AUS AEDP Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) Commitment Summary

The FAA recently approved the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the AUS Airport Expansion and Development Program (AEDP) and issued a FONSI in response. This document summarizes the commitments that were stated in the NEPA and FONSI documents.

Number of Gates

The Proposed Action called for no more than 20 new gates. Any increase beyond that number will require an amendment to the EA and a re-run of noise and air quality modeling.

Air Quality

The Airport currently has initiatives outlined in the TCEQ's Austin-Round Rock 1997 Eight-Hour Ozone Flex Plan that was approved in June 2008. Measures implemented at the Airport include alternative fuel usage for the shuttle bus fleets, airline equipment electrification, preconditioned air and ground power units on each electric-powered jet bridge, public vehicle chargers, airport vehicle electrification, and the development of light rail from downtown Austin to the airport.

The contractor shall be required to pay special attention to dust control when earthwork or hauling operations are in progress, and/or when wind or weather conditions cause excessive blowing of dust.

Biological Resources

The quality of stormwater runoff would be maintained at current regulatory levels in accordance with state and local requirements so as to protect freshwater mussel species and to not result in the destruction or adverse modification of Ecologically Significant Stream Segments or Critical Habitat within the General Study Area.

Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) provided a letter with guidelines and Best Management Practices (BMPs) as part of their comments on the AEDP. Their comments are provided below:

Impacts to Vegetation/Wildlife Habitat – TPWD recommends reducing the amount of vegetation proposed for clearing if possible and minimizing clearing of native vegetation, particularly mature native trees, riparian vegetation, and shrubs to the greatest extent practicable. Vegetation management should include removing invasive species early on while allowing the existing native plants to revegetate the disturbed areas. TPWD recommends

referring to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Native Plant Database for regionally adapted native species that would be appropriate for landscaping and revegetation.

TPWD recommends that the areas proposed for disturbance be surveyed for the above-listed plant SGCN (and rare vegetation community) where suitable habitat is present. Field surveys should be performed by a qualified biologist familiar with the identification of these species. Surveys should be conducted when these species are most detectable and identifiable (usually during their respective flowering periods), and disturbance should be avoided during construction to the extent feasible. If these species are found in the path of construction, this office should be contacted for further coordination and possible salvage of plants and/or seeds for seed banking. Plants not in the direct path of construction should be protected by markers or fencing and by instructing construction crews to avoid any harm.

Monarch Butterfly - In December 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing for the monarch butterfly (Danaus plexippus) was warranted; however, listing was precluded by higher priority listing actions. Currently, the monarch butterfly is a candidate for listing and USFWS will review the species status annually until a proposal for listing is developed. Significant declines in the population of migrating monarch butterflies have led to widespread concern about this species and the long-term persistence of the North American monarch migration. As part of an international conservation effort TPWD has developed the Texas Monarch and Native Pollinator Conservation Plan, and one of the broad categories of action in this plan is to augment larval feeding and adult nectaring opportunities.

TPWD recommends incorporating pollinator conservation and management into the revegetation and maintenance plan for this project, such as promoting growth of native flowering species throughout the growing season. TPWD recommends revegetation efforts include planting or seeding native milkweed (Asclepias spp.) and nectar plants as funding and seed availability allow. Information about monarch biology, migration, and butterfly gardening can be found on the Monarch Watch website.

TPWD advises against planting the non-native milkweed species black swallow-wort (Cynanchum louiseae) and pale swallow-wort (C. rossicum). Monarch butterflies will lay eggs on these plant species, but the larvae are unable to feed and complete their life cycle. Additionally, these plant species can be highly invasive. TPWD also advises against planting the nonnative tropical milkweed (Asclepias curassavica), a popular commercial nursery milkweed that can persist year-round in southern states. The yearround persistence of tropical milkweed fosters greater transmission of the protozoan Ophryocystis elektroscirrha (OE), increasing the likelihood that monarchs become infected with the debilitating parasite.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) - TPWD recommends excluding vegetation clearing activities during the general bird nesting season, March 15 through September 15, to avoid adverse impacts to breeding birds. If clearing vegetation during the migratory bird nesting season is

unavoidable, TPWD recommends surveying the area proposed for disturbance to ensure that no nests with eggs or young will be disturbed by operations. TPWD recommends performing active bird nest surveys no more than five days prior to planned clearing or construction. TPWD recommends that a minimum 150-foot buffer of vegetation remain around any active nests that are observed prior to disturbance. Any vegetation (such as trees, shrubs, and grasses) or other open areas where occupied nests are located should not be disturbed until the eggs have hatched and the young have fledged.

Austin Energy Substation - While raptor electrocutions at substations are uncommon, smaller birds such as songbirds and corvids may perch, roost or nest in substations, causing electrocution and outage risks. For new substations, a combination of framing and covering is the most effective method for preventing bird (and other animal) contacts with the substation.

Texas Map Turtle - TPWD recommends implementing the following BMPs to avoid and/or minimize potential impacts to the Texas map turtle that could occur from the construction of the proposed project:

- Avoid impacts to snags and logs as Texas map turtles like to use these for basking.

- TPWD recommends paying particular attention to gravel bars or riffle habitat in streams around where construction-related disturbance may occur. TPWD recommends avoiding impacts to gravel bars and riffle habitat in the project area.

- During construction, trucks and equipment should use existing bridge or culvert structures to cross creeks, and equipment staging areas should be located in previously disturbed areas outside of riparian corridors.

- Texas map turtles come to shore to nest and nest along sand bars and other sandy areas that provide protection to the clutch. TPWD recommends avoiding disturbance of these types of areas to avoid disturbing nesting turtles or their nests.

- TPWD recommends avoiding construction during the breeding and nesting season of this species (spring and summer).

Hazardous Materials

Hazardous materials are present within the limits of construction and must be managed according to federal, state and local regulations. Impacted media management could include coordination with the Department of Defense, TCEQ and the City of Austin. Groundwater and soils are impacted by aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) which will require additional coordination as regulations are developing.

Historical, Archaeological, Architectural, and Cultural Resources

Texas Historical Commission (THC) approved a construction monitoring strategy for the west airfield components of the project. Any archaeological resources discovered during construction will be reported to the FAA and the THC, evaluated for NRHP-eligibility, and assessed for possible effects under Section 106.

Environmental, in coordination with Planning, will work to coordinate an archaeological survey prior to construction of the west airfield improvements to prevent any slowdowns during construction that may occur as a result of the monitoring.

Noise

The noise analysis in the EA were conducted for 20 new gates and resulted in no areas having greater than 1.5 dB increase in DNL over the No Action Alternative. If more than 20 gates are proposed to be constructed, the noise analysis will need to be re-run and could cause some areas to have a greater than 1.5 dB DNL change, prompting mitigation measures being needed.

Traffic

No mitigation measures were discussed in the EA or the FONSI, however the EA states that coordination between the Department of Aviation, City of Austin, and TxDOT would identify future roadway and/or signalization improvements at the SH71 intersections with Spirit of Texas Drive and with Presidential Boulevard.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Project does not include any acquisition of land, relocation of residences or businesses, involve off-airport construction, or cause significant environmental impacts that would affect minority and/or low-income populations.

Children's Health

Construction noise would not affect children or disrupt learning activities at nearby schools, nor are significant noise impacts expected at locations where children are likely to congregate within the General Study Area.

Wetlands

Three (3) potential wetlands were identified in the area of the new substation and utility lines leading north away from the substation. Utility poles in need of replacement or upgrade would be installed along the existing utility pole alignment and installed in the same ground locations as the existing pole locations to avoid the potential wetland areas. No trenching would be required for installation of these new overhead electrical lines.

The substation location was modified so it would a potential wetland and its buffer area. Construction of the new electrical ductbanks west of the substation, which would be placed underground within the aircraft operations area (AOA) to avoid safety issues with aircraft operations, would occur in areas where no potential wetlands occur.

Water Resources

TPWD recommends the use of BMPs for riparian areas to minimize impacts on mussels (as well as all fish species which may serve as the mussels' larval host). BMPs would include measures such as avoiding construction during fish and mussel spawning periods and use of double silt fences and doubling soil stabilization measures along the banks to avoid increasing the turbidity of the creek or river. If mussel populations are present within the limits of the proposed project area, those populations should be protected from disturbance to the greatest extent possible. If impacts to the Colorado River or Onion Creek (including the banks) are anticipated as part of this project, then TPWD recommends contacting this office as additional permits may be required.

TPWD recommends implementing beneficial management practices (BMPs) to prevent erosion and sedimentation into the Colorado River and Onion Creek. Erosion and sediment control measures include temporary or permanent seeding (with native plants), mulching, earth dikes, silt fences, sediment traps, and sediment basins. Examples of post-construction BMPs include vegetation systems (biofilters) such as grass filter strips and vegetated swales as well as retention basins capable of treating any additional runoff. Please also refer to the General Construction Recommendations section of this letter for erosion and seed/mulch stabilization materials TPWD recommends utilizing and avoiding. Erosion controls and sediment runoff control measures should be installed prior to construction and maintained until disturbed areas are permanently revegetated using site-specific native vegetation. Measures should be properly installed to effectively minimize the amount of sediment and other debris entering the waterway.

All waterways and associated floodplains, riparian corridors, springs, and wetlands, regardless of their jurisdictional status, provide valuable wildlife habitat and should be protected to the maximum extent possible. Natural buffers contiguous to any wetlands or aquatic systems should remain undisturbed to preserve wildlife cover, food sources, and travel corridors. During

construction, trucks and equipment should use existing bridge or culvert structures to cross creeks, and equipment staging areas should be located in previously disturbed areas outside of riparian corridors. Destruction of inert microhabitats in waterways such as snags, brush piles, fallen logs, creek banks, pools, and gravel stream bottoms should also be avoided, as these provide habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species and their food sources.

Lighting

TPWD recommends committing to dark-sky lighting practices for the proposed Austin Energy Substation and any other project elements that will require lighting. TPWD recommends implementing the following BMPs:

- When lighting is added, minimize sky glow by focusing light downward, with full cutoff luminaires to avoid light emitting above the horizontal.
- Use the minimum amount of night-time lighting needed for safety and security.
- Use dark-sky friendly lighting that is on only when needed, down-shielded, as bright as needed, and minimizing blue light emissions.

Appropriate lighting technologies and BMPs can be found on the International Dark-Sky Association website or the McDonald Observatory website.

TPWD General Construction Recommendations

TPWD recommends the judicious use and placement of sediment control fence to exclude wildlife from the construction areas. In many cases, sediment control fence placement for the purposes of controlling erosion and protecting water quality can be modified minimally to also provide the benefit of excluding wildlife access to construction areas. The exclusion fence should be buried at least six inches and be at least 24 inches high. The exclusion fence should be maintained for the life of the project and only removed after the construction is completed and the disturbed site has been revegetated with site-specific native species. Construction personnel should be encouraged to examine the inside of the exclusion area daily to determine if any wildlife species have been trapped inside the area of impact and provide safe egress opportunities prior to initiation of construction activities. TPWD recommends that any open trenches or excavation areas be covered overnight and/or inspected every morning to ensure no wildlife species have been trapped. For open trenches and excavated pits, install escape ramps at an angle of less than 45 degrees (1:1) in areas left uncovered. Also, inspect excavation areas for trapped wildlife prior to refilling.

For soil stabilization and/or revegetation of disturbed areas within the proposed project area, TPWD recommends erosion and seed/mulch stabilization materials that avoid entanglement

hazards to snakes and other wildlife species. Because the mesh found in many erosion control blankets or mats pose an entanglement hazard to wildlife, TPWD recommends the use of no-till drilling, hydromulching and/or hydroseeding due to a reduced risk to wildlife. If erosion control blankets or mats will be used, the product should not contain netting, but if it must contain netting it should contain loosely woven, natural fiber netting in which the mesh design allows the threads to move, therefore allowing expansion of the mesh openings. TPWD recommends avoiding the use of plastic mesh matting.

Impervious vehicular areas, such as roads, sidewalks, and parking areas, should not impede natural surface water drainage. TPWD recommends Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) to manage and treat stormwater runoff before discharging into nearby waterways through limiting the amount of connected impervious cover, using permeable or porous pavement, and directing runoff into rain gardens, vegetated swales, retention or detention ponds, or similar pre-treatment areas. When designing roads or parking areas with curbs, consider using Type I or Type III curbs to provide a gentle slope to enable turtles and small animals to get out of roadways.