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Hays County Transportation Planners:

We are grateful for your work on behalf of all the citizens of Hays County, who deal with increasingly challenging transportation issues. We value leaders who have taken the time to deeply understand the dilemma in planning for a bustling region that rests on uniquely fragile karst hydrogeology. We have heard you clearly grapple with the tension between traffic congestion and watershed protection, and between water quality and road construction.

Your draft plan's vision shows you are listening to public input and responding with purpose since the CAMPO 2045 regional transportation plan adopted last summer. Nonetheless, our community will benefit from additional care and consideration, as you refine the plan to be presented to Commissioners Court.

The south extension of Jacob's Well Road cuts across mostly undeveloped land west of Little Twin Sister Peaks, connecting only to Wayside Drive as it winds westward to Slime Bridge on the Blanco. Its pathway solves no noticeable traffic need and would tend, as new roads do, to encourage future development.

Equally concerning is the plan to turn Ranch Road 12 into a four-lane divided parkway that connects Dripping Springs to San Marcos via Winters Mill Parkway around Wimberley.

Near Driftwood, Rutherford Bypass from FM 967 south to FM 150 W would bring a four-lane arterial road along the easternmost path considered in the County's 2017 FM 150 W Character Plan. While the shift eastward is positive, the continued suggestion of the roadway across ranches and conserved lands serves as a conduit from development sprawl from Austin.

We compliment the new un-twist in Dripping Springs, eliminating a previous loop plan in favor of new reliever roads over the mid-term along US 290 and RR 12 that will connect outer areas of the city.

Plans in western San Marcos, too, have progressed. Gone is the northern loop segment from the CAMPO plan. Instead, we see a reasonable bypass from RR 12 west of the city to I-35 south and a smaller western loop connect from the junction at RR 12 and Wonder World Drive to Centerpoint Road.

Please give greater thought to overall transportation principles. Population growth is a particular problem. CAMPO's projections are aggressive. More illuminating are the collision and

congestion data based on actual reporting, not forecasting. Judicious incremental phasing can reduce impact on the land and preserve County taxpayers' budget.

Some progress appears in the draft plan. The effort to concentrate on improving existing roadways, gradually, allows for more open space. But more can be done. The south extension of Jacob's Well Road can be removed. The widening of RR 12 from Dripping Springs to San Marcos around Wimberley likewise makes little sense, considering CAMPO's regional safety data. The Rutherford Bypass intrusion on verdant ranch land can be erased. There has to be a different way.

Roadways at any distance from I-35 or US 290 can be improved as scenic byways, rather than ordinary highways. Such specially designated roadways bring economic value to a region, and offer scenic protection that also preserves open space, wildlife habitat, and rural character. Limiting access and creating conservation easements alongside right-of-way can mitigate the choking effect of concrete swaths over undulating, porous karst topography. Consider that a mile of 200-foot right-of-way covers 24 acres of land. These simple lines on a map erase thousands of acres that recharge our aquifer and contribute to flood mitigation.

The development that goes hand in hand with transportation faces a great and growing two-part conundrum. Where do we get water, now that groundwater is virtually tapped out? And even if we do pipe in water from outside the region, as some propose, how will we meet companion wastewater volumes?

The time is past due for Hays County to adopt a land/water/transportation plan that draws on the example set by Travis County in 2014. The stresses are clear: traffic, quickly clearing land, sinking groundwater levels, and ill impacts from discharge.

Today's survey deals with a new transportation plan, but the challenges that face one of the nation's fastest-growing counties cannot be constrained at any time to roads alone.

Thank you for a second opportunity, now that new lines have been drawn and some taken away. We understand the planning process really never ends, and we look forward to collaborating on integration of land, water, and transportation in comprehensive countywide partnership.



David Baker
Executive Director, WVWA