REGIONAL REPORT PETITION:
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
TYLER DISTRICT

1. Group Identification
North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA)
Chairman Jeff Austin, III
305 South Broadway Ave., Suite 100
Tyler, Texas 75702
903-595-6585

Member Counties:
Smith               Bowie
Gregg               Cass
Cherokee            Panola
Harrison            Titus
Rusk                Van Zandt
Upshur              Wood

MPOs
Tyler MPO
Longview MPO
Texarkana MPO

Possible Speakers (Individuals scheduled to attend; not all will be speakers)
Jeff Austin, III, NET RMA Chairman
Gary Halbrooks, NET RMA Finance Committee Chairman
Robert Torrans, NET RMA Texarkana Outer Loop Committee Chairman
Dave Spurrier, NET RMA East Texas Hourglass Chairman
John Cloutier, NET RMA Public Information and Education Committee Chairman
Barbara Holly, Tyler MPO
Karen Owen, Longview MPO
Brad McCaleb, Texarkana MPO
Judge James Carlow, Bowie County Judge
Judge Bill Stoudt, Longview County Judge
Mayor Barbara Bass, Tyler Mayor
2. Statement of Intent

The NET RMA has requested an appearance before the Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) in order to provide an organization update and project status report.

The NET RMA wishes to express its appreciation for the funding of two of its key projects: Toll 49 Segment 5, which will be funded through Proposition 14 bonds; and Toll 49 Segment 3A, which will be funded through the Federal stimulus package. The Toll 49 project has been the vision of Smith County for more than 30 years, and the County and its citizens are gratified to receive the support of the TTC. The funding received through the initial Financial Assistance Agreement for Toll 49 was used efficiently and successfully by the NET RMA to provide the Plans, Specifications and Estimates (PS&E) for these two projects. Now, the NET RMA plans to continue with project development to see the remaining portions of the project come to fruition.

The NET RMA asks for the Commission’s support for two impending NET RMA projects, the Texarkana Outer Loop and the Toll 49 East Texas Hourglass. A Financial Assistance Application (FAA) package has been submitted for the Texarkana Outer Loop project, and the NET RMA would like to formally present the Commission with an FAA for preliminary corridor studies on the Toll 49 East Texas Hourglass. Both of these projects are important transportation initiatives that will reduce congestion, enhance safety, and increase the economic opportunities for the citizens of northeast Texas.

Finally, the NET RMA would also like to update the Commission on several other projects and activities, including:

- NET RMA alternative funding efforts, specifically bonding of Toll 49 Segment 3B and studies for a Vehicle Miles Traveled Fee;
- Possible partnership with the Angelina Neches River Authority (ANRA) for their Lake Columbia Project; and,
- Rail activities, including support of the adoption of an abandoned rail line between Whitehouse and Troup, and continued support of a possible parallel track in the US 80 rail corridor to serve higher speed commuter rail between Dallas and Shreveport.

3. Strategic Planning/Project Update

Texarkana Outer Loop

Background Information
Centrally located between several major urban areas, the city of Texarkana is a regional transportation hub for Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. According to FORBES, Texarkana is the second fastest growing small metropolitan area in the country, and is predicted to grow 28.57% in gross municipal product by 2012. In addition, a major regional industrial park and intermodal transportation hub is planned on the site of the former Red River Army Depot and Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant on the west side of Texarkana.
In order to keep pace with this rapid growth and development, Texarkana has an immense need for transportation infrastructure improvements that will foster economic vitality and improve the quality of life for the residents of the city through congestion relief and traffic safety.

The Texarkana Outer Loop has been under consideration since 1994, and corridor alignment was approved in 2000. Initial schematics and environmental studies began in 2004, but were halted in 2005 due to contractual obligations with the engineering consultant. A new consultant was selected to complete the study, but in 2007 funding for the project was discontinued.

The Texarkana Outer Loop has been included in the approved Metropolitan Transportation Plan of the Texarkana Metropolitan Planning Organization as part of I-69. In addition, the project was included on a list of candidate projects for development, construction, and operation as toll projects approved by the Texas Transportation Commission in Minute Order 110964 on June 14, 2007.

**Project Specifications**

The proposed Texarkana Outer Loop will begin on US 59 southwest of Texarkana, and extend around the west and north sides of Texarkana to end at US 71 North, a distance of approximately 21 miles.

It will initially be constructed as a two-lane undivided highway with passing lanes, and expanded to an ultimate four-lane divided highway. Roadway alignment may be altered to better serve the site of the Red River Army Depot and Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant, which is expected to be converted into a large industrial park following its closure as determined by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The Texarkana Outer Loop will alleviate traffic congestion, enhance safety, decrease travel time, stimulate the growth of new business, generate additional tax revenue for the area, and generally improve the quality of life for citizens in the region.

**NET RMA Request**

The NET RMA requests that the TTC approve the Financial Assistance Application for the Texarkana Outer Loop, which was submitted in January 2009.

If funding is granted, the $4 million will be used for environmental studies; design, traffic and revenue studies; preliminary engineering; public outreach and education; legal and financial advisory services; and other direct and indirect project costs.

**Toll 49 East Texas Hourglass**

**Background Information**

The Toll 49 East Texas Hourglass project has been under consideration since 2003, when the City of Longview passed a resolution in support of an outer loop around Longview. In 2005 the NET RMA formally requested that TxDOT perform a Traffic and Revenue study for the project.
In 2006 TxDOT released the East Texas Hourglass Viability Analysis, in which the project was found to be potentially toll viable. In 2007 funding for the project was discontinued. The NET RMA East Texas Hourglass Committee has continued to support the project, which would ease congestion on Longview’s Loop 281, as well as provide regional connectivity between Tyler, Longview, and proposed I-69 near Marshall.

Project Specifications
Toll 49 East Texas Hourglass encompasses Segments 6, 6A, 7, 8 and 8A of Toll 49. All five segments would initially be constructed as a two-lane undivided highway section that would ultimately be expanded to a four-lane divided highway.

Toll 49 Segment 6 would extend northeast from SH 110 in Tyler to the Gregg County Line. This major segment would connect the current loop under construction around Tyler with the outer loop proposed for construction around Longview.

Toll 49 Segment 6A is a spur that would connect Segment 6 with the large University of Texas Health Science Center complex located at US 271 and SH 155 northeast of Tyler.

Toll 49 Segment 7 would form an outer west loop around Longview, Texas beginning at I-20 at the Gregg County line and proceeding north around Longview, terminating at US 259 (a distance of approximately 20.4 miles). This segment would serve the rapidly-growing sections of north and northwest Longview.

Toll 49 Segment 8 would begin at US 259 north of Longview and proceed east to US 59 in Marshall (a distance of approximately 20.6 miles). This segment would tie Toll 49 with the proposed I-69 corridor north of Marshall.

Toll 49 Segment 8A would begin at US 259 in Longview and continue south to I-20 near Hallsville (a distance of approximately 11 miles). This segment would complete a north loop around the city of Longview.

NET RMA Request
The NET RMA would like to formally submit the FAA for the Toll 49 East Texas Hourglass Preliminary Corridor Study to the Commission. This $2.5 million funding request when granted would provide financing for the preliminary corridor studies for the five new segments of Toll 49 (Segments 6, 6A, 7, 8 and 8A).

NET RMA Alternative Funding Efforts
The NET RMA is continually seeking alternative methods to fund transportation projects in northeast Texas. In the past year, the organization has:
- issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Financial Partners,
- issued a RFP for Underwriter Services, and
- participated in a study with the Texas Transportation Institute for Mileage Based User Fees.
Partnership with the Angelina Neches River Authority (ANRA)
The NET RMA and ANRA are exploring a partnership opportunity that would help advance ANRA’s Lake Columbia project, which would supply water to nine northeast Texas cities, as well as several commercial operations and rural Water Supply Corporations. The NET RMA proposes to assist ANRA with the relocation of US 79, SH 135, and the UPRR where they cross Lake Columbia.

Rail Activity
The NET RMA has an active Rail Committee, which has identified and prioritized 34 active and potential rail project within the 12-county NET RMA region. Two of the top priority local rail projects are:
- Purchase and preservation of an abandoned rail line ROW corridor between Whitehouse and Troup, for use with future rail and utility projects; and,
- Design and construction of a parallel rail line on UPRR’s existing US 80 rail corridor for the purpose of higher speed commuter rail between Dallas and Shreveport.

4. Environmental Impact

Texarkana Outer Loop
Environmental impacts, including social, economic, and cultural resource issues, would be thoroughly addressed in the environmental review process. Environmental mitigation would be provided where required.

East Texas Hourglass
Environmental impacts, including social, economic, and cultural resource issues, would be thoroughly addressed in the environmental review process. Environmental mitigation would be provided where required.

5. Metropolitan Planning Organization(s) Position

Texarkana Outer Loop
The Texarkana Outer Loop has been included in the approved Metropolitan Transportation Plan of the Texarkana Metropolitan Planning Organization as IH 69.

Toll 49 East Texas Hourglass
Toll 49 and the East Texas Hourglass projects have been included in the approved Metropolitan Transportation Plan for both the Tyler and Longview Metropolitan Planning Organizations.
6. **Congressional and State legislative representatives in the region**
   State Senator Bob Deuell
   State Senator Kevin Eltife
   State Senator Robert Nichols
   State Representative Leo Berman
   State Representative Dan Flynn
   State Representative Stephen Frost
   State Representative Mark Homer
   State Representative Chuck Hopson
   State Representative Bryan Hughes
   State Representative Tommy Merritt