

May 24, 2013



Stacey Benningfield  
I-35 Program Manager  
Texas Department of Transportation  
Austin District  
P.O. Box 15426  
Austin, Texas 78761-5426

Re: Support for Inclusion of the I-35 "Reconnecting Austin" Alternative in TxDOT Planning

Dear Stacey Benningfield,

As 2013 President of AIA Austin, we wholeheartedly support a thorough investigation and vetting of the proposed, depressed Downtown freeway segment shown in the recent I-35 public meetings, and which is being termed as the "Reconnecting Austin" alternative, such as that presented by Sinclair Black, FAIA. We would like to understand the costs and benefits of this option (including the economic development, environmental and neighborhood connectivity benefits), as well as understand the key technical and constructability approaches to ventilation, construction sequencing, interim traffic controls, etc.

Conversely, we believe that the alternative "interim" concept of deconstructing and reconstructing elevated freeway sections in this part of Central Austin will create an adverse impact on the livability of Downtown and East Austin and will be deleterious to the image and identity of Austin. Depressing the main lanes of the freeway will allow a true integration of land use and transportation - creating the potential for a great urban design solution to be realized - one that will bring great economic and livability benefits, particularly in transforming frontage roads to great boulevards and valuable "addresses" for new development. *We do not support any "interim" options that may preclude or make impractical the realization of such a concept.*

The American Institute of Architects is committed to creating great communities, as expressed below in our national policies:

*"The AIA believes that planning and design that integrates transportation, housing and land-use policies at the neighborhood, community and regional scales are prerequisites to the creation of safe, attractive, walkable and sustainable communities. The AIA supports governmental policies, programs and incentives that promote well-designed communities and maximize public participation in a community planning process."*

AIA Austin appreciates the public involvement process that you are conducting, and we welcome the opportunity to participate more fully in the public engagement process for this once-in-a-lifetime project that has the potential to truly transform Austin into a world-class city - into a city that demonstrates its regard for the community and the environment through excellence in transportation and urban design. Please feel free to contact me at any time, and thank you for bringing this possibility forward into the public arena.

Sincerely,  
  
Jana McCann, FAIA  
President

CC: Mayor Lee Leffingwell  
Mayor Pro Tem, Sheryl Cole  
Councilmember Chris Riley  
Councilmember Mike Martinez  
Councilmember Kathie Tovo  
Councilmember Laura Morrison  
Councilmember Bill Spelman  
Sinclair Black, FAIA, Black & Vernooy Architects  
Robert Spillar, Director, Austin Transportation Department  
Board of Directors, AIA Austin