

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Cecelia Hartley](#)
Subject: FW: The Sunset Review of the Texas Department of Transportation
Date: Thursday, December 01, 2016 8:03:19 AM

From: Lauren Cresswell
Sent: Wednesday, November 30, 2016 6:21 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission
Subject: The Sunset Review of the Texas Department of Transportation

Dear Sunset Commission,

I am a citizen of the City of Austin and an active member of the local advocacy community focused on transportation-related issues. I have participated in numerous public open houses, meetings, and presentations hosted by TxDOT on varied infrastructure projects.

I commend many of the findings of this review, and would like to submit additional areas of consideration by the Commission.

1. Page 1 of the draft report notes that, "TxDOT needs to get out of its crisis mode mentality developed in previous times of change and funding uncertainty, and implement a more proactive and streamlined approach to delivering highway projects from beginning to end". There is a fundamental flaw in this statement – use of the limiting phrase "highway projects". TxDOT no longer bears the name of Highway Department. Its mission, vision, and scope of responsibilities must accurately reflect the transportation infrastructure needs of a much more varied system of modes. TxDOT Districts throughout the state of Texas include networks for mass transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. It is imperative that TxDOT's scope expand to a multimodal lens. Neither TxDOT's stated mission/vision nor their most recent 2016 Strategic Plan make comprehensive mention of transit. The agency currently lacks the administrative structure to support the multimodal approach to transportation infrastructure that is vital for the health and safety of more localized and regional networks. I would like to suggest that the Commission consider recommendations to TxDOT that include creation of policies, procedures, and departmental functions that begin to address this deficiency.
2. Previous reviews of TxDOT found them lacking in sufficient and effective public engagement activities. As a result, TxDOT has made efforts to increase both the frequency with which they make contact with the public, and the means through which the public can provide input on projects. This, however, merely reflects an increase in quantity. I submit, as a member of the public with frequent contact with TxDOT staff through public engagement activities, that there is still significantly lacking quality. There remains a great deal of conflicting and confusing information received by the public from TxDOT. This includes inconsistencies in project details, inaccurate project timelines, egregious delays in receiving requested information, and inappropriately short windows of time in which the public can comment on particular projects. It has seemed consistently that TxDOT has touted their increase in frequency as the remedy to their lacking public engagement. This, however, has done little to affect the perception that many or all TxDOT projects have a "predetermined outcome" that valuable public input does not impact. This is particularly problematic in procedures that are federally mandated **not** to be predetermined, like in cases of NEPA environmental reviews. I implore the Sunset Commission to continue to scrutinize the quality of TxDOT's public engagement policies and processes.
3. TxDOT has not made sufficient progress on addressing safety on state roadways. The

agency lacks a plan to eliminate death and serious injuries that occur in traffic. Localities within Texas are taking steps to adopt plans guided by Vision Zero-minded policies. If TxDOT Districts are to work effectively with regional and local governing bodies, the agency should have a plan to improve traffic safety. I request that the Commission's recommendations to TxDOT include the creation of a Vision Zero Plan. This should include a focus on working more closely with public health departments, higher-quality data on crash rates and better data sharing between agencies, and a focus on developing infrastructure projects that prioritize safe mobility for all road users – drivers, transit riders, cyclists, and pedestrians.

4. I am deeply concerned that the report frequently speaks to lack of fiscal oversight and adherence to stated reporting policies and procedures. The report cites difficulty in tracking spending related to private management consulting contracts and subsequent monitoring of impact of said services, lack of oversight of construction contract performance and project scopes, lack of guidance for districts in handling billion dollar alternative contracts, among others. Given these findings, and the understanding that budgets will be increasing significantly in the coming years, **I suggest that Sunset Commission reviews of TxDOT be executed more frequently – every six years (2023) instead of the recommended twelve years (2029).** It seems now more important than ever to maintain consistent and frequent oversight over TxDOT's actions, procedures, and outcomes in order to ensure that budgetary influxes and taxpayer dollars are not grossly mismanaged.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Lauren Cresswell

Lauren Cresswell
[Black + Vernooy Architecture and Urban Design](#)
208 W. 4th St, Ste. 3A
Austin, TX 78701
Office 512-474-1632
reconnectaustin.com