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Dear Client:

In a national presentation closed to the news media, Austin mayor Steve Adler outlined Austin's actions preserving the environment as it relates to the city's transportation policy. As he put it: "Preserving our environment is a big priority in Austin. It's huge. But most Austinites, stuck in rush hour traffic every day, will tell you traffic is the most immediate, in-your-face challenge." Let's look at some quotes he made available.

First of all, the mayor said "we're going to need to **reduce our transportation carbon footprint** if we're going to make a big difference fighting climate change." He ticked off a number of steps already taken, including passing "the biggest bond in city history. **It was bigger in fact than all the mobility bonds in the previous 20 years.** And it passed with 60% of the vote."

He continued: "We're making better use of our existing roads, making them more efficient and safer. **We're putting scores of millions of dollars into active transportation; bikes, trails and sidewalks.** We're managing demand by accurately recognizing the cost of parking and dynamically pricing toll lanes, paid for by automobiles and free for transit."

"The lessons we're learning are clear," he told the C40 Climate Summit. "**Where we offer multiple, diverse transportation options, Austinites get out of their cars and ride bikes, take buses, and even walk.**"

"**Where we don't offer those choices – where we don't have protected bike lanes, frequent bus service, even sidewalks – people stay in their cars,** Adler said. So, mayor, what is in Austin's mobility future? "**Our challenge is to expand choices.**"

For a picture of what he's talking about, you need to look no further than the proposal announced Tuesday for the area known as The Drag, adjacent to UTAustin. **It will reduce car travel to one lane in each direction, while adding bus-only and bike lanes – with expanded sidewalks, eliminating parking** along one-mile of Guadalupe St. At a cost of \$33.7 million. To be sure, this is a unique area with tens of thousands of students within walking distance of UTAustin and shuttle buses bringing in others from greater distances. But it is an example of the move to allocate city tax dollars to implement the overall plan to curtail car traffic.

Speaking of city policies, six policymakers will be asking for your vote next year – five members of the ten-member Austin City Council as well as the mayor. You’ll recall that when this current council was seated in an election implementing a single-member district approach, they drew straws to determine which councilmembers were elected in staggered years. This prevented a complete turnover in membership at any given election. The next election is almost a year away, but there is already activity on this front.

The election for the six seats will be in November, 2018. While a year is almost a lifetime in politics, the **current councilmembers and the mayor are all indicating they will seek re-election** in their respective districts. And, you can be sure possible replacements are lining up to challenge them.

This will be the first time all but one of these councilmembers will face the voters after taking the oath of office. **So, in some respects, it could turn out to be a referendum on council actions of the past few years** when the 10-1 district system was implemented. The other members of the council not on the upcoming ballot faced voters recently, and a couple of them were defeated.

Who are the councilmembers who will be seeking re-election? As of this writing they are **Ora Houston, Sabino “Pio” Renteria, Ann Kitchen, Ellen Troxclair,** and the only carry-over from the previous at-large system, **Kathie Tovo.** Mayor **Steve Adler** will join them on the re-election ballot in 11 months.

An ardent opponent of City mobility policies – especially as they limit car travel in favor of buses and bikes – **Mike Levy asks how removing vehicular lanes reduces congestion** (as mentioned in the previous story). As he put it: **“What will be fun will be to listen to the mayor and councilmembers running for re-election in 2018 try to justify this.”**

To bolster his concerns, Levy passed along this quote from a city traffic engineer who worked on the Guadalupe Street plan. **Lee Austin: “I’ll be super blunt. (The plan) will probably not help vehicle traffic. It’s a tough decision to make here, but Austin as a whole has made a decision that we don’t want to prioritize giant, multilane roads.”**

Levy’s feisty response: **“Yougottabekidding. Was there an election where Austin as a whole voted on this?”** Hang on. Traffic concerns will likely be Topic-A in the 2018 election.

Roadway congestion will only grow worse by the day between now and November 2018, as new people move to the Austin area. Mayor Adler in his presentation to the C40 Climate Summit we mentioned in the previous item, also said city mobility policies will probably be enhanced: **“The scale of our thinking does not yet meet the scale of our challenges. That’s our next challenge, to scale up our ambition.”**

About two years ago, the head of Austin’s electric utility, Larry Weis, left Austin for a high-paying job as the CEO/General Manager of Seattle’s electric-power utility. On his way out Austin’s door, he blistered the Austin City Council’s policies and actions. These were his bosses, the ones who hired him to head Austin Energy. Now, Weis is out of his Seattle job.

The Seattle Times reported Seattle’s new mayor, who was sworn in November 28, said this week she has accepted Weis’ resignation, saying they “**reached a ‘mutual decision’ he would leave.**” **She said she came to a conclusion that a change was necessary.** Weis was Seattle’s best paid city employee -- \$340,000/year.

The newspaper reported Seattle’s utility, City Light, had been bombarded with **complaints over billing, and had a backlog of more than 12,000 complaints.** It also said there had been “challenges” in the workplace environment.

Several Seattle councilmembers reportedly were concerned about his comments upon leaving Austin – where he was quoted as describing **some members of the Austin City Council as naïve and argued for Austin Energy to be run by an independent board,** rather than the Austin City Council.

Coincidentally, (maybe ironically) Weis succeeded **Jorge Carrasco** as City Light’s CEO and General Manager, who left after he made some unauthorized contracts. You may recognize that name. **Carrasco is a former Austin Assistant City Manager.** (You think Seattle will look to a third Austin city staffer as the new head of City Light?)

Another personnel note: the current director of public affairs for Mayor Steve Adler, Amy Everhart, will join the staff of the Austin Board of Realtors (ABoR) in January. She previously worked for Mayor Lee Leffingwell. At ABoR, she will manage communications and government affairs employees. A search for a new ABoR CEO is underway, to follow Paul Hilgers year-end departure.

While on the topic of Austin real estate matters, are you aware an Austin home-grown company surpassed more than \$240 billion in sales – that’s right, *billion* – for the first ten months of this year. Keller Williams Realty, an Austin-based franchise, set that mark.

Don’t jump to the conclusion those sales were in the hot Austin market. Oh, no. **Keller Williams is the world’s largest real estate franchise with more than 175,000 associates in the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia.** It has 240-plus employees here in its corporate HQ. And, as a result of Keller’s 16% year-over-year growth during 2017’s first ten months, **the local employees just split \$6.3 million in profit-sharing bonuses,** over and above their salaries.

Two candidates have emerged as finalists for Austin City Manager. Both are current city administrators. One is a former Director of Public Works in Austin, Howard Lazarus. The other, Spencer Cronk, heads up city government in Minneapolis. They will be in Austin next week to begin a final round of interviews and meetings.

Austin has been without a permanent city manager for more than a year. **Marc Ott** left in September 2016 for a job in Washington, DC. The search has been somewhat laborious. But, it is nearing a **conclusion if the Austin City Council decides to hire one of these two finalists**. The Council made the decision to narrow the list of finalists to Lazarus, 61, and Cronk, 38. Both men will now meet again with the Council, city staffers, and various public interest groups. A final decision is expected before Christmas.

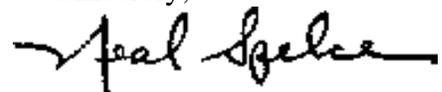
Baylor University is back in the good graces with a higher education accrediting agency, following a scandal that led to the firing of president Ken Starr, head football coach Art Briles and the departure of the university's athletic director. It was announced this week that Baylor is no longer under a warning sanction by its accrediting agency.

The Waco Tribune reported the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges met this week and **lifted the sanction that was handed down a year ago in the wake of Baylor's sexual assault scandal**. The action was taken after two audits, including one from the accrediting agency, verified more than 100 improvements Baylor made during the past 18 months to its institutional response to sexual assault.

The scandal engulfed the football team that was found to be operating "above the rules." Another onsite review will be conducted this spring.

Dr. Louis Overholster was reminded the other day about a football coach who said of his players: they have to be smart enough to understand the game, but they also have to be dumb enough to think what they are doing is important!

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher