



May 20, 2025

Honorable Mayor  
Honorable City Council Members

Re: Cap and Stitch Funding for I-35

Dear Mayor Watson and City Council Members,

Austin is a city shaped more by people than plans and policies. The choices we make and the public spaces we build embody our values.

On behalf of the American Institute of Architects, Austin Chapter (AIA Austin) along with our more than 1,400 local members, architects, and urban designers, I am writing in strong support of funding for Phase 1 of the I-35 Cap and Stitch project, including all roadway elements between Cesar Chavez and the Red Line. This is a rare opportunity to create a more connected, livable city.

### **A Creative City, Working Together**

Austin thrives on creativity—not only in arts and music, but in how we tackle challenges collaboratively. We applaud Our Future 35's community engagement and vision as well as City Council's strategic pursuit of sustainable funding despite daunting fiscal hurdles. This is an important moment—the proposed I-35 caps present a chance for a creative partnership aimed at reclaiming the city center and reconnecting East and West Austin.

### **A City Built for People**

For better and worse, Austin has been on a roll for decades. This is a moment to consider what we can do better. The caps are a monumental opportunity, but without local investment, the expanded I-35 will loom large, loud, and daunting to cross—deepening a divide we *should* be working to overcome.

Our choices today will shape future development along the corridor. Placing people and parks over highways encourages reinvestment that will invite pedestrians and a more robust city life. Without our investment, the highway expansion will likely attract more services and facilities geared toward automobiles. More parking. Less people.

Importantly, our investment will work to realize our major city policy goals—including ASMP 50/50, Climate Equity, and Project Connect—for future generations. We're not just creating parks and amenities; we're reclaiming the center of our city for people, bikes, and communities.

### **What We Can Afford**

We understand, given current fiscal realities, that the city will need to consider scaled-down options, such as reducing the number of caps or reducing the length of others to 800'. That said, we recommend at least a full-

length cap from Cesar Chavez to 4th, another at the proposed Hancock Red Line station, and as many as feasible in between. These are essential to ensuring vibrant, pedestrian-friendly districts with a focus toward future transit.

However, they are not enough on their own. Each cut will diminish the potential of the caps. Our goal today should be focused on keeping the full vision alive and viable by funding as many Phase 1 elements as possible. We know we cannot build everything at once—but we can lay the groundwork for what is to come.

We also know that recent policies have redirected state and federal funds that helped build projects like Dallas' Klyde Warren Park, but we should at least place ourselves in a position to capitalize on those stimuli when they return and remain prepared to act when the time comes. Even now, Dallas is advancing an additional 15 acres of deck parks, including: Klyde Warren Park Phase 2; Southern Gateway, opening Phase 1 in 2026; and the I-30 'Canyon' Park, where \$42 million in city funds were recently approved to build caps. Here in Austin, the University of Texas Board of Regents has already approved \$106 million for roadway elements supporting their proposed caps, spanning 10 to 12 acres. We should rise to that same vision and commitment.

### **Learning from Our History**

In the 1960s, Austin confronted similar crossroads. Plans were drawn for two highways—one along what is now 38th Street, another skirting the southern edge of Town Lake. Citizens spoke up, and City Council listened. Both highways were abandoned, and Town Lake became an urban treasure, beautified with public support and transformed by civic leaders like Ann and Roy Butler and Lady Bird Johnson.

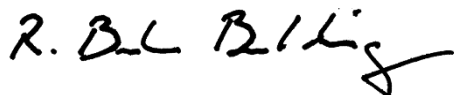
With the I-35 expansion underway, we have the opportunity to introduce something bold, lasting, and restorative. Moments like this are rare in the life of a city. We should not miss this chance to lead with creativity and courage.

### **A Creative Commitment**

We urge City Council to approve funding for all Phase 1 roadway elements between Cesar Chavez and the Red Line. I will end this with Lady Bird Johnson's declaration in her 1968 address to the American Institute of Architects:

*"Winston Churchill said, 'First we shape our buildings – and then they shape us.' And the same is true of our highways, our parks, our public buildings, the environment we create: they shape us. You are shaping people – shaping lives. And so your countrymen are looking to you for creative insights, deep compassion, bold leadership. I am sure you will give them nothing less."*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. BL Baldrige". The signature is stylized, with the first name "R." and the last name "Baldrige" written in a cursive-like script.

Burton Baldrige, FAIA  
AIA Austin President, 2025