To: Mayor Adler; Council Members Harper-Madison, Garza, Renteria, Casar, Kitchen, Flannigan, Pool, Ellis, Tovo, Alter; City Manager Cronk; Assistant City Manager Fiandaca; Director Spillar

Re: Sustaining Public Health and Community Resiliency During the COVID-19 Pandemic Through a “Slow Streets” Program and Other Measures

Date: April 22nd, 2020

Dear Mayor Adler, Austin City Council Members, City Manager Cronk, Assistant City Manager Fiandaca, and Director Spillar,

We write to applaud you for your strong leadership and swift action in the face of the current pandemic and to urge you to immediately take the below further actions to address the growing mental and physical health crisis in Austin related to COVID-19. We greatly appreciate the steps you have already taken to support safe opportunities for walking and biking, including the recent reallocation of road space on Riverside Drive and on the Longhorn Dam bridge, and are ready to support you on the next critical steps.

Austinites are experiencing unprecedented hardship. Pandemic-related stress and the necessary shelter-in-place order has, according to local medical institutions, created skyrocketing mental health impacts. Meanwhile, despite the enormous health benefits of outdoor exercise, residents are being discouraged from crowding in parks and trails but have few alternative opportunities for safe exercise, meaning that park and trail use remains at dangerous levels. This situation must be addressed now to prevent the crisis escalating still further.

Therefore, our organizations call on you to immediately implement an emergency “Slow Streets” program that facilitates safe, socially-distanced outdoor activity by prioritizing walking and bicycling on neighborhood streets while allowing local through-traffic. At a moment of historically-low traffic levels, this program, recently implemented in Oakland and being considered in other cities, could utilize non-arterial, transit-free streets, equitably distributed across every Council District and identified as All Ages and Abilities routes in the Bicycle Master Plan or recommended by community members. This crucial preventative measure will greatly mitigate public mental and physical impacts, reduce potential COVID-19 transmission, relieve pressure on parks and trails, increase community resilience, and enhance post-crisis citywide recovery.

Furthermore, in response to the sudden rise in dangerous vehicle speeds and increased pedestrian and bicycle activity, we also call upon you to:

- Create temporary bicycle lanes on Congress Avenue north of Riverside Drive to the State Capitol
- Consider reallocating partial/full road space for walking and bicycling on other currently unsafe streets and near crowded trails and sidewalks, as was recently implemented on Riverside Drive and on the Longhorn Dam bridge
- Disable pedestrian push buttons at intersections to eliminate the need to touch surfaces, while still catering for the needs of those with disabilities
- Implement Lead Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) beyond downtown
- Retime traffic lights citywide to discourage speeding, shorten pedestrian wait times, and reduce crowding at intersections

For COVID-19 street-related measures being carried out by cities, see https://bit.ly/2KdPjr7
Though the need for Slow Streets and other measures is critical we understand that City capacity is stretched and implementing the above may be challenging. That’s why our organizations and our citywide volunteer networks are ready to help, continuing the precedents set by City leaders and Austin Transportation and other departments’ quick and impactful response to the crisis.

Thank you for your service to the people of Austin. Together, we will get through this, emerging as a stronger community than we were before.

Sincerely,

Adam Greenfield, Board President, Walk Austin (lead organization)
Joanna Wolaver, Board President, Austin Outside
Colin Wallis, CEO, Austin Parks Foundation
Heidi Anderson, CEO, The Trail Foundation
Ivey Kaiser, Executive Director, Shoal Creek Conservancy
George Cofer, CEO, Hill Country Conservancy
Heath Riddles, CEO, Pease Park Conservancy
Sarah Story, Executive Director, UMLAUF Sculpture Garden and Museum
Melinda Chow, Executive Director, Austin Youth River Watch
Sarah Tober, Executive Director, Scenic Austin
David Todd, Co-Conspirator, Blunn Creek Partnership
Charli Krause, Program Director, Generation SERVE
Jim Wick, Executive Director, MoveATX
Chris Riley, Board President, Bike Austin
Christopher Stanton, Founder and Executive Director, Ghisallo Cycling Initiative
Yellow Bike Project
Jay Blazek Crossley, Executive Director, Farm&City
Kathy Sokolic, Chair, Vision Zero ATX and Central Texas Families For Safe Streets
Tom Wald, Executive Director, Red Line Parkway Initiative
Luke Metzger, Executive Director, Environment Texas
Mateo Barnstone, Executive Director, Congress For the New Urbanism Central Texas
Ted Siff, Principal, Creating Common Ground
Sinclair Black, Principal, Black + Vernooy Architects
Heyden Black Walker, Chair, Board of Directors, Reconnect Austin
Jordan Linhart, President, UT Austin Community and Regional Planning Student Organization
Kris Cue, Chairperson, Deaf-Blind Service Center of Austin
Delia Jervier, Executive Director, Alzheimer’s Association, Capital of Texas
Amy McGeady, CEO, Stronger Austin
Tracee Henneke, Director of Relationships & Giving, Mobile Loaves & Fishes
Austin Dennis, Board President, Blackland Community Development Corporation