



## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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# PRESSING PAUSE

### MAYOR'S COMPREHENSIVE TRANSIT INITIATIVE PARKED BY PANDEMIC

**C**onnectSA could have been a legacy project for San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg, and it might still be.

ConnectSA, the city's public transportation initiative, is on indefinite hiatus due to budget and priority changes stemming from Covid-19.

"We are paused," Nirenberg told me. "The kind of earthquake that's shaken our city economically has revealed some fault lines. Now, we have to assess the fundamentals."

Nirenberg said VIA Metropolitan Transit may need to rethink some of its strategies, which could mean concentrating more of its services in a smaller geographic area where ridership is strongest.

He said that addressing economic mobility must be at the heart of any transportation strategy moving forward.

"Our first priority is to provide transportation services for people who need them the most," he said. "You build from there."

On March 13, Nirenberg declared the global pandemic a public health emergency in San Antonio. The mayor spoke with key stakeholders about the need to idle ConnectSA.

"I told them it's a difficult but important

recognition of where we are," he said. "If we are going to come back stronger and more resilient, this is what we have to do."

Nirenberg rolled out his plan for ConnectSA in April 2018. He tapped Henry Cisneros, Hope Andrade and Jane Macon to co-chair the organization, tasking them with helping craft a multimodal plan for a city of more than 1.5 million people that's been largely dependent on buses.

In January, Cisneros shared with the Business Journal the first phase of a 20-year strategy that would cost an estimated \$1.3 billion and not require a tax increase. The plan incorporated several potential modes of transportation, including trackless trains with dedicated lanes. It was proposed that some funding come from the one-eighth-cent share of sales tax revenue that's been used to buy land over the Edwards Aquifer.

"It's not a shoot-for-the-moon plan. It's very much to San Antonio's budget and it's economic capacity," Cisneros said then.

Cisneros, meanwhile, is providing his expertise elsewhere. In April, I reported that he was picked to be on Gov. Andrew Cuomo's New York Forward Reopening Advisory Board.



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**RON NIRENBERG,**  
SAN ANTONIO MAYOR

