

T TRANSPORTATION NEWS

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On the cover:

The Cottonwood Creek Bridge, located in the Waco District, is lifted onto a truck in the first of a series of TxDOT bridge rehabilitation projects.

More on page 3.

TxDOT photo by Michael Amador

Contents

Spending cuts.....	1
From the editor.....	1
TxDOT ice storm response.....	2
“A sweet little bridge”.....	3
TxDOT Roundup.....	4
Toyota in Texas.....	5
Transportation Digest.....	5
Special Section Commuting in Texas beginning on page 6	
Video conferencing.....	10
Letters.....	11
Service Awards.....	12
Retirees.....	13
Calendar.....	13
Backtracks photo.....	14

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Straight Talk



Safety: Important for TxDOT and for the people of Texas

by **Mike Behrens**

Executive Director

In a recent letter to the editor of the Lubbock newspaper, a woman wrote, “I am the wife of a TxDOT employee, and I am very concerned about my husband’s safety.”

We all share the concern of the wife of our fellow employee. Even more important, we work every day to ensure the safety of our fellow workers and all of those using the Texas transportation system.

In previous months, I talked about the importance of accountability and quality. Of the three, however, safety is the most important: in the office, in highway work zones and at home. You will find many good ideas about personal and workplace safety on the intranet site for the department’s Occupational Safety Division.

As we encourage safety among ourselves, we preach the same thing to the traveling public by focusing attention on proper speed, use of seat belts and on driving friendly. We support efforts to promote driver education, to engineer safety into transportation infrastructure near schools, and to make roadway design and construction as safe as possible. One of the most important things we do is support efforts to eliminate drunken driving.

Last month, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) reported that traffic deaths in Texas are soaring, even as comparable national figures show a decline. The report says drunken drivers play a big part in causing such highway carnage.

Statistics show that 3,724 people were killed on Texas highways in 2001 — that’s more than 10 per day. And one highway fatality is one too many.

According to TTI, of all the fatal crashes in Texas in 2001, more than four out of every 10 crashes involved at least one person who was legally drunk. Some researchers believe the actual percentage is even greater.

Every day presents special challenges to us in TxDOT, especially when it comes to the safety of the people who use the Texas transportation system. One such day was this past Valentine’s Day when a northbound bus crossed the rain-wet median of I-35 near Waco and collided with a sport-utility vehicle. Seven people died.

While the National Transportation Safety Board has been called in to investigate, it takes no investigation to know that many in TxDOT were affected by this tragic loss of life. We felt the shock that such news brings to anybody with a caring heart.

TxDOT employees work every day to make our transportation systems even safer for the people of Texas.

Thank you — and be safe. ☆

TxDOT responds to call for spending cuts

by **Judy Curtis**
Managing Editor

Acknowledging the tough financial times facing all state agencies – and Gov. Perry’s call for a 7 percent general revenue budget cut this year — TxDOT’s focus remains centered on helping to solve Texas’ budget shortfall while moving people and goods safely and efficiently.

“In times like these,” said Executive Director Mike Behrens, “you have to prioritize and determine what’s most important to get done. As we tighten our belts, we must avoid undermining the safety and mobility of Texans and those traveling in the state.”

Behrens noted that TxDOT’s most important job is to maintain the existing transportation system. “We have nearly 80,000 miles of roads; that’s a tremendous investment. And with any investment of that magnitude, we must maintain it for the benefit of all Texans.”

Behrens added that TxDOT’s

large construction program, which addresses mobility and safety, will continue. “All of these projects go hand in hand as the highest priorities of this department,” he said.

Clearly, however, something has to be cut, and TxDOT is identifying ways to reduce spending for the current fiscal year. “We are being asked to scrutinize our budgets and to look at ways our costs can be reduced to meet the needs of Texas,” said Behrens.

In a letter to Gov. Perry and other top elected officials, Transportation Commission chairman John Johnson reported that the department will “implement a hiring freeze, reduce travel, postpone or eliminate capital expenditures, perform only essential maintenance where the safety of the public and employees is not compromised.”

Currently, however, TxDOT has no plans to delay highway improvements. “Economic development depends on good, safe and reliable

roads,” said Behrens. “Economic vitality ranks high on our list of department objectives.”

Added Johnson, in his letter to Gov. Perry, “Transportation is the backbone of a healthy economy. Not only does it create jobs while it is being built, it supports economic development once it is completed. We will do everything in our power to keep Texans working.”

Behrens noted that TxDOT will continue to focus on building, planning and maintaining the state’s transportation system. “We want to make sure we’re as efficient and effective as possible with our funding,” he said, “and that those dollars we get go toward helping Texans and goods in Texas move efficiently and safely.”

See related story on page 10:
Video conferencing

Letter from the editor



I haven’t seen any “I Survived the Great Winter Storm of February ‘03” T-shirts yet, but I’m surprised. By Texas standards, as the television meteorologists would say, it was a pretty ornery “weather event.”

While thousands of workers and school kids across much of the state got a “snow day” on Feb. 25, many TxDOT employees reported for around-the-clock duty to do everything they could to keep traffic moving as safely as possible. Even so, the storm was so severe that quite a few roadways, including big chunks of the interstate system, had to be shut down for a time. With help from our public information officers in the affected areas, we’ve put together an overview of our

handling of the problems created by the storm. Reading the story ought to make you proud to work for TxDOT.

Lost and found...

Several astute readers noticed that the last line on managing editor Judy Curtis’ February story, “Budget Work Ahead,” was missing. We still haven’t figured out where it went, but in case you’ve been eagerly awaiting the stirring conclusion to the article, here it is: “cial driver’s licenses.”

Change in plans...

The story we ran last month by the Travel Division’s Darah Waldrip on conference planning was some-

thing we first planned last summer. For various reasons, we had to keep putting off running it. And now, with the belt-tightening stemming from Gov. Perry’s request to reduce our General Revenue expenditures by 7 percent, the story doesn’t seem quite as appropriate as it did right after the event that inspired it — the successful July WASHTO conference in San Antonio. (Planned by the Travel Division.) So, we’ve decided not to publish the second part, at least not in TNews. If you’re interested in reading it, we’ll be happy to furnish you a print out.

Finally, we’re working on a system to get retiree death notices back in TNews. We’ll keep you posted.

— Mike Cox

TxDOT workers help thaw February's freeze

12 districts involved in de-icing, highway safety efforts

by **Mike Cox**
Editor

A long-standing joke in Austin is that someone inadvertently tossing a single ice cube out of a car on I-35 can paralyze the Capital City. But when a strong Arctic air mass blew into a moisture-laden low pressure system from the Gulf of Mexico late last month, a lot of Texans were not laughing.

Beginning on February 24, Mother Nature tossed a whole lot of ice — and snow — across roughly a quarter of the state, claiming 10 lives in one of the more severe winter storms to hit Texas in the last quarter century. The storm affected thousands of miles of roadway and kept many employees in several TxDOT districts working around-the-clock for two days and in some cases, longer.

At the height of the storm, I-35 from Georgetown to the Red River was one long, white parking lot strewn with stranded vehicles and jack-knifed 18-wheelers. Even portions of I-10 were closed for a time because of ice.

Here's a roundup from the various districts affected:

■ **Abilene:** In Taylor County, TxDOT maintenance workers spent 1,152 man-hours in 12-hour shifts applying de-icing material, removing snow and ice and responding to accident scenes. In Callahan County, the time commitment was 416 man-hours. Equipment used in the two counties included 14 trucks, 10 snowplows, 8 V-box spreaders, 7 pickups, 5 pickup spreaders, 3 maintainers and 2 loaders.

■ **Austin:** Forecasters called for light drizzle in the Capital City on Feb. 24, but that afternoon, freezing rain began falling along with the temperature. Overnight, roadway

conditions went from hazardous to treacherous. Maintenance crews spread sand and de-icer, a process that resulted in a close call for maintenance worker Greg Stevenson. Driving a truck with more than 1,000 gallons of de-icer on southbound U.S. 183, Stevenson succeeded in correcting one skid, but could not recover from a second. When an outside rear tire blew, the liquid de-icer sloshed to one side and the truck slowly overturned. Hanging by his seatbelt in a partially crushed cab and unable to use his radio, Stevenson grabbed his cell phone, crawled out the window and called for help. His only injury was a sore wrist.

■ **Brownwood:** All nine counties in the district were affected by the storm. Maintenance Director Howard Holland said small V-box spreaders purchased last year improved TxDOT's response because they can be fitted onto pickup trucks. That enabled more vehicles to hit the road spreading sand. Only one crash occurred on the infamous Ranger Hill on I-20, and it was attributed to excessive speed, not ice.

■ **Bryan:** Maintenance crews worked non-stop in Brazos, Robertson, Leon and Freestone counties, the four hardest-hit counties in the district. Crews in the district's other counties constantly checked bridges and overpasses to make sure they remained ice-free.

■ **Childress:** Only spotty ice and minor delays reported in Childress, Collingsworth, Wheeler, Hall and Donley counties.

■ **Dallas:** Maintenance employees worked 48 hours straight, spreading 1,500 truckloads of sand. Each truck averaged about 100 miles of roadway per shift, each load of sand covering about 10 miles of pavement per hour. Workers concentrat-



TxDOT photo / Hunt County Maintenance Office

ed on bridges, which the district has more of than any other district.

■ **Fort Worth:** "The icing was the most intense we've had in 25 years," said District Maintenance Director Glenn Elliott. "But once we got past the first night's rush hour, traffic kept moving in Fort Worth. Our crews did a great job." That job involved 8,890 man-hours, 60 sanding trucks and 25 trucks equipped to spread magnesium chloride.

■ **Odessa:** Employees from the Fort Stockton Maintenance Section were involved in an around-the-clock roadblock on I-10 to alert east-bound travelers that the interstate was shut down in the Hill Country between Kerrville and San Antonio.

■ **San Angelo:** At 7:30 a.m. on Feb. 25, Gary Davenport, maintenance supervisor from Real County, came upon a car with a broken radiator 28 miles north of Leakey on SH 83. Inside were two women and six children who had spent the night in the vehicle — without any heat. Davenport paid (from his own pocket) to have the car towed to Leakey. He even made sure that

■ **See ICE STORM, Page 10**

Retired bridge gets new life span



Workers from a local construction company uproot the century-old Cottonwood Creek Bridge from its tree-covered spot outside Hillsboro before wending its way into town — and eventually into permanent residence as a pedestrian bridge at City Park.

“It’s a sweet little bridge,” said Lisa Hart, supervisor of historical studies in TxDOT’s Environmental Division. It is also the first Texas bridge to undergo rehabilitation with Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program (STEP) funds as part of the Historic Bridge Rehabilitation Program.

The Texas Transportation Commission in 2002 approved the allocation of \$3.5 million in STEP funds for the Historic Bridge Preservation Program — with the state matching 20 percent for a total of \$4.4 million. Some 43 historic bridges have been identified as potential candidates for the preservation program although funds are sufficient to rehabilitate about seven bridges.

Because of the minimal amount of metal used in the bridge, it was once among the least expensive spans to build in the U.S. In addition, the “Erector set”-like pieces of the bridges allowed them to be ordered by catalog and shipped by rail to small Texas towns for re-assembly.

Built in 1900, the 50-foot long truss bridge — too narrow for modern car traffic — was lifted onto a flat bed truck where it was transported to a county maintenance yard for eventual restoration. It will serve out its second century as a foot bridge in a Hillsboro city park. ★

— Judy Curtis

TxDOT photo / Michael Amador



■ **Steven W. Hall, P.E.**, has been appointed Tyler Area Engineer for the Tyler District. Hall began his career with TxDOT in 1989 as an engineering assistant in Rusk. Other assignments were in Jacksonville and Palestine. In 1998, he was appointed Tyler District materials engineer and two years later he became area engineer in Jacksonville. Hall earned a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering from Texas A&M University in 1988.

■ **Randall C. Redmond, P.E.**, was named director of Transportation Planning and Development in the Tyler District, effective Feb. 1, 2003.

Redmond began his career in 1987 as a summer employee in the Mineola residency and continued to work each summer there until his graduation from Texas A&M in 1989. A year later, he became a full-time employee of the Mineola residency and was later promoted to assistant area engineer. Redmond was named assistant director of maintenance in 1998 and became area engineer of the Mineola Area

Office in 1999. In September 2001, Redmond became area engineer for the Tyler Area Office.

■ The Texas airport system is the largest state system in the nation with approximately 400 airports open to the public.

■ Three studies conducted over the past three decades all show that vehicles get more miles per gallon if they are driven at 55 mph rather than at higher speeds. According to the Office of Transportation Technology, fuel efficiency among vehicles going 70 mph dropped 17 percent compared to those traveling at 55 mph.

■ Several TxDOT training videos produced by contractor Channel Three Productions have recently won Telly Awards in the safety and animation categories. Telly Awards recognize outstanding film and video production. More than 10,000 entries submitted by advertising agencies and production companies compete.

During the past four years, the video-production company has

worked with **Karl Burkett** and **Gary Counts** of TxDOT to produce 14 training videos covering everything from grounding to electrical services. Burkett, senior lighting-design engineer and Counts, master electrician, both work in the Traffic Operations Division.

Copies of the videos are available from the Traffic Operations Division's intranet site or by contacting Lois Young at (512) 302-0985 or at lyoung@dot.state.tx.us.

■ April 6-12 is National Work Zone Awareness Week. TxDOT will highlight the week's observance by holding various media and public events across the state, urging motorists to use caution during travel through work zones.

Some 140 people were reported killed in work-zone-related crashes in Texas in 2001. The majority of those killed were motorists — not workers.

For more information about TxDOT events related to Work Zone Awareness week, contact your district Public Information Office. ★

Trash-Off April 5

Texans will be out in force on April 5 for the state's annual spring cleaning. Last year, nearly 18,000 Adopt-a-Highway volunteers picked up 202 tons of garbage off Texas highways. TxDOT's Maintenance workers are expecting an even larger turnout in this year's effort along some 2,500 miles of roadway.

New this year is the request that volunteers report any space shuttle parts they might find to the proper authorities. Cleanup activities are open to anyone interested in sprucing up our state. For more information about the Trash-Off, contact the Travel Division at (512) 486-5911.



Long before the Trash-Off got its start in 1986, TxDOT employees kept the right of way clean. In this 1963 photo, a crew works along State Highway 71 near Bastrop to remove trash from the side of the road. This year, the Maintenance Division estimates that more than 19,000 people from around the state will join in the Texas Trash-Off.

TxDOT to pave the way to new San Antonio Toyota plant

The efforts of many – including TxDOT – helped bring the Toyota manufacturing plant to Texas rather than the other states trying to attract the company.

Company officials announced in February their choice of San Antonio as the site for their sixth North American plant, a facility to be built on 2,000 acres in south San Antonio.

“We hope that more companies will consider building future projects here knowing that Texas will do its best to handle their transportation challenges,” said Mike Behrens, executive director of TxDOT.

The department will spend \$48 million, including right of way, for improvements or upgrades on four existing roads that will serve the new factory.

“The Toyota plant is a prime example of how transportation

makes all the difference between winning and losing business in the state of Texas,” said Behrens. “This sort of transportation planning makes businesses prosper and helps to drive our economy.”

The factory construction will bring \$800 million to Texas — and a payroll of \$100 million a year when the 2000 Toyota plant jobs are filled by 2006. In addition, Gov. Rick Perry has estimated that the plant will generate more than 5,000 spin-off jobs and add another \$4 billion to the state’s economy over the next decade.

San Antonio District Engineer John Kelly said that he and his staff have already begun the first steps toward the road improvements. “We are pleased that Toyota chose San Antonio and that our work has been identified and approved by the Commission,” said Kelly. “We are

moving forward to put the road infrastructure in place that Toyota needs.”

The following projects will accommodate the Toyota plant:

- Watson Road
 - Estimated date contract will be out for bid: Oct. ‘03
 - Estimated completion: Dec. ‘04
- IH 410 (Loop 410)
 - Estimated date contract will be out for bid: May ‘04
 - Estimated completion: Jan. ‘06
- Loop 1604:
 - Estimated date contract will be out for bid: May ‘04
 - Estimated completion date: June ‘06

Bidding begins in October on the first of three contracts with completion on the final contract scheduled for June 2006. ★

— Judy Curtis

Transportation Digest



★ **YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN:** “And when we consider that the Trans Texas Corridor will provide jobs for Texans while reducing the fuel we spend in stop-and-slow highway driving — not to mention the hideous amount of time spent commuting to and from work — the money seems particularly well spent... Unfortunately, the corridor will be like trees. We don’t plant oak trees for ourselves. We do it for our grandchildren. And our great-grandchildren will be the ones who benefit from the corridor we build today.” (Columnist Ana McDonald, San Antonio *Express-News*)

★ **TRAIN FINDS ZIP IN MAGNETS:** In China, the world’s first commer-

cial magnetic-levitation train performed flawlessly on its maiden journey in late December, hitting 260 mph over the 19 miles between Shanghai’s financial district and the Pudong airport. The German-built high-tech train can outrun a World War II fighter plane by riding above its track suspended by powerful opposing magnets. The Shanghai train is being watched closely, especially because of its \$1.2 billion price tag. China is in the midst of a five-year, \$31 billion upgrade of its railway network. Based on its experience with the Shanghai train, China may move forward with plans for an 800-mile high-speed link between Shanghai and the capital, Beijing. A maglev train could

make the trip in three hours, fast enough to rival air travel. (Houston *Chronicle*)

★ **ALTERNATIVE VEHICLES FUEL FUTURE:** There are currently 118,000 alternative fuel vehicles (AFVs) on the road in the U.S., and the numbers are growing. The range of alternative fuels includes compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, ethanol and electricity. Biodiesel, made from vegetable oils and animal fat, is also gaining momentum as an alternate fuel. The goal is to create fuels that are cost-efficient, widely available and cleaner burning. Added note: more than half of TxDOT’s on-road fleet uses alternative fuels. (Tyler *Morning Telegraph*)

Aviation director commutes with a good altitude

by David Fulton

Director, Aviation Division

When I became director of the newly created Aviation Division in 1992, leaving my job with the Tennessee DOT, I was eager to get to Texas and take on new aviation challenges. The past director of the Texas Aeronautics Commission (which was folded into TxDOT) is a friend of mine, and I knew that there was a lot of work ahead in getting the statewide airport system up to the standard that the State of Texas deserves. However, I was soon to learn that the challenge was significantly greater than I anticipated.

The Aviation Division provides financial and technical assistance to some 276 communities statewide in the planning and development of their local airports. These airports are very important not only for air

transportation but also in supporting economic development, particularly in the rural parts of our state.

So, back in 1992, to get the best understanding I could as to the condition of the airports in Texas, I got into a TxDOT car and starting driving across the state visiting as many of these airports as possible. I managed to make it to most of them, and quickly realized just how big Texas really is. I also learned that many of our state's small airports had had little attention over the years and were in pretty poor condition.

During the past 11 years, with the support of the Transportation Commission, Administration, and our great Aviation Division staff, we've made a lot of progress in improving the airports in Texas. But we sure have spent a lot of time on the road. Unlike TxDOT's highway work,

which is managed in the districts, the aviation program is managed almost totally out of our Austin office, meaning our staff has to travel to airports all over the state on a regular basis.

Finally, a couple of years ago, I bought a V-35 Beechcraft Bonanza, using it for a great deal of my, and sometime my staff's, travel needs. Not only has the airplane saved me a tremendous amount of travel time, but it also has been very cost-effective for TxDOT.

As an example, recently Scott Bryan, our property acquisition agent, and I needed to make a trip to the Atlanta Airport in East Texas to talk to the city manager about acquiring some additional property for the airport. Round trip by car is 616 miles. Had we driven, the trip would have taken at least two days. By flying, we were at the Atlanta Airport in an hour and a half, conducted our business, and were back in Austin the same day. The airplane helps us avoid overnight stays on many trips.

Since all of our work involves airports, arriving by air gives a totally different perspective of the airport as compared to driving. Another great benefit is that there is no traffic congestion up there at 8,000 feet.

My airplane has given me the opportunity to continue to use skills I acquired in the Navy, to do my job more effectively, and do something I enjoy. It's a great way to travel. There are no X-ray machines to walk through, I don't have to take my shoes off, and I can carry my pocketknife with me. ✪



TxDOT photo / Kevin Stillman

David Fulton, Aviation Division director, outside his plane. For the past two years, Fulton has flown the plane to TxDOT meetings throughout the state.

TNews editor discovers bus-riding benefits



TxDOT photo / Michael Amador

Reading up on the latest crude oil pricing while waiting for his bus, TNews editor Mike Cox favors public transportation nowadays.

by Mike Cox
Editor

The last time I filled my SUV the price per gallon for regular was \$1.59. Total charge: \$22.39.

But even before gas prices started rising faster than stock prices are dropping, I decided to start riding the bus to work.

I am far from alone. Annually in Texas, according to statistics compiled by TxDOT's Public Transportation Division, more than 7,500 buses and vans cover more than 247 million miles providing 285 million rides.

The first day I took the six-minute walk from my house to the bus stop, I was almost as edgy as a kid on the first day of school. Clutched in my hand was a dollar bill, the amount my wife had assured me I had to pay each leg of my commute. Worried about missing the bus, I arrived way too early.

Friday afternoon of my first week, the bus arrived on time and

soon we were only a couple of stops away from mine. I was looking forward to supper.

Suddenly, the bus stopped even though no one was waiting at this particular route point. Then, the driver got out of the bus and pulled out a cigarette.

I looked around at my fellow passengers, expecting to see shared outrage. But no one seemed concerned. Only later did I learn that this is standard procedure. Once someone explained it to me, it made perfect sense: A bus can be late, but it can't be early. If a driver sees that he or she is running ahead of schedule, they have to stop. Otherwise, folks could miss their ride.

My next learning experience came the second week of my commuting career. I brought my daughter to work downtown so she could see the Inaugural parade. On the ride home, I displayed a dollar in change, asking the driver how much

I needed to drop in the coin box for my daughter.

"That's enough for both of you," the driver said, looking at the four quarters in my hand.

I had been blithely paying \$1 each way — double what it costs on most routes in Austin.

Speaking of money, Capital Metro's Web site will compute your costs of driving to work. In my case, the tab — including depreciation, insurance, and gasoline — is \$94.82 a month.

Since my bus fare is \$20 a month I'm saving \$74.82 a month by taking the bus. That's \$897.84 a year.

Of course, if I have an appointment, or if there is some other extenuating circumstance, I still take my SUV to work. Aside from the monetary savings, here are some other things I like about taking the bus:

■ I have nearly an hour of free time each workday to read, work on my Palm Pilot, think or simply stare out the window at the scenery.

■ Conversely, I have 53 minutes times 5 times 4 times 12 that I don't have to be driving. Except during the recent ice storm, when the driver told us to hold on as he prepared to head down a slick incline, the bus ride is much less stressful than fighting traffic.

■ I don't have to hunt for a parking space.

■ Finally, I'm eliminating one vehicle a day from Austin's traffic. This won't reduce congestion or prevent a non-attainment area designation, but it's the best I can do.

See you at the bus stop? ☺

Train-traveling rookie surprised by ride

by **Buddy Allison**

Public Information Office

I'm a driver. I drive everywhere I go. Except for the occasional airliner, my only experience with public transportation was a trip to New York City, where taxis, buses and subways move nearly everyone.

I recently sold my car in Austin and bought another, but the new one was in Plano, just north of Dallas. I resigned myself to flying to Dallas until a co-worker suggested the train.

After five minutes of pleasant conversation with "Julie," Amtrak's personable reservations computer, I learned that I could get on a train in downtown Austin, read a few chapters of Tom Clancy, and arrive in downtown Dallas six hours later.

I compared the train to flying. Aside from the obvious difference of not having to defy the law of gravity, the train offered one advantage that I found irresistible. The price. Twenty-one dollars — and no armed federal agents looking through my luggage or checking my shoes before boarding.

Having been trained all these years by the airlines, I arrived early — early enough to go to a local restaurant, have a relaxing brunch and still not risk tardiness. At the ticket counter, the agent advised me of a potential 30- to 45-minute delay due to track repairs between Round Rock and Taylor and directed me to a passenger car. The schedule claimed a departure time of 11:31 a.m. and with clock-setting timeliness, we pulled away from the station. We would arrive 30 minutes late in Dallas.

My coach seat was large and roomy with lots of leg room, much like first-class on an airliner. And the ride was smooth and quiet. But the highlight of the trip was the scenery, all new to me. I have driven on Loop 1 hundreds of times, but



Photos by Buddy Allison

Fort Worth is the heartbeat of activity in Texas for Amtrak's Texas Eagle, with ridership topping 61,000 in 2002. The Temple train station (inset) boarded over 6,600 passengers during the same period. Amtrak reported a total Texas ridership of more than 223,000 during fiscal 2002.

never down the center, between the lanes. Amtrak Number 22 even took me past a quarry operation I didn't know existed somewhere between Austin and Round Rock.

Amtrak (a combination of the words "American" and "track") is officially called the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, and employs over 24,000 people and operates more than 22,000 route miles. The company serves over 500 stations in 46 states. Each day, some 65,000 passengers board an Amtrak train.

The freedom to roam while en route was a highlight for this first-time rail rookie. There were dining cars, not four-star — OK, not even one-star — but with a decent selection of sandwiches, chips, drinks and snacks. The dining cars were equipped with tables and a TV set. There was an observation car with large win-

dows and lounge seats facing sideways for taking in all the scenery on that side of the train. There were even sealed rooms for smokers.

Total time for the trip to Dallas was six hours. But my journey wasn't over — I still had to get to Plano.

The Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) northbound Red train took me to the Parker Road stop, just where I wanted to go. And, once again, I was awe-struck by the price: One dollar.

The DART commuter train was not as quiet, comfortable or scenic as the Amtrak. But 40 minutes after parting with a single dollar-bill, I was sitting in my brother's car and on my way to something with which I am much more familiar — some old-time Texas barbecue.

So, now I have been publicly transported, and yes, I'd do it again. But, for the record, I'm still a driver. 🌟

Texas to get its first toll interstate

by **Mike Cox**
Editor

A 12-mile segment of Interstate 10 in west Houston will become Texas' first toll interstate, according to Gov. Rick Perry.

The \$1.4 billion project, which could begin construction as early as July, represents one of the single largest highway expenditures in Texas history. And also one of the more innovatively financed.

Perry joined U.S. Rep. John Culberson, Transportation Commissioner John W. Johnson and Harris County Judge Robert Eckels on March 14 in announcing the Katy Freeway reconstruction.

"I'm committed to innovative transportation solutions," said Perry after signing the final financial

agreement with TxDOT Executive Director Mike Behrens, Federal Highway Administration official Dan Reagan and Judge Eckels.

The deal packages federal and state money with \$250 million to be provided by the Harris County Toll Road Authority. In addition, Harris County will be able to provide the equivalent of another \$250 million in services such as surveying.

"It comes down to providing more options for commuters, and more solutions to combat the gridlock grind," Perry said.

The reconstruction will feature four toll lanes (with HOV lanes), eight free, general-purpose lanes and six access lanes. Total length of the project is 20 miles, though the toll lanes will extend only 12 miles.

When completed in five to six years — nearly half the time it would have taken under traditional financing methods — the project will have an enormous impact on Houston traffic congestion, planners said. Currently, more than 207,000 vehicles a day use the 35-year-old freeway.

The mid-March signing capped an effort begun in August 2001 to develop innovative funding to accelerate the Katy expansion.

"Commuters of Houston will be the very first in Texas to experience tollways on an existing interstate," Perry said. "It will represent the best of both worlds — several free lanes for those who don't want to pay a toll, and tollways for those who want to bypass traffic." ☘

Marathon man: It's a long-distance road affair

by **Bill Powell**
Public Information Office

As someone who drives three hours and more than 150 miles a day on everything from quiet two lane country roads to the congested six lane parking lot many of us call I-35, I have encountered practically every road condition.

My trips vary from fun-filled and interesting to boring. One misadventure, for instance, included an unscheduled and unfortunate meeting between my car and a misdirected, clueless deer on a dark two-lane highway. I lost the use of my car for over a month. I got a rental car that ate gas like it was designed by an oil cartel.

The only thing I've found scarier than the animals lurking by the side of the road was the ice storm that Central Texas experienced in February. If you want to talk about slick, only the Betty Crocker

Bakeoff had better icing than Central Texas got. A segment of I-35 between Georgetown and Waco was closed due to the volume of ice and accidents caused by it. I stayed at home during the storm since 50 of the miles I drive is north or parallel with Georgetown.

In my travels as a long-distance commuter, I have encountered farmers coming onto the road going 20 miles per hour to my 65 miles per hour — and all the stress on my nerves that causes. I see various hand gestures from less than polite drivers out in the country where you'd think people had less to be mad about, and frequent tailgating by people in a hurry to get to the next traffic jam. I see a lot of all that as I log 770 miles by the end of each week.

The second question I get after most ask why I drive more than

■ See **COMMUTING**, Page 13



Video conferencing brings districts to Austin — virtually

Just days after TxDOT received Gov. Rick Perry's request to reduce general revenue spending, Executive Director Mike Behrens called a meeting of all district, division and office directors — a "virtual" meeting. The topic: how to comply with the governor's request to cut costs without affecting the millions of Texans who depend on our transportation system every day.

It was clear that a discussion of how to tighten the department's budget should in itself be a model of governmental frugality. And by holding this meeting through a new video conferencing system already installed in 19 districts and in

Austin, TxDOT saved more than \$60,000 before the discussion even began among 59 participants from around the state.

The savings stemmed from reducing travel time and, thus, increasing productivity. "There's a real savings in employee productivity," said Steve Simmons, deputy executive director. "That's especially important right now with the hiring freeze on and increased workloads." Expenses associated with traveling to Austin, including air fare, automobile mileage reimbursements and meals and hotels, were cut entirely.

Numerous benefits besides dollar savings result from using the video

conferencing system. In the process of saving time by holding one meeting statewide, TxDOT executives are assured of transmitting a consistent message to employees. "Everybody gets the same information at the same time," said Simmons. "There's no confusion."

Because of the savings that accrue from cutting out expensive travel, the system will pay for itself within 6 months. "It doesn't take many conferences at \$60,000 a pop to ring up huge savings," said Ray Belk, video network project manager at TxDOT. ☘

—Judy Curtis

For more information on TxDOT's video conferencing system, go to the department's internal web site at <http://crossroads.dot.state.tx.us/org/hrd/Professional/Training/VideoTeleConf/FAQs.asp>

Ice storm has many districts clearing roads around the clock

Continued from Page 2

the stranded travelers had a warm place to stay while the car was being repaired.

San Angelo district workers put in more than 1500 hours dealing with the ice storm, and applied approximately 525 cubic yards of sand and 495 gallons of liquid de-icer.

■ **San Antonio:** The Alamo City got its first measurable snowfall in 15 years on Feb. 8, followed by the ice storm two weeks later. As in other affected districts, maintenance crews put in long hours, particularly in working bridges and overpasses. In San Antonio, maintenance workers began spraying bridges on freeways before the 5 o'clock rush traffic on Feb. 24 making it possible for drivers to get home safely. More than 100 district employees worked around the clock keeping roads safe for drivers.

■ **Tyler:** The Athens, Canton and Mineola maintenance sections took the brunt of the storm. Athens crews sanded long bridges over Cedar Creek Lake and the Trinity River. Maintenance workers out of Canton handled the bridges and overpasses of I-20. Another chore was cutting and removing trees downed by ice accumulations. Some 600 18-wheelers were counted parked at a rest area on the interstate near Van. With power outages affecting some TxDOT signals, crews placed portable stop signs at key intersections.

■ **Waco:** TxDOT Waco District employees worked tirelessly to maintain the safety and continuous flow of traffic in the district's eight-county area. Crews spread sand and de-icer day and night February 24, 25 and 26. As conditions worsened overnight on Feb. 25, employ-

ees from the Hillsboro Area Office and the Hillsboro Maintenance section assisted DPS and other local agencies with escort and transportation for motorists stranded on the ice-covered interstate to shelters set up in Abbott, Hillsboro and Itasca.

■ **Wichita Falls:** Signal Supervisor Jim Keck drove up on a wrecked motorcycle on the side of an icy highway near Nocona. He and another passerby were finally able to get the heavy Harley Davidson off the roadway and waited with the operator, who had only minor injuries, until law enforcement help arrived. ☘

District PIOs Mark Ball, Chris Bishop, Bobby Colwell, Mary Beth Kilgore, Glen Larum, Adele Lewis, Delaina Mayer, Sandra Parker, Michael Peters, Patsy Rainwater-Maddux, Ken Roberts and Barbara Seal contributed information for this report.



To: TxDOT, El Paso District
From: Lola Gentry, Dell City, TX

As a contractor/driver for the U.S. Postal Service, I drive Route HC 60 from Dell City to Pine Springs, back to Cornudas, then return to Dell City. This is 135 miles daily, six days per week.

At times in years past, accessing mailboxes was difficult as right of way was rocky, slick, thorn-infested from mesquite, or offered other problems for mail carriers.

Now, for the first time in 23 years, I can access most of the boxes without any of the above problems.

I want to commend your road crews at Pine Springs and Dell City for their work on this part of U.S. 62/180. Just the blacktop neatness around the boxes shows that TxDOT cares. And this mail carrier certainly appreciates all the work done to make the boxes more easily accessible.

(Editor's note: This letter was sent to Charles Berry, El Paso district engineer.)

To: TxDOT, Tyler District
From: Don Brogdon, Duncanville, TX

Just a note to let you know what kind of employee you have. **Rickey Newman** came along when I needed help in the worst way. I had a blowout on Interstate 20. I have a bad back and was having a hard time. Rickey didn't just help me change my tire, he jacked up my pickup and changed the tire himself.

He then followed me about two miles down the road to a service station so I could get more air in my tire. I tried to pay Rickey but he wouldn't take any money. I just wanted someone from his job to know just how much I appreciated his help and what a great representative he is to the Texas Department of Transportation.

(Editor's note: This letter was sent to Eldon McCurley, North Tyler maintenance section supervisor. Rickey Newman is North Tyler maintenance contract inspector.)

To: TxDOT, Waco District
From: Michael Nicoletti, city manager,
Lacy-Lakeview, TX

I wanted to thank two TxDOT employees who came to the aid of a few ladies stranded on Highway 31 near Hubbard. Our city secretary, Connie Foreman, rode with Robinson city secretary Linda Vranich to a City Secretary's Association Meeting to be held in Corsicana. The Robinson finance director was also in the vehicle.

Just outside of Hubbard, their vehicle began smoking and they had to ditch it on the side of the road. Two TxDOT employees, **Jerry Handy** and **Steve Hill**, stopped to assist the ladies and stood by them until they received adequate assistance from a car dealership.

I am very appreciative, as are the ladies, of the time taken by TxDOT employees to make sure that the ladies were safe and en route to their original destination.

(Editor's note: Jerry Handy and Steve Hill are maintenance technicians in the Hill County Maintenance Office, Waco District. This letter was sent to the district engineer.)

To: TxDOT, Austin District
From: Carolyn Scarborough, Austin, TX

I was on a temporary assignment in Fredericksburg in my Texas Department of Health auto when I had a flat tire returning to Austin. This is quite devastating to a female traveling alone, and all I knew to do was raise my hood and pray.

One of our real Texas heroes from TxDOT stopped and asked, "Can I help you?" This young man was so polite and helpful and really saved me that day. His name was **Justin Evans**. His co-worker, **Glaforo Galindo**, also stopped to assist. I just want the department to know how grateful I will always be to those young men who went out of their way to help me. Their moms would be so proud of them; I sure was.

(Editor's note: Justin Evans is a crew chief with the center-stripe crew in Austin. Glaforo Galindo is a center-stripe crewmember.)



Amarillo District

30 years
Dale O. Chick
25 years
Benton M. Rogers
20 years
Junior D. Ireland
15 years
Ronald A. Herr
10 years
Harold R. Bedell
David S. Miller
5 years
Warren E. Miller
Janet A. Williams

Abilene District

30 years
Joseph T. Locke
20 years
Blair W. Haynie
10 years
Vernon L. Session
5 years
Jovelina R. Guerrero
Gay N. McKennon
Ronda L. White

Atlanta District

20 years
Thomas P. Beckendorf
Leland R. Cooper
James G. Joslin
10 years
Randell E. Deloach

Austin District

45 years
William R. Ashabranner
30 years
Elgin O. Wendel
20 years
Miguel A. Ruiz
15 years
William W. Benningfield
Eugene J. Heinemann
Terry J. Martin
John D. Murray
5 years
Diana L. Jackson
James R. Williams

Beaumont District

20 years
Margaret H. Robicheaux
5 years
Ruby A. Behannon
Terry R. Coleman

Brownwood District

35 years
Tim L. Ehrler
25 years
Randall L. Baggett
10 years
Lucinda F. Chesnut
Letha T. Garrett
William L. Henderson
5 years
Trey M. Rust

Bryan District

35 years
John W. Parsons
20 years
John O. Page Jr.

15 years

Robert A. Appleton
5 years
Leigh A. Greer
Lee E. Newsome
Wesley G. Schroeder
Lawrence W. Wilson

Childress District

25 years
Servando H. Canales Jr.
20 years
Larry A. Davis
Winfred L. McBride
15 years
Michael A. Breedlove
James W. Harris
10 years
Mary Y. Marshall
Frank G. Ortiz
5 years
Ruben M. Cantu

Corpus Christi District

25 years
John H. Toliver
20 years
Walter H. Norwood
15 years
Jesse G. Aguilar
Humberto Martinez
10 years
Ricardo F. Benavides
Solomon P. Kahookale
5 years
Leslie E. Crayton
Brian L. McKenna
Linda S. Morgan
Vicente Ortiz Jr.

Dallas District

35 years
Karen S. Wade
30 years
Venetia C. Scott
Claud Smith
25 years
Sherman L. Putman
20 years
Norman E. Thompson
15 years
Joseph S. Jancuska
Suja G. Mathew
George B. Reeves
Michael A. Renfrow
10 years
Waid D. Goolsby
Richard C. Mason
Fraydoon A. Nafissi
5 years
James R. Brand
Steven D. Kennemer

El Paso District

10 years
Alberto Armendariz III
Roberto J. Cardona
Pete A. Cereceres
Connie D. Chesshire
Patricia G. Dalbin
Larry A. Delgado
Thomas A. Murphy
Roberto R. Ramirez
Rogelio Valencia
5 years
Jorge A. Gomez

Fort Worth District

30 years
Larry G. Pack
25 years
James W. Clarke
Todd J. Western
20 years
Charles D. Doss
15 years
Jacqueline N. Carter
Kenneth R. Long
10 years
Cheryl A. Hall
Jerry W. Hunter Jr.
Jeffrey G. Miller
Mayra R. Mitchell
Robert A. Spurlock
5 years
Edrean Cheng
Enrique Guzman
Thomas W. Miller
Larry D. Wann

Houston District

30 years
Don P. Maniha
25 years
Allen L. Duncan
Linda W. Moss
20 years
Sharlene A. Rothen
Thomas J. Whitaker
Rosie L. White
15 years
Trent R. Bush
10 years
Larry W. Buchanan
5 years
Sabas U. Cagubcub
Claude A. Cash
Jimmy R. Rankin
Ronald M. Roland

Laredo District

25 years
Estela Rodriguez
15 years
Mauro Galvan Jr.
Manuel Jaime Jr.
10 years
Baltazar Avila
5 years
Juan A. Reyna Jr.

Lufkin District

25 years
Harry W. Thompson
15 years
Richard W. Bentley
Jack L. Marshall
10 years
Paul N. Edwards
5 years
Anthony G. Fuller

Lubbock District

20 years
John M. Craig
Terry W. Lee
Cecil J. Norris
15 years
Ricky L. Westbrook
10 years
Richard L. Hutton
5 years
Adelfino S. Aleman
Gonzalo R. Flores
Micah N. Shaw

Odessa District

20 years
Douglas E. Paup
10 years
Saul Acosta
Everett R. Harris
Glen W. Larum
Bobby D. Phelps
5 years
Gaylon C. Windham

Paris District

25 years
Keith Norris
20 years
Curtis M. Long
Kenneth W. Parker
10 years
Jerry A. Dickerson Jr.
Catherine M. Hostetler
Tom G. Roest
Darius L. Samuels
5 years
William E. Fesperman
Patricia A. Hurley
James E. Lewis

Pharr District

25 years
Rosa B. Ramirez
20 years
Rene R. Garcia
15 years
Benito Campos Jr.
10 years
Jose F. Torres
5 years
Mark A. Iglesias
Roberto Puentes Jr.

San Angelo District

25 years
William C. Kleypas

San Antonio District

30 years
Jose E. Mendez
25 years
John W. Davis
Dolores S. Pena
20 years
Winifred M. Bishop
Jeff F. Caron
Roger E. Schultz
15 years
Alfredo V. Alvizo
Gerardo Carmona
10 years
Kathryn M. Pearson
5 years
Matt D. Jordan
Jeffery W. Smith
Troy D. Witt

Tyler District

35 years
Bernie K. Dodd
20 years
Rodney D. English
10 years
Victor A. Martinez
5 years
Bobby G. Curnutt
Juanita L. Daniels-west
J. P. Garcia
James M. Massey
Sheryl S. McQuitty
John L. Powell

Waco District

20 years
Johnny D. Fulton
Susan W. Ussey
10 years
Clovis S. Sutton
5 years
Brian W. Lamb
Johnny R. Neal Sr.

Wichita Falls District

20 years
Grace M. Davis
Joyce E. Holzer
15 years
Jon P. Leary
James R. Shelton
10 years
Jerry Bradley
Patricia A. Sears

Yoakum District

35 years
Carolyn Schroeder
15 years
Barbara J. Barton
10 years
Ernest Trevino

Aviation Division

10 years
Greg L. Miller

Bridge Division

5 years
Scott T. Dziekan

Construction Division

30 years
Eugene L. Long Jr.
15 years
Dale A. Rand
10 years
Claudia F. Kern
5 years
Jeff D. Sexton

Design Division

20 years
Shirley T. Ashbrook
Howard J. Nelson

Environmental Affairs Division

10 years
Donald W. Hill

Finance Division

15 years
Brad E. Gatlin
5 years
Delilah M. Hernandez
Maxine M. White

General Services Division

30 years
Donald W. Morrison
20 years
James V. Collier
Regis H. Frank
Joseph D. Santos
Aurora V. Zavala
10 years
Wayne Helton
Karen S. Lewis

Information

Systems Division

25 years
Sarah D. Tooke
20 years
Marshall Hinton
10 years
William D. Gee
Noreen K. Ozment
Edward X. Rios
5 years
Jeffrey W. McCoy

Maintenance Division

5 years
Elias G. Reyna

Motor Carrier Division

15 years
Suzanne Regan

Motor Vehicle Division

5 years
Leticia C. Castillo
Ann Ponce

Occupational Safety Division

25 years
Mary M. Marciel
10 years
Judith I. Geissen
Austin Taylor Klotz

Right of Way Division

15 years
James P. Hutchinson

Travel Division

15 years
Devon V. Armstrong

Texas Turnpike Authority Division

25 years
Andra B. Evans
20 years
Timothy J. Weight

Vehicle Titles and Registration Division

20 years
Monica H. Blackwell
5 years
Trina N. Scott
Martha A. Weeks



February 2003

Dallas District

Robert L. Blevins
Engineering Technician
20 Years

Fort Worth District

Fredie D. Goble
Engineering Technician
10 Years

Houston District

Mary T. Logan
Secretary
13 Years

Jimmie R. Rogers

Purchaser
17 Years

Lubbock District

Bobby S. Sims
Transportation Maintenance
Crew Chief
29 Years

San Antonio District

Jesse R. Mata
Engineering Technician
28 Years

Isaac H. Reno
Engineering Technician
25 Years

Juan V. Gomez
Engineering Technician
21 Years

Yoakum District

Johnny L. Sanders
Transportation Maintenance
Technician
24 Years

General Services Division

David A. Brown, Sr.
Electric and Air Conditional
Mechanic
37 Years

Manuel S. Rodriguez, Jr.
Printing Service Technician
25 Years

Human Resources Division

Marlene L. Bradley
Program Specialist
10 Years

Information Systems Division

Jeff D. Hazard
System Analyst
29 Years

Motor Carrier Division

Robert D. Beck
Investigator
31 Years

Did you know?

Mexico, Texas' closest foreign neighbor, is the second-largest trading partner of the United States behind Canada. Sales to Mexico in the first six months of 2002 totaled \$47.5 billion. That compares with the \$41.6 billion for all of 1993, the year before the North American Free Trade

Agreement took effect. Because of NAFTA, many goods move duty-free between Canada, Mexico and the United States. Mexico is also the largest foreign market for Texas merchandise exports, and Texas' transportation infrastructure serves as the principal route for trade between Mexico and the U.S. (*USA Today, TxED*).

Commuting to work: a very long road

Continued from Page 9

3,000 miles a month to work is, "Where in the world do you live?" The answer: I live in the city of Copperas Cove. "Cove," as residents call it, is next to Killeen and Fort Hood, population 30,000.

Why I drive that far is simple. I like my job and it pays much better than the job I left working as a news producer for a TV station in Waco. Of course, it's also because my wife found a job she liked years ago working in the Cove school system. She found it 13 years ago when we moved to the Fort Hood area because we had to leave Panama prematurely just months before Manuel Noriega was removed from office. After years of

moving as a military wife, she finally has a job from which she can retire. It seems a fair trade: she works toward retirement at a place she has finally been able to set down roots and I take the road to Austin because our mortgage payment is a lot less than a lot of places in Austin we might live.

I've gone a fair number of miles since I started working for TxDOT in October 2000. More than 87,000 miles to be exact. Think of that next time your commute lengthens from 15 to 30 minutes because of a traffic jam. And think of me: I still have an hour more to go. ☆

Calendar

2003

MARCH

27

Commission Meeting, Austin
Cesar Chavez Day (optional holiday)

31

31-4/1

NIGC Change Management, Houston, GSD

APRIL

1

NIGC Change Management, Houston, GSD

1-2

3

Bid Letting, Austin, CST
Safety Rest Area Grand Opening, I-40 mm129, MNT
Safety Rest Area Grand Opening, Quanah, MNT

5

Don't Mess with Texas Trash-Off, statewide, TRV

7-9

10

DE/DD/OD meeting, Austin
Environmental Seminar, Dallas, CST (& AGC)

10-11

NIGC Contract Management, Plano, GSD

15

NIGC Specification Writing, Austin, GSD

17

Environmental Seminar, Dallas, CST (& AGC)

17-18

Effective Contract Writing, Austin, GSD

18

Good Friday (optional holiday)

21

San Jacinto Day (skeleton crew holiday)

22

Environmental Seminar, Lubbock, CST (& AGC)

22-24

Advanced Public Procurement, Austin, GSD

23-24

Statewide Maintenance Conference, Waco, MNT

24

Commission Meeting, Austin

28

Bullet-Proofing RFPs, Austin, GSD

28-5/2

Project Management Course, Corpus Christi, TRF

MAY

1-2

Project Management Course, Corpus Christi, TRF

5-6

Contracting for Services, San Antonio, GSD

6-7

Comp.Sealed Proposals, Austin, GSD

6-7

Bid Letting, Austin, CST

The complete TxDOT Calendar is on the intranet at <http://crossroads/org/pio/articles/calendar.htm>

Coming next month:

- ☆ Wildflowers in Texas
- ☆ TxDOT novelist published
- ☆ Turning tires into roads
- ☆ Safety rest area debut

backtracks



How did this happen and where was it? If you know the answers to those and any other questions this photograph might have caused you to ask, please let TNews know by calling Quevarra Moten at (512) 463-6396 or e-mailing qmoten@dot.state.tx.us.

Last month's backtracks solution...

TxDOT retiree Walt Bailey of Marble Falls was the first to identify the last backtracks photo as Paisano Drive (U.S. 85) in El Paso. According to Bailey, the buildings in the background are a part of the original Fort Bliss before it moved to its current location.

Bailey retired in 2001 from TxDOT's Information Systems Division with plans to travel and take it easy with his wife. But an opportunity arose with the city of Marble Falls, and Bailey has been working as a city planner there since his retirement. "It's a one-person office, but it's great," he said.

Bailey, who began with the department as a transportation planner for the El Paso District from 1969-1978, misses his former TxDOT co-workers, but not the daily two-hour commute he faced during the last five years of his job at TxDOT. ☺



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Austin, Texas 78701

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