AIA Dallas

April 17, 2023

The Honorable Eric Johnson
Dallas City Hall
1500 Marilla Street
Dallas, Texas 75201

Dear Mayor Johnson and members of the Dallas City Council:

AIA Dallas was glad to see the City pause and reflect on the **future of IH-345** through downtown Dallas. With experts in architecture, urban planning, and landscape within the organization, AIA Dallas recommends further review of what should be a generational infrastructure investment. Our organization believes that there are essential revisions that can be made to the proposed hybrid or further additional design alternatives that would improve the design for all constituencies along this important corridor.

AIA Dallas has formed an internal working subcommittee to review, study, and share comments on this process and the future options for IH-345. Based upon the enclosed City of Dallas design guidelines, we are providing the following structural critiques of the hybrid option, as presented by TxDOT, to Dallas City Council on October 19, 2022. We believe the following items merit additional study in order to develop design solutions that are more consistent with the City's design guidelines:

- **Width of Open Highway Trench**
- **Elevated and Obstructive Interchanges & Connections**
- **Development Potential & Land Use**
- **Surface Roadway Network**
- **Pedestrian Experience & Connectivity**

Additionally, TxDOT's hybrid design is based on a now **obsolete traffic study and growth projections** established before the pandemic and changes to workforce commuting patterns. This information should be revisited and updated to confirm that the proposed solution for the corridor is appropriate for changing commute and travel patterns for all modes and balances economic development and placemaking opportunities.

AIA Dallas is committed to working with its City of Dallas partners on this transformative project. More robust design solutions can help the City, its residents, and its business community achieve shared objectives. We look forward to working with the City Council, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Planning + Urban Design on a Dallas-based approach with engagement from the community members.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for additional information.

Sincerely,

Zaida Basora, FAIA
Executive Director

Kate Aoki, AIA
Board President

CC: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
Majed al-Ghafry, Assistant City Manager
Robert Perez, Assistant City Manager
Ghassan Khankarli, Director of Transportation
Julia Ryan, Director of Planning + Urban Design

Enclosures: City of Dallas Design Guidelines &
Structural Critique for the IH-345 Hybrid Option

345 Feasibility Study

Design Guidance for the Development of I-345

Texas Department of Transportation

CITY OF DALLAS

The City of Dallas requests that the following design criteria be applied to the scenarios that TxDOT develops for future improvements or reconstruction of I-345. The criteria were developed with the goal of incorporating safety, environmental sustainability, economic vitality, and housing considerations as part of all scenarios.

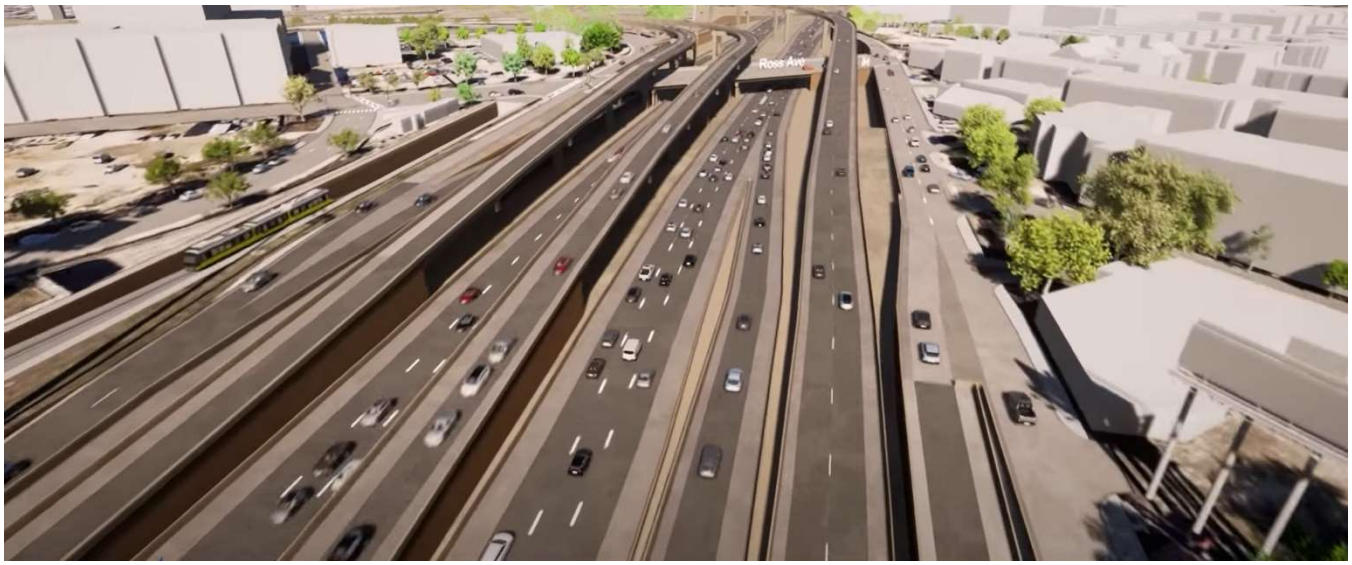
Design Criteria

1. Minimize the footprint of I-345 and related ramps, to the extent possible in applicable scenarios, to maximize future development potential along the corridor and reconnect neighborhoods. For the elevated scenario, consider running Cesar Chavez under I-345 north of Pacific to minimize right-of-way and create new opportunities for economic development along I-345.
2. Incorporate a D2 subway connection across TxDOT right-of-way in the I-345 scenarios, in line with the March 24, 2021 City Council resolution.
3. Avoid creating any new barriers between neighborhoods and seek opportunities to reconnect Downtown with Deep Ellum and Bryan Place, the State-Thomas neighborhood with the Arts District, the Cedars area with Fair Park, and Carpenter Park with surrounding neighborhoods.
4. Seek to limit the presence of on/off ramp connections to the city street grid along the I-345 corridor between Live Oak Street and Canton Street in applicable scenarios, to increase walkability between Downtown and Deep Ellum.
5. On/off ramps should follow an urban configuration and tie into or become part of the city street network.
6. I-345 scenarios should tie seamlessly into Woodall Rodgers Freeway, US 75, I-30, and I-45 with the least impact possible to neighborhood connectivity and surrounding development.
7. Incorporate complete streets and urban design elements on all new and reconstructed city streets.
8. In line with the City's Vision Zero resolution, seek to enhance safety for all modes of transportation in all scenarios.
9. Allow for strategic decking/air-right development opportunities in a depressed configuration.
10. Integrated Stormwater Management (iSWM) standards should be used to mitigate stormwater concerns. Any required underground water storage infrastructure should be seamlessly integrated into the surrounding area and be environmentally friendly.

Structural Critique for the proposed IH-345 Hybrid Option

1. Width of Open Highway Trench

While a depressed roadway is an improvement from an elevated tangle of elevated highways and ramps, the proposed depressed highway continues to sustain physical and visual barriers between the downtown communities. According to preliminary road section drawings from TxDOT (section A-A at trenched portion), the highway trench appears to be over 180 ft wide – more expansive than the width of a football field. The proposed highway in several sections has ten or more lanes, some with multi-level lanes, dividing the downtown and eastern neighborhoods even further.



Screenshot of TxDOT Dallas District - I-345 recommended alternative flyover video, May 2022, looking north along the proposed IH-345 Corridor south of Ross Avenue.

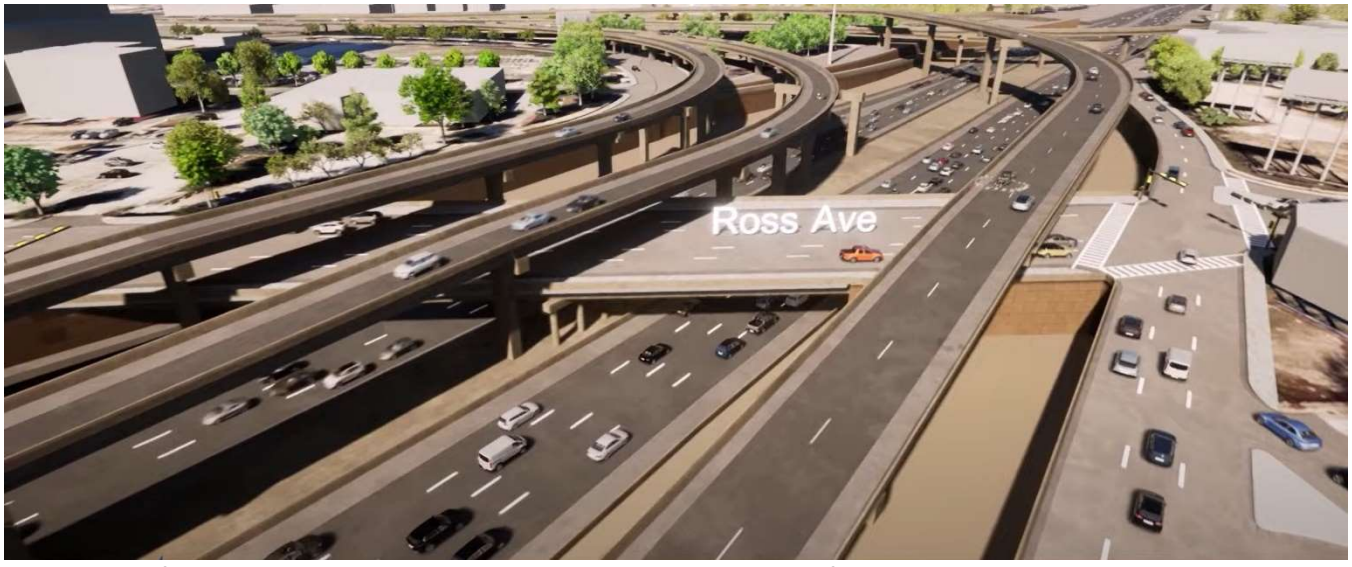
Structural Critique for the proposed IH-345 Hybrid Option

2. Elevated and Obstructive Interchanges & Connections

According to TxDOT preliminary drawings, elevated flyover ramps at several depressed portions will exist and negate the benefits of depressing the main road. The scale of interchanges between US-75, Woodall Rodgers at the northern end, and IH-30 and IH-45 at the southern end, along with additional entry/exit ramps, as designed, consumes a more significant portion of the proposed IH-345 replacement corridor than the current elevated highway. What remains are irregular parcels and limited air rights opportunities that will be difficult to improve, reducing the chance for sensible development along the corridor.

From the southern approach, the south end of the trench is not depressed enough to allow new connections between downtown and eastern downtown districts, particularly between Southern Deep Ellum and Farmer's Market south of the East Quarter of Downtown. It also severs the existing connectivity at Taylor and Henry streets.

Toward the north end, the proposed freeway lanes are below Ross Avenue. Still, a series of elevated ramps cross above this important corridor, obscuring the approach from east Dallas into the Arts District. The impact of the entire trench's width in various renderings appears to be over 350 feet, impairing any chance for a reasonable connection experience. In the end, the proposed design does not improve connections between the divided communities and, in some instances, creates new barriers.



Screenshot of TxDOT Dallas District - I-345 recommended alternative flyover video, May 2022, looking north at Ross Avenue Crossing with elevated Interchanges above connecting to Woodall Rodgers Freeway.

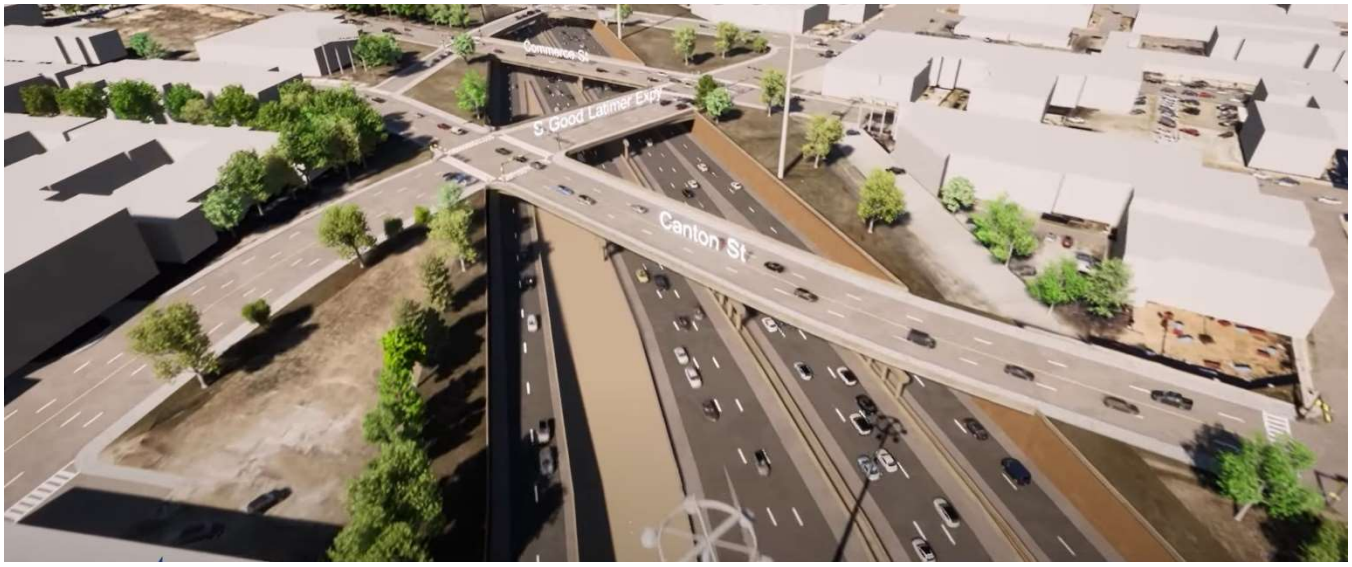
Structural Critique for the proposed IH-345 Hybrid Option

3. Development Potential & Land Use

Due to the alignment of the freeway, most of the surface streets intersect at awkward angles leaving oddly shaped land and air-right parcels. Additionally, many of these parcels front the freeway directly with no surface streets or pedestrian amenities along the edge of the ROW, which impacts the walkability of future development. The most concerning examples are crossings at Commerce, Main, and Elm, where blocks approach 900 ft in length.

The TxDOT Feasibility Study suggests ten or more "capping opportunities," which could include surface and vertical improvements, but no funding has been identified to construct any of the suggested decks. Further, foundation loads would need to be engineered and built within the roadway ROW to support the development of significant size. Improving foundations after construction would likely be cost-prohibitive and disruptive to traffic flow.

The TXDOT Feasibility Study graphics focus on the central portion of the corridor where surface streets will cross the freeway trench at grade, and efforts have been concentrated on repairing the street grid. Development potential beyond the core has been reduced due to severed street connections and additional elevated exit ramps at the interchanges. This approach would leave several sections of the corridor with a vast expanse of undevelopable areas, and the highways would remain visually as a barrier between communities.



Screenshot of TxDOT Dallas District - I-345 recommended alternative flyover video, May 2022, looking north at Canton Street and other bridges.

Structural Critique for the proposed IH-345 Hybrid Option

4. Surface Roadway Network

The local streets between Pacific and Ross look to be a vestige of existing corridors designed around the columns of the elevated freeway. The surface connections in the southern half of the corridor are relatively clean, but the northern connections are convoluted and will be difficult to navigate for both cars and pedestrians. Cesar Chavez is the most glaring example of a forced connection which creates a series of awkward intersections as the divided lanes weave back and forth across the freeway canyon.

Cesar Chavez also severely limits future connections between Carpenter Park and Deep Ellum. Even with the potential addition of a deck park between the north and southbound lanes, connections would be cumbersome at best. There appears to be no planned relationship between the Swiss/Florence connector and Cesar Chavez, even though they run parallel in close proximity - even touching at one point. This park is an existing asset that should be better leveraged for both sides of the canyon, especially given the limited funding identified for other decking opportunities.

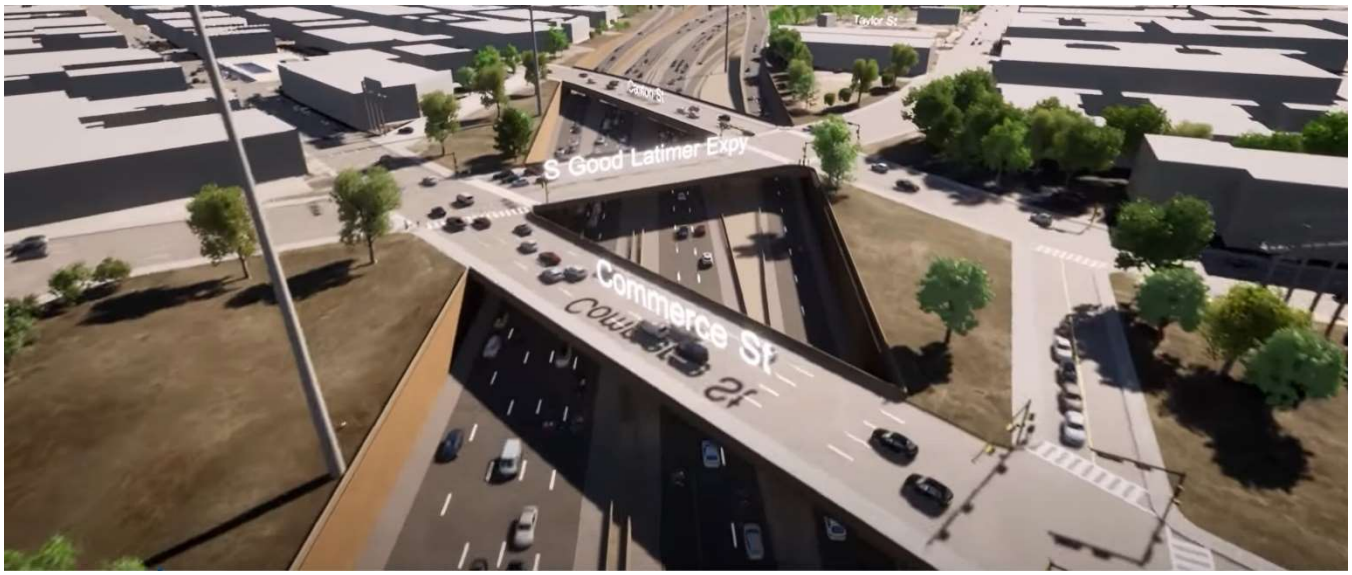
Screenshot of TxDOT Dallas District - I-345 recommended alternative flyover video, May 2022, looking north at Cesar Chavez Boulevard straddling the freeway as it approaches Live Oak Street with Carpenter Park on the left.

Structural Critique for the proposed IH-345 Hybrid Option

5. Pedestrian Experience & **Connectivity**

As noted earlier, the pedestrian experience across the highway trench is marginalized, uncomfortable, and treacherous. The flyover video shows a sidewalk of nominal width on either side of Canton, Good Latimer, Hawkins, Commerce, Main, and Pacific. As these six streets cross the trench at an angle, some of them are quite long. The quality of the experience here may impact visitors' and residents' perceptions of downtown Dallas and its connectivity to Deep Ellum.

The renderings and flyover suggest only basic sidewalks with no amenities, such as trees or vegetation, spanning over a 200-foot wide or greater depressed freeway. Research has shown increased safety for pedestrians, both real and perceived, when streetscape and trees separate traffic from pedestrians. Wider sidewalks would also increase their functional use and encourage the movement of larger groups of people, dog walkers, and parents with strollers and kids.



Screenshot of TxDOT Dallas District - I-345 recommended alternative flyover video, May 2022, looking south at Commerce Street Bridge over the IH-345 depressed trench.

Next-Generation Traffic Study

The last traffic study was generated before the Covid-19 Pandemic and significant changes in workforce commuting patterns. A new traffic study should be performed with current data that acknowledges the changes in workforce commuting and multimodal traveling patterns. Particularly important is revisiting the statistical needs for throughput serving the southern Dallas communities to employment opportunities in and north of the city.