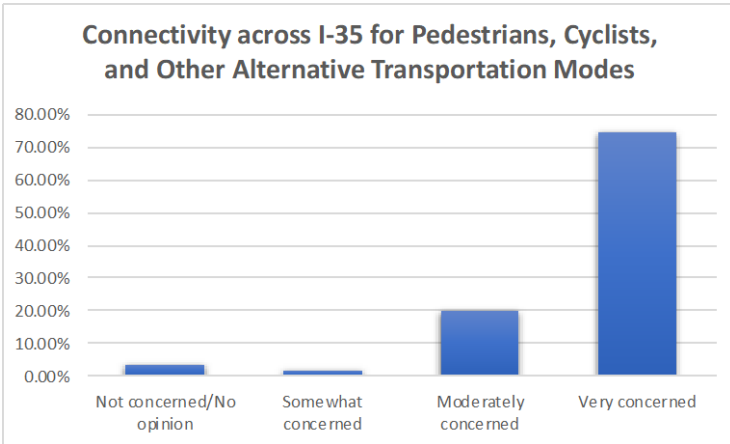
Sincerely,

Cherrywood Neighborhood Association Steering Committee

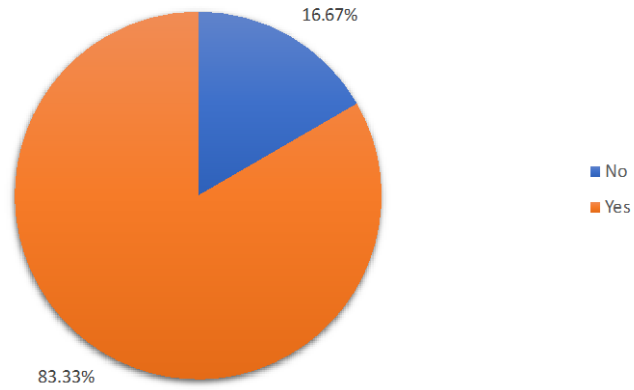
cc:

Texas Senator Sarah Eckhardt
Texas Representative Sheryl Cole
Texas Representative Celia Israel
Austin Mayor Steve Adler
Members of Austin City Council





Are you concerned about the physical impact of TxDOT's plans for I-35 on your residence or business? (Respondents on Robinson Ave.)



Do you feel that TxDOT will consider your feedback when finalizing its plans for I-35?

