lhe Open Page

Barton Skyway bridge, extension draws support, opposition

Against and why

By THE BARTON HILLS-HORSESHOE BEND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

After extensive public hearings and research, the Austin Tomorrow Ongoing Committee, the Urban Transportation Commission, the City Environmental Quality Board, the City Planning Commission, and, on a 5-2 vote, the City Council, have all disapproved the building of a bridge across Barton Creek linking Barton Skyway with the MOPAC expressway. We are homeowners in Barton Hills-Horseshoe Bend who also oppose the bridge. In 1975, 900 Barton Hills homeowners were polled door-to-door and signatures gathered protesting the bridge. Eighty-four percent opposed its construction, while 10 percent favored it, and percent had no opinion. Admittedly, some sentiment has changed over the years. Horseshoe Bend has been developed and apartments have been built on both sides of Barton Creek.

ABOUT 50 PERCENT of the registered voters in the two Barton Hills precincts (325-342) voted i the primaries at the Barton Hills Elementary School on May 6. Of these 1,565 voters, 593 favored the bridge in a straw poll, 327 were opposed, 127 were undecided and 518 did not participate. This indicates that many new Barton Hills residents have not made up their minds about the bridge. We therefore offer the following reasons why we are opposed to its construction.

A major arterial street through a residential area tends to drastically alter its character. Increased traffic flow, noise, air pollution and the ever present danger to children make homes bordering on the thoroughfare or on feeder streets undesirable for family living. As property values decline, economic pressures lead to commercialization of the street. A gradual process, it is nonetheless inexorable and has happened many times in Austin neighborhoods over the past 30 years.

The completion of a Barton Skyway bridge would funnel truck and automobile traffic from South Austin between Oltorf and William Cannon Drive, the Zilker School area and the north side of Barton Creek through our quiet residential neigh-Drive. The Expressway and Major Arterial Plan (EMAP) adopted by the City Council in 1969, and updated in 1973, calls for Barton Skyway, Lightsey Road and Woodward Avenue to become a continuous thoroughfare from MOPAC to IH35. This would be the only east-west thoroughfare between Barton Springs road and Ben White Boulevard. Since 1973 construction has proceeded between South Lamar and South 1st.

IN 1975 THE DEPARTMENT of Urban Transportation estimated that as soon as the bridge was opened in 1979-80, traffic on Barton Skyway would increase from 3,000 vehicles daily to 7,000; the extensive residential and apartment development i South Austin and on the north side of Barton Creek since 1975 undoubtedly makes this estimate a conservative one. The 1976 average daily traffic figure for Barton Skyway west of Lamar was 4,770.

To anyone driving Barton Skyway, it is immedicess to and from driveways and feeder streets is

extremely dangerous. Clearly these flaws will not be corrected by sidewalks, four-way stop signs at Cedarview or a traffic light at the intersection of Barton Skyway and Barton Hills Drive. Heavy traffic flow on these two streets will be dangerous for young children who have to cope with morning rush hour traffic in going to Barton Hills Elementary School. Also, children board and disembark from school buses on Barton Skyway.

CITY MANAGER DAN Davidson recommended to the City Council in September 1977 that the bridge be built without the Lightsey -Woodard connection to IH35. In an article on the bridge, Joe Ternus, head of Urban Transportation, commented: "I don't think it's necessary or desirable to have that street and bridge hook up as a crosstown thoroughfare. If we make adequate improvements to Ben White and Loop 360, we don't need another east-west thoroughfare." However, Dick Lillie, the city planning director, disagreed on this point, saying: "Our east-west circulation in Austin is terrible. You need a crosstown street about every mile and we just don't have that" (Austin American Statesman, Oct. 27, 1977). Even if the Lightsey — Woodard extension were deleted from the next updated expressway and major arterial plan, there is no assurance that it will not be put back in the next revised plan after the bridge is finished. In our opinion, if a \$1.6 million bridge is built, the few remaining gaps in the connection to IH35 will be completed as originally proposed. Moreover, even without the connection, Barton Skyway would have to carry heavy traffic from Oltorf, Manchaca and Lamar.

The bridge and traffic will also detract from the quiet, natural atmosphere of Barton Creek Greenbelt Park. The intrusion would have a visual as well as a physical impact on the creek for a significant portion of its length, including Campbell's

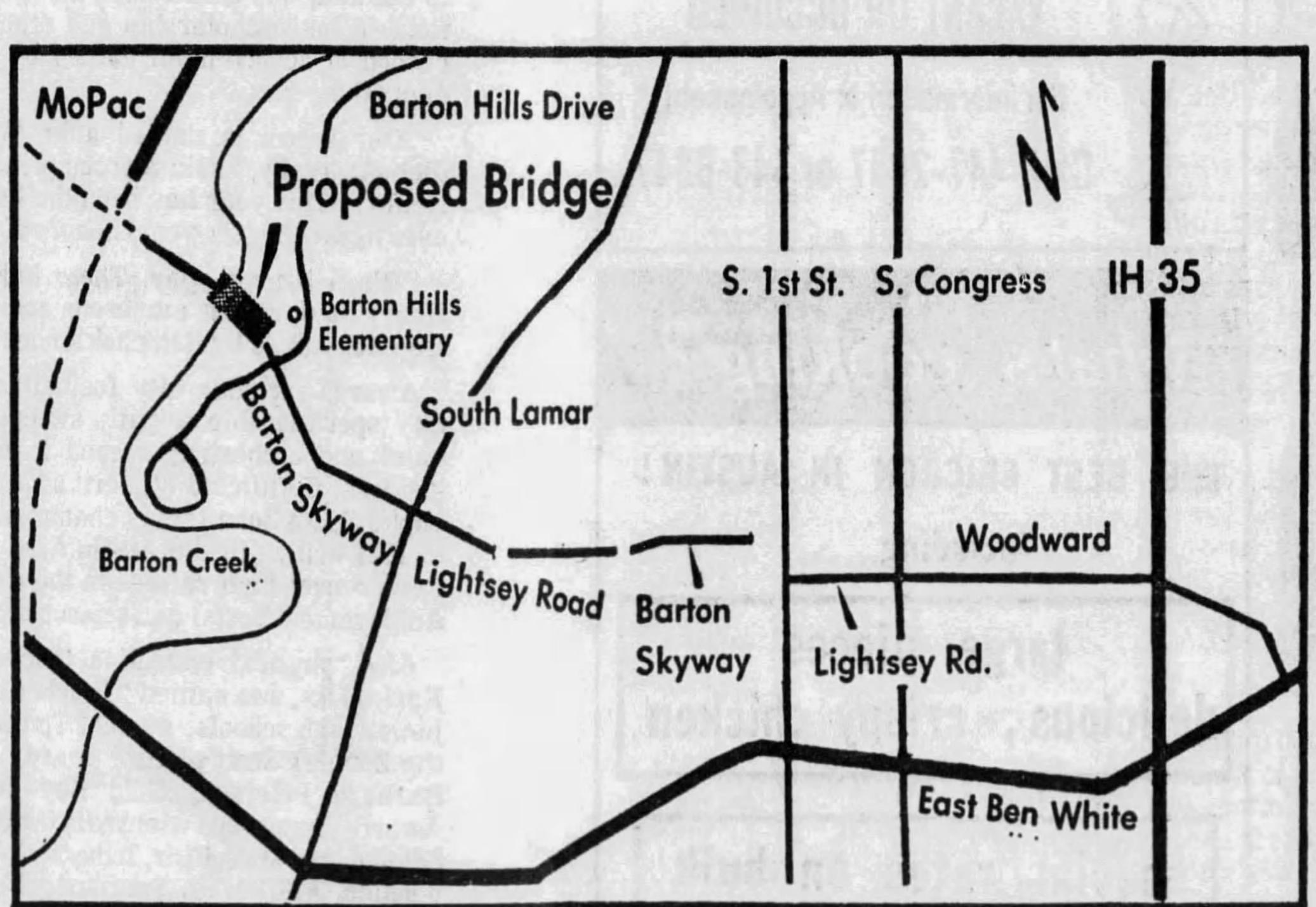
AT PRESENT THERE are two routes to MOPAC from our area: South Lamar to West 1st Street and Robert E. Lee to Barton Springs and Bee Caves road. The South Lamar route is almost borhood on Barton Skyway and Barton Hills two miles shorter than going through Zilker Park but is presently over-crowded. There are a number of approved street and bridge projects which will greatly reduce this traffic, making South Lamar a more viable alternative for our neighborhood. The major ones are the IH35 access road bridges across Town Lake, the renovation of the Congress Avenue Bridge, and the completion of MOPAC and Loop 360.

> An alternative access to MOPAC for Barton Hills residents will shortly exist when it is extended to Loop 360. Although longer than the direct access via the Barton Skyway Bridge, we feel many people would be willing to spend the few extra minutes of driving time and its small cost. People are moving out of Austin, driving many more miles and spending much more money to re- hood. gain residential peace.

South Lamar to West 1st Street and South ately apparent that the hills and curves make it a Lamar to Loop 360 should provide adequate acparticularly unsuitable major arterial street. Ac- cess to MOPAC and downtown from our area. It is reasonable to await the completion of these prodifficult because of poor visibility, and passing is jects before building a highly expensive bridge

Today, proponents of the proposed Barton Skyway Bridge possibly will ask the city planning commission to reinstate the bridge into the new Capital Improvements Program (CIP) budget. Opponents to the bridge will try to keep it from being funded. The bridge, to span Barton Creek at Barton Skyway, has stirred controversy and much emotion from both sides of the issue. Because of

the strong feelings on this particular neighborhood issue The Open Page today is devoted entirely to statements from each side of the issue. Neighbor presents the views of both sides of the issue from their respective spokesmen and committees. Each statement represented here was prepared by these spokesmen and/or committees.



IN SUMMARY, WE FEEL that the basic issue in the bridge controversy is neighborhood integrity vs. convenience, and that convenience is not a compelling enough reason to sacrifice the residential character of Barton Hills. While Barton Hills ks just a small part of a rapidly growing city, we would appreciate the support of all those Austin ci-

which will have adverse social, economic and en- tizens who don't want "progress" in the form of vironmental effects on the Barton Hills neighbor- additional cars and trucks into residential neigh

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By THE GREATER BARTON HILLS BETTERMENTASSOCIATION

For and why

The question is Bridge or No Bridge? We favor the Bridge, but some do not. Still others have truly mixed emotions and have not yet made up their minds. This statement is intended to describe our position.

BACKGROUND:

Barton Skyway begins one short block southeast of Lamar a Manchaca Road and goes up and down hill almost a mile until i deadends just beyond its intersection with Barton Hills Drive Turn left and you are soon in Horseshoe Bend; turn right and you wind up facing Robert E. Lee Road by the baseball diamonds. If you park your car at the deadend by St. Mark's Episcopal Church and go on foot to the bluff overlooking Barton Creek, first you walk past several acres on your left which are owned by the church. Adjacent to this property is dedicated parkland that the City will develop as a recreational area after there is access to it. From the bluff you see ahead of you two vast apartment complexes divided by Barton Skyway. For many years the Master Plan of the City has included connecting the Skyway in Barton Hills with Skyway across the creek via a bridge. Apparently with this in mind, those apartments were in cluded in the two Barton Hills voting precincts. In 1973 the AISI trustees justified their wisdom in transferring Barton Hills and Zilker pupils to O'Henry and Austin High by reminding concerned parents that with the imminent completion of the Bridge and MoPac, their children woulld have convenient, safe acces to their new schools.

The City acquired all rights-of-way for the Skyway extension and bridge before the creation of the Barton Creek Greenbelt. Building the bridge would be not involve condemning either dedicated parkland or private property and the bridge would cross the creek at its narrowest point in the area.

THE TWO "PREFERRED" routes from the Zilker-Barton Hills area to points north are South Lamar and Robert E. Lee Road. The traffic congestion on both these streets at peak hours

In recent weeks the Austin Transportation Study Commission reached final agreement with the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation over the design of MoPac South. A portion of that agreement provides for a grade-separated cross at Barton Skyway and MoPac when Barton Skyway is complete to Bee Caves Road.

Approximately one year ago the Planning Commission dele ted the bridge from the CIP and on a 4-3 vote in the fall, the city council declined to reinstate it.

We contend that these decisions were based on erroneous i formation. First, that we have no serious traffic problems in the Zilker-Barton Hills area and second, that there was virtual una nimity of opinion in the neighborhood opposing the bridge.

Areas of some agreement:

- 1. Economically, aesthetically and ecologically, the sugge ted alternative solution our traffic problems which involves widening Robert E. Lee Road is unsound. It would either infringe on public parkland or seriously damage private property Additionally the road provides the only access to the south entrance of Barton Springs Pool and to four ball fields which handle many hundreds of games each season. Where it meets Barton Springs Road, there is a steep cliff on one side and sharp drop on the other. Robert E. Lee should remain a picturesque country lane.
- 2. We believe that while Barton Skyway was designed and built to handle relatively heavy traffic, its topography demands that it not be high speed traffic. We support the bridge with a traffic light at Skyway and Barton Hills Drive and with a fourway stop at Cedarview and Barton Skyway with appropriate
- 3. We are also very protective of the beauty of Barton Creek

and do not favor a bridge design which would severely impose on and interfere with the creek environment.

- 4. We join with many anti-bridgers to oppose as unnecessary and destructive the condemnation of private property and the descreation of natural beauty that would be required if Barton Skyway were to be extended eastward from Manchaca Road across the railroad tracks toward IH-35.
- 5. Even those opposed to the bridge recognize that having direct access to MoPac would be very convenient.

If the bridge is defeated once and for all, thousands of people, if they want to reach MoPac, must forever choose between the Lamar bridge of Robert E. Lee/Zilker Park routes or else they must go three miles out of their way to pick up MoPac at Loop 360. Figuring eight to 10 cents a mile total cost, these six extra miles per round trip would easily cost an average family in Barton Hills more than \$300 per year.

Traffic flows best on the arterials built to handle it. The bridge is an important link in the Master Plan. We believe MoPac cannot reach its maximum potential without East-West' access at Barton Skyway.

IT IS IMPERATIVE that the bridge not be postponed unnecessarily. Each year it is delayed, inflation raises the price tag. Furthermore, if the city is forced to expend funds on stop-gap measures, the eventual cost to the taxpayers could double in just a few short years.

When traffic going northwest can get to MoPac easily, the arteries leading downtown will become less congested and this will make it more attractive for businesses to locate in the city center. We believ the revitalization of downtown Austin should be encouraged in every possible way.

Ours is a large, vital area in a rapidly growing city. Our concern must be for the area as a whole and not just for a small portion of it. There is no virtue in believing that it is fine for me to drive down your street whenever I want to, but it is not so fine if you want to drive down mine. Compromises are essential if Austin is to grow and develop without seriously lessening the quality of life for a majority of its citizens.

WHY SHOULD BARTON HILLS be the only major westside area in Austin denied direct access to MoPac. The results of an informal survey taken May 6, 1978 indicate that fully 62 percent of the 1,500 persons questioned at Zilker and Barton Hills school on election day favor the bridge with 25 percent opposing.

The bridge cannot destroy our neighborhood unless we sit back and let it happen. Neighborhoods across the river have found direct access to be beneficial rather than detrimental; police, fire and EMS protection to the Greenbelt and the rapidly expanding annexations north of Barton Creek would be vastly more efficient; the bridge would greatly reduce Zilker Park congestion, even making it feasible to close the park to through traffic during special events; and our students would have their promised route to O'Henry and Austin High.

We see the bridge as a fantastic convenience for those living in the neighborhood and for those from other parts of west Anderson who need to come into our area; as a gateway to the Greenbelt and to Gus Fruh Park; as a viable alternative route for other south Austinites; but always as a sensitivily designed and executed example of progress at its best.

Bridge or no bridge? We ask you to consider which promises the greatest good for the largest number of people.

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