

Principles for I-35 North-Central Deck

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The TxDOT I-35 Capital Express Central project is a generational infrastructure investment that will dramatically impact the City of Austin, but particularly those neighborhoods immediately adjacent to I-35. The current TxDOT design “Alternative 3 Mod” is proceeding into the environmental impact assessment process. Although neighborhood leaders support the fundamental questioning of the project as expressed by groups like Reconnect Austin and Rethink I-35, we also have a pragmatic interest in a bold idea to improve the project in the section adjacent our neighborhoods—a North-Central Deck (NC Deck).

The North Central Deck would complement the proposed downtown caps and stitches, but responds to the distinctly different context of current and future residential urban-core fabric. Similar to the downtown enhancements, the NC Deck would create significant reputational value for the City of Austin (and Austin District of TxDOT) such as the Klyde Warren Park project did for the City of Dallas.

The following purpose and design principles for the NC Deck have been drafted by the Cherrywood NA along with several neighborhood associations in the North-Central section of the Capital Express project.

Main Challenges

- Infrastructure design that enables future large caps between Dean Keeton and Airport Boulevards.
- A safer, responsive, and innovative E. 32nd Street intersection.
- Remove the exit ramp to E. 38 ½ Street from the northbound main lanes.
- Construction cost; operation and maintenance costs.

Public Health

- Further reduce noise pollution beyond reductions achieved with removal of upper decks and lowering of the main lanes.
- Mitigate air pollution from carbon emissions and brake dust.
- Prioritize the physical and psychological health of thousands of current and thousands of future urban-core residents through the development of open space for active uses.

Human-scale, interactive uses

- Prioritize people by providing interactive amenities beyond “aesthetic enhancements.”
- Create opportunities for green space, food trucks, dog parks, public restrooms, a transit hub, EV charging, rewilding areas, bike and pedestrian paths, and single-story civic spaces, among others.
- Strengthening communities by making Austin and its neighborhoods more desirable places to live and work with development of open space, cycling and pedestrian facilities.

Financial Commitment

- Identify appropriate opportunities for future tax increment value capture or other mechanisms to support the construction and maintenance costs.

Environment and Resilience

- Provide significant volume of storm water quality management.
- Mitigate emissions with functional natural systems that serve as carbon sinks.
- Create an opportunity for significant solar generation and battery storage to partially offset energy demands of ventilation systems and/or reinforce the Austin Energy grid.

Benefit to future land use redevelopment

- Add to the meaningful reconnection of the east and west sides of Austin via functional civic spaces and added east-west crossings.
- Enhance the marketability of the future redevelopment and densification of commercial properties (e.g., on the west side between Luther and 41st St; Hancock Center; Delwood Center).
- Redesign frontage roads to serve as functional, urban-core-scale streets suitable for users of all modes, especially those who walk, bike, or roll.
- Create the potential to develop 3-4 story affordable residential structures, which sufficient engineering should allow.