



Wildfires scorch Texas
TxDOT crews face heat, smoke: Pages 7-10

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On the cover:

Lightly traveled highways curve through a sea of blackened and burned grassland in North Texas. The charred earth is the aftermath of numerous wildfires that raced through hundreds of thousands of acres in March and April. At least a dozen people have died in the blazes that also claimed scores of homes and herds of grazing cattle.

TxDOT photo by Paul Braun

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Straight Talk

More challenges ahead

by Mike Behrens, Executive Director

Recent days around TxDOT have been anything but “business as usual.” We can expect more of the same in the coming weeks and months.

Of course, some things about our business are “as usual” — our insistence on high standards, on accountability and integrity, on excellence in workplace safety, on providing transportation value for our fellow Texans.

But seldom is any one workday like the one before it. For many, that is what keeps things interesting.

Nowadays, we’re observing Work-Zone Safety Week to remind us that injuries and deaths in highway work zones must be prevented.

We also observe, during this season of new flowers in bloom, that roadway litter must be prevented — the beauty of our state depends on it through efforts such as the Texas Trash-Off, which is now two decades old.

As we have in the past, many of us will renew our efforts to be healthy — and the upcoming Texas Round-up is a good place to start. This April program calls on us to be more physically active, to be healthier whether by walking or running or other exercise.

Even with all this, there’s more. Many TxDOT folks are involved with the planning for the first Texas Transportation Forum. Seen as an annual event, the forum is sponsored by TxDOT with the Associated General Contractors of Texas, the Texas Good Roads Transportation Association, and the Texas Transportation Institute. Scheduled for early June in Austin, the two-day gathering will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the interstate highway system. The forum also allows those present to look ahead to the transportation challenges of the next half century.

As planning for this event continues, others in TxDOT are working to control wildfires that have destroyed grasslands across hundreds of thousands of acres in Texas. For some, the fires are as destructive as the effects from any of last year’s hurricanes.

Others in TxDOT are hard at work seeing to it that Texas is ready to respond to any of the storms that may come to the state this year. Hurricane season starts June 1.

But our biggest challenge, day in and day out, continues to be providing the high-quality transportation system that Texans demand. We know people hate waiting in traffic because time lost to traffic congestion can’t be recovered. All that waiting also wastes fuel and fouls the air.

We know this because we hate waiting in traffic too. Once we set ourselves in motion in our vehicles, whether to the corner store, across town or across the state, we don’t like to be delayed until we’ve reached our destination.

Better than most people, we understand that the Texas transportation system has not kept pace with the needs of our rapidly increasing population.

By now, everyone in TxDOT should understand that we have a plan to meet those needs through the faster completion of transportation projects with additional money to get the job done right. The TxDOT plan sees Texas moving forward — by reducing congestion, enhancing safety, improving air quality, increasing the value of our transportation assets, and by expanding economic opportunity.

You are the folks who make that plan happen, today and every day to come through the next several decades. Thanks for being up to the challenge.★

Trans-Texas Corridor efforts advance

■ TTC-35 draft report refines study area, identifies need

DALLAS — A multi-use transportation alternative to the heavily congested Interstate 35 corridor could lie slightly to the east while incorporating the interstate's southern half, according to a 4,000-page draft environmental impact statement for Trans-Texas Corridor 35 (TTC-35).

The report, released April 4, shows a narrowed study area from Gainesville to Laredo to be generally 10 miles wide and near I-35 and metropolitan centers, except where it is centered on I-35 south of San Antonio to Laredo.

The report's findings are not final and will be subject to more than 50 public hearings along the I-35 corridor this summer.

The narrowed study area was identified as the preferred corridor alternative because it best supports the purpose and need for TTC-35 and incorporates the most miles of existing highways (195 miles) and rail (214 miles).

These findings are part of the TTC-35 draft environmental impact statement prepared by TxDOT and the Federal Highway Administration.

"After more than two years of analysis, the question regarding the need for TTC-35 is now well documented," said Michael Behrens, TxDOT executive director.

Already, nearly 10 million Texans live within 50 miles of I-35.

If federally approved, the environmental process would continue with Tier Two focusing on the narrowed 10-mile wide study area. It is within this study area that a final project route would be determined for roads, rail and utilities. If approved, the Tier Two studies would authorize construction.

The complete draft environmental impact statement for TTC-35,

including a map of the narrowed study area, is available at www.keeptexasmoving.org

■ Partner sought to accelerate 600-mile project along I-69

CORPUS CHRISTI — The search is on for a long-term strategic partner to accelerate development of I-69/Trans-Texas Corridor.

A formal request to the private sector, revealed on April 10, invites proposals for developing I-69/TTC, a 600-mile multi-use transportation corridor extending from Northeast Texas to Mexico.

"The I-69 corridor has been under study since it was identified as a congressional high-priority corridor in 1991," said Hope Andrade, member of the Texas Transportation Commission. "This project has been waiting for funding for the past 15 years and will continue on hold if we don't seek private-sector investment."

The request for qualifications, issued by TxDOT, begins a competitive, two-step selection process to develop a public-private partnership for I-69/TTC. Proposers would submit statements detailing their experience in developing and financing large, multimodal transportation projects.

These statements also would include a conceptual proposal to finance, design, construct, operate and maintain I-69/TTC. Conceptual proposals are due by June 7.

The Texas Transportation Commission would need to approve the next step — issuing a request for detailed proposals. The selection process can take 15 months to complete.

■ Proposal favors plan for rail line as part of TTC-35

AUSTIN — A new 600-mile freight-rail line from Dallas-

Fort Worth to Mexico is timely and ready for development, according to a private-sector proposal submitted to TxDOT.

The proposal, unveiled March 29, determines that the new railway "would have substantial national, statewide, and regional benefits by adding capacity and increasing efficiency for freight transportation."

In a letter to TxDOT, Cintra-Zachry (the state's private-sector planning partner for TTC-35), suggests all intersecting roads would go either below or above the new railway and there would be no "at-grade" crossings.

This design would improve safety, attract existing rail traffic away from urban areas, and improve efficiency of freight movement across Texas.

"Much like our highway system is congested due to a 57 percent jump in the state's population during the last 25 years, our rail system is congested as well," said Ric Williamson, chair of the Texas Transportation Commission.

One positive effect would pull one million trucks a year from I-35. Other benefits include reduced congestion on roadways blocked by trains at rail crossings, safer transport of hazardous materials, and expanded economic opportunities.

Cintra-Zachry says the new railway would be routed so Class 1 freight railroads operating within the major urban areas along TTC-35 (Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, San Marcos and San Antonio) are provided new rail infrastructure for the movement of goods. Private financing, based on revenue generated from railroad operators and shippers using the new rail line, would be the focus of the Cintra-Zachry funding plan to pay for the rail. ⬤



by **Bill Powell**

TxDOT Public Information Office

Songs have long been written about “the road” — the lore, history, romance and love people have for travel.

Whether heading out or heading home, highways have inspired a wealth of songs, — from “On the Road Again” to “Take Me Home, Country Roads.”

Odes to leaving always seem to involve the word “down.” No one ever goes “up” the road — “Down the Road and Gone,” “Rockin’ Down the Highway,” “Down the Highway,” “Roll On Down the Highway.”

Dozens of other variations on the theme are in a list of more than 1,300 road songs compiled by Richard Weingroff and listed on the Federal Highway Administration’s Web site.

“Get Your Kicks on Interstate 40” doesn’t sound quite as lyrical as the road it replaced — Route 66. There are seven songs about Route 66, perhaps the best remembered song about any American road and a part of which is still in Texas. It is commemorated in song and featured in the early 1960s television series of the same name.

More songs are written about highways in general than interstates in particular — 40 songs about numbered

highways against 17 about interstates.

Not all songs are romantic. “Dead Man’s Curve” tells a disastrous story and shows more than romance takes place on the highways.

Songs are as varied as categories of vehicles. Buses and trucks have a hefty share of songs: “Eighteen Wheels,” “Greyhound,” “Speedball Trucker,” “Continental Trailways Blues,” “Truck Drivers’ Blues,” “Greyhound Bus,” “On a Bus to St. Cloud” and “Me and Bobby McGee.” There’s at least one song called “Motorcycle” and a van song (“Hey Little Minivan”).

Some songs devoted to cars and featuring highways include “1970 Monte Carlo,” “Chevy Impala,” “Rocket 88” and “Mercury Blues.” Who could forget Dinah Shore singing to “See the USA in Your Chevrolet”?

At least five songs are devoted to the car of many people’s dreams through the years — the Cadillac. They include “59 Cadillac,” “Sleek Black Cadillac,” “Cadillac Blues,” “Pink Cadillac” and “Long White Cadillac.”

There are songs about common experiences. Who can’t relate to “Prisoner of the Highway”? With “Traffic Jam,” it’s probably about drivers in major cities during rush hour.

This could be followed by a tribute to impatient drivers, “Honkin’ Down the Highway.”

Those addicted to driving have “Highway Junkie” to call their own.

Songs about toll roads are “Turnpike Tom,” and “Trouble on the Turnpike.”

For those who drive in the left lane, refuse to signal lane changes, and who speed — those strains of music you hear could be “This Highway’s Mine.”

There are no shortage of songs paying homage to the Department of Public Safety: “You Can’t Catch Me,” “Highway Patrol,” “Life in the Fast Lane,” “How Fast Them Trucks Can Go,” “Speed On,” “(I’m a) Road Runner,” “Drive That Fast,” “I Feel Speed,” and “Highway Patrolman.”

■ **TxDOT’s own has a road song:** It’s not on the Web site listing highway songs, but a suitable addition comes from a newly released CD provided by Paul Braun, TxDOT’s public information officer in the Amarillo District. In his free time, Braun is the drummer and a vocalist with Gray County Line, a country-music band now headlining at North Texas venues. The song — called “I-27” — tells the story of a young man traveling the highway on a Friday night between Lubbock and Amarillo to pick up his girlfriend.

Old diary offers mystery

by Mike Cox

A remodeling project at the Greer Building in Austin has uncovered a mini-mystery dating back to the days of Bonnie and Clyde.

Working in the brick pipe chase behind the elevator shafts, a worker found a 1934 diary stuffed inside. The contract employee passed the folded, soft-cover daybook to Greer Building facilities coordinator Dick Rollins, who presented it to the TxDOT Public Information Office.

Whoever owned the diary neglected to write his name in it and there are few clues. Judging from the sparse penciled entries, the owner did a lot of traveling. He covered the state, from the Panhandle to the Valley, on Highway Department business. He also took a trip to Washington.

But the mystery TxDOT diarist didn't waste words. The entry for Tuesday, January 9, simply reads: "Office" and "Commission meeting." Curiously, some of the entries have been erased.

The diary owner made his last entry on Tuesday, June 12, simply noting "San Antonio." Nothing else appears after that day, suggesting the diary got lost – or hidden – not long afterward.

Who knows what happened? The imagination comes up with all sorts of possible scenarios, from an accident to someone's idea of an informal time capsule from the depths of the Great Depression.

More lost and found

A few weeks after the diary turned up, security guard Jack Mathis found an interesting assortment of items when remodeling of the counter in the front lobby began.

The oldest item was a small piece of paper connected to the bid-letting process to replace louvers in the ventilation building at the Baytown-La Porte tunnel. Whoever

Letter from the editor

got the job was scheduled to find out about it at 2:30 p.m. on Oct. 11, 1967. Hope the lost slip of paper didn't delay the project.

Seven years later, a wallet-sized University of Texas football schedule fell between the cracks at the security counter. (UT went on to an 8-4 season that year, tying for second place in the Southwest Conference and ending up ranked 17th in the nation in the final Associated Press poll. Oh, the Longhorns beat the Aggies in Austin, 17-3.)

Finally, Mathis found three red, white and blue peelable stickers labeled "Visitor To Texas/Kindly Extend All Courtesies/Texas Tourist Council." In other words, don't mess with Texas tourists.

One sticky subject

"I know that gum is a no-no in meetings," e-mails El Paso District's public information officer Blanca Del Valle. "But, every meeting I attend TxDOT folks are chewing gum 100 miles an hour. Sometimes I approach them and say something. They do not appreciate this. ... Would you know if there is something, somewhere written on gum etiquette?"

Well, no one could accuse me of being Miss Manners. In fact, I'm discretely chewing sugarless gum as I write this. But gum chewing is definitely a sticky subject. And Blanca is not alone in wanting to burst bubbles when it comes to gum chewing.

A Web search revealed page after page of sites containing the words "gum etiquette." Bottom line: It's not polite to smack, be careful how you dispose of used gum, and any level of chewing or bubble-blowing in a public setting by a public employee is out of place. ☺

TNotes

■ **Transit grants:** Rural Texans will find it easier to get to the doctor, work, and the store, through \$7 million in grants made available to transit providers at the March commission meeting.

"This award recognizes the efforts of rural transit districts in encouraging Congress and the president to provide more federal funds for transit," said Eric Gleason, TxDOT's director of public transportation.

The Rural Public Transportation Grant Program seeks to enhance the access of people in non-urbanized areas to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services, and recreation.

Thirty-nine operators provide transportation throughout Texas in rural areas and cities with populations less than 50,000.

The state's rural-transit programs provided 4.5 million passenger trips during the 2005 fiscal year, an increase of more than 3 percent from the prior year. More than 7,000 transit vehicles, buses, and vans operate in Texas.

Proposals sought:

Commissioners also agreed to seek private-sector proposals to speed development of two express/managed-lane projects in Dallas and Tarrant counties — the I-820/SH 183 corridor, including portions of I-35W, and the Funnel (SH 121/SH 114 corridor).

The action signifies the state's determination to reduce congestion, enhance safety, expand economic opportunity, improve air quality, and increase the value of transportation assets.

"The development of these projects will greatly enhance mobility throughout the I-35

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TxDOT in the news

TxDOT often makes news. Here are some highlights, summarized from media reports in recent weeks.

■ TxDOT finished Texas 360 through Euless, completing a two-year \$390-million project opening a freeway route from Interstate 20 in Arlington to SH 121/SH114 in Grapevine. The route provides commuters a new way to get around the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport.

The ribbon-cutting opened the way for traffic expected to grow sharply by 2025 according to the North Central Texas Council of Governments. (*Fort Worth Star Telegram* – 2/7/06)

■ A ribbon-cutting was held Feb. 8 marking the “beginning of another step toward the completion of the La Entrada al Pacifico, the international trade corridor between Texas and western Mexico,” according to Texas House Speaker Tom Craddick of Midland.

The \$35-million, 15-mile project runs from the intersection of Highway 191 and Farm to Market 1788 and runs to Texas 349. The Highway 349 reliever route is expected to require up to 18 months for right-of-way acquisition with groundbreaking expected in a year to 18 months. (*Midland Reporter-Telegram* – 2/8/06)

■ TxDOT has fast-tracked a rehabilitation project along U.S. 67 through Early and Brownwood due to increased traffic, crashes and

failing pavement. The \$2.65-million project is expected to be let in August, started in October, and completed within one year. Roadway medians are included in the project due to heavy development and increased traffic at the intersection of U.S. 67 and U.S. 377. (*Abilene Reporter News* – 2/15/06)

■ TxDOT has reached the halfway point in a more than \$2.4-million renovation of the Farm to Market Road 314 overpass near Van over Interstate 20. Renovation began last March when extensive traffic weakened the overpass. The bridge, which is being reinforced, rebuilt and widened a half at a time, has moved traffic to the new side while rebuilding the other half. Project completion is expected by the end of summer. (*Times Record News* – 2/16/06)

■ TxDOT will begin the Grapevine funnel, a \$762-million project next year. The project, one of the largest and most expensive in TxDOT history, is being built to alleviate choke points squeezing traffic on the seven highways that converge between Dallas-Fort Worth Airport and Lake Grapevine.

The area, which now accommodates 190,000 vehicles per day, will increase to 325,000 by 2025 according to the North Central Texas Council of Governments. (*Fort Worth Star Telegram* – 2/22/06)

■ The four-state coalition putting together a network of roads called the Ports to Plains Corridor, has

almost reached the halfway point in its goal to build the 1,400-mile trade route. TxDOT and highway departments in New Mexico, Oklahoma and Colorado have developed the route, which will stretch from Laredo to Denver. Development of the route could attract thousands of new jobs and have an economic impact of more than \$4.5 billion. (*Amarillo Globe News* – 2/23/06)

■ TxDOT approved \$13.1 million for rehabilitation of a three-mile stretch of Interstate 40 in Carson County. The project, which starts construction in May, will include removing existing asphalt and replacing it with concrete and removing a dangerous overpass. Completion is expected in one year. (*Amarillo Globe-News* – 3/1/06)

■ TxDOT begins a \$39-million project in Denton in April to widen Loop 288 to six lanes between Interstate 35E and University Drive.

The interstate will be divided by raised median with three lanes in each direction, with left-turn lanes at several locations and turnarounds at University Drive. (*Dallas Morning News* – 3/21/06)

■ Work begins April 1 on a \$54-million project that will widen Interstate 45 (Gulf Freeway) at the new NASA Road 1 and NASA Road 1 connector ramps. The project, which will not affect frontage road traffic, will take approximately nine months to complete. (*Galveston County Daily News* – 3/23/06)★

SCORCHED!

Wildfires burn Texas

by Paul Braun
Amarillo Public Information Office

The Texas Panhandle had not had a significant rainfall since early August 2005. Even a brief freezing rain the first week of December did nothing to quench the parched rangelands.

Burn bans had been in effect in several counties since early January. The Texas Forest Service sent warnings to Texas residents about fire hazards — burning trash, parking cars with hot engines in grassy areas, or throwing cigarettes out of car windows could trigger range fires not seen in the Panhandle in decades.

On Friday, March 10, the inevitable happened. At about 3 p.m., a car caught fire on U.S. 385 in Hartley County about five miles north of the Cal Farley Boys Ranch (35 miles northwest of Amarillo). Flames ignited grass on the right of way, and the hot, dry conditions — fueled by winds gusting up to 40 mph — did the rest.

Wes McDougal, TxDOT maintenance supervisor for the Channing and Dumas sections, was called by Hartley County disaster officials to assist volunteer firefighters. McDougal dispatched two motor graders from Dumas and a motor grader and truck from Hartley County to a fire on FM 722 near Middlewell.

He and the crews were joined by TxDOT crews from maintenance supervisor Royce Howell's Dalhart section in the area between FM 722 and SH 354 for about seven hours, blading firebreaks and providing traffic control, when smoke and ash blown by high winds forced the closure of FM 722 and SH 354.

The fire was controlled, and the crews refueled the trucks of volunteer firefighters before leaving at around 1 a.m.

On Saturday, March 11, high winds again forced the closure of FM 722 and SH 354 — not from smoke, but by ash and sand being blown across the roadway. McDougal and his crew were out again performing

traffic control on both Saturday and Sunday. Another fire started in the area on Sunday morning, March 12, threatening the city of Dumas in Moore County, about 45 miles north of Amarillo, but it was brought under control by about 5 p.m.

Black Sunday

Mike Taylor, director of operations for the Amarillo District, was landing at the Rick Husband International Airport in Amarillo on Sunday, March 12, when his cell phone started ringing. Winds of 45 mph, with gusts topping 60 mph, had blown over a power line, sparking a range fire just south of I-40, about four miles east of Groom.

A nine-vehicle pileup had already occurred on I-40 due to reduced visibility from smoke blowing across the interstate. Four people were killed and several others injured.

Randall Patterson, maintenance supervisor for the Groom and Panhandle sections, had already responded with a full crew to close the interstate and reroute traffic. Taylor barely had time to drop off his suitcases before reporting to the emergency-operations center in Amarillo to help coordinate TxDOT assistance. While at the ops center, he learned the fire near

Editor's note: Deadly wildfires seared many counties in rural Texas into April, even after TxDOT public information officers Paul Braun (Amarillo District) and Barbara Seal (Childress District) made this four-page special section possible through their reports and photos from North Texas. Due to space limitations, the text seen in this publication has been shortened from their original but longer reports. See the full-text versions of their articles at <http://crossroads.org/pio/TNews/tnol.htm>

■ See Page 8

TxDOT crews face fires



Johnny McConnell prepares to fight wildfires in Texas Panhandle.

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Groom was blazing out of control. Requests for TxDOT assistance were coming in from several areas. Taylor dispatched crews to help with traffic control, blading operations, fueling, and aerial operations.

With the McLean fire raging and threatening I-40, the Texas Department of Public Safety closed a 70-mile stretch of the interstate, diverting traffic to U.S. 287. Russell Luther and the Amarillo Expressway section put up roadblocks on the interstate and feeder routes to direct traffic to the detours. The Claude maintenance section, headed by Parker Stewart, was also called out to direct traffic. Eastbound I-40 traffic was rerouted south down SH 207 onto U.S. 287 toward Childress.

Double trouble

Throughout the day, as winds pushed the flames northeast, firefighting efforts intensified. With aerial operations grounded due to the high winds, TxDOT motor-grader crews worked side-by-side with firefighters from several area towns and the Texas Forest Service. They bladed firebreaks as quickly as possible, trying to keep up with the fires then moving at about 50 mph. To add insult to injury, another blaze, later to be called the Borger fire, ignited southwest of

Skellytown in Carson County (45 miles northeast of Amarillo).

Already stretched resources were transferred to the area and volunteer fire departments across the Panhandle responded. Throughout the day and evening, the winds blew the flames nearer to populated areas. Several Panhandle cities were evacuated.

More Amarillo District maintenance sections went into action. Pete Hare's Pampa Maintenance Section, cutting firebreaks and refueling firefighting vehicles, handled fires in Roberts and Ochiltree counties.

Flames continued to spread to Skellytown, threatening to destroy it. TxDOT crews stepped up their efforts assisting firefighters on the ground, as well as supporting aerial fire suppression.

Special planes were flown in from out-of-state because their size allowed them to operate despite the wind gusts of over 60 mph.

TxDOT employees from Special Jobs and the Expressway section kept planes loaded with fire retardant at the Tradewinds Airport. Their efforts in keeping the retardant tanks full kept airplane ground time to a minimum.

The Texas Forest Service credited these pilots with saving the town of Skellytown, and the pilots said they couldn't have done the job without TxDOT workers keeping the retardant mixture flowing.

In all, more than 70 TxDOT employees, equipped with 60 vehicles, spent all day and night Sunday helping fight two fires simultaneously. And the week was only getting started.

The Borger Section, headed by Randy Clark, sent two motor graders to assist with the fire near Borger. These motor graders, operated by Tammy McWilliams and Dale Herbst, rescued two fire trucks, an ops center pickup, and a wrecker — along with their drivers and passengers — after the vehicles became stuck in the sand at Bear Creek just ahead of the approaching flames.

The Borger Section then joined with the Panhandle and Pampa sections to fight the Skellytown fire.

A tale of two chiefs

As the fires raged, charring hundreds of thousands of acres and destroying farms and ranches, local volunteer fire departments were stretched to their limits.

Most of these firefighters were volunteers, including 16 TxDOT employees. Two employees are fire chiefs for their departments. Roy Tarpley, Amarillo Shop, heads the Panhandle Volunteer Fire Department. Scott Brewster, Canadian Maintenance, is the Canadian fire chief.

"You have to be able to rely on your fellow firefighters, friends, and neighbors in a time like this," said Tarpley. "It's impossible to try



TxDOT photos by Paul Braun



Fire volunteers save town

■ Continued from Page 8

and outguess wildfires, and this was the worst one I've experienced. Without support from the agencies and departments on hand, we would have been in some serious trouble."

Tarpley's crew was tasked with stopping a 10-mile fire line on the southern flank of the Borger fire, which was approaching Skellytown.

Although the city had been evacuated during the day, the fire still threatened homes and businesses, and Tarpley's team was determined to stop it. The volunteers worked nearly 10 hours before bringing that fire under control.

Brewster's team in Canadian was busy fighting fires Sunday in their own backyard in Hemphill County, at times alongside his fellow workers

from the TxDOT Canadian Maintenance Section. It wasn't until late Thursday and early Friday that relief crews arrived, giving Brewster and his crew a much-needed break.★

*Note: full text available at:
<http://crossroads.org/pio/TNews/tnol.htm>*

Childress District fights wildfires

by **Barbara Seal**

Childress District Public Information Office

It was a tinder box, and all it took was a spark.

Six months without significant rainfall created a volatile fire hazard for the 13 counties in the Childress District. Average annual rainfall for the region is about 22 inches. But last year saw only two inches of rain. The lack of water combined with high winds and temperatures created a recipe for disaster.

"We knew that the extremely dry conditions would increase the fire danger when the March winds started," said Darwin Lankford, Childress District director of operations.

As predicted, on a hot, windy Sunday in mid-March, the Texas Forest Service called TxDOT to report a grass fire on U.S. 83 at the Childress-Cottle county line. The wind was blowing up to 50 mph, the temperature was in the 80s, and the humidity was extremely low.

Crews from Cottle, Childress and Hardeman counties began cutting fire guards. Even so, with the high winds, the fires quickly got out of control.

"We had crews on the east and west side of the fire cutting fire guards and working toward each other until they met. When finished, they had cut a line around the north side of the fire," said Chris Medford,

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'Guys truly amazing'



TxDOT photo by Ricky Pruitt

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Childress County maintenance supervisor. "The guys who did the work were truly amazing," he added. "They are not firefighters, but they go in and do whatever job the Texas Forest Service asks them to do. Everything went smooth. There were no injuries and no equipment damaged."

The Childress-Cottle county fire, named the Buckle L2 because it was identical to a fire that scorched that area 10 years ago, was fully contained on Wednesday, March 13, and burned approximately 40,000 acres.

At the same time, Fu Benavidez, Donley County maintenance supervisor, got a call from the Texas Department of Public Safety, asking him to provide traffic control. Smoke from a fire on I-40 was causing limited visibility, and part of the interstate had to be closed for a short time.

"During the closure, all traffic from I-40 was diverted," said Benavidez. "Donley County crews provided traffic

control to manage the massive amount of traffic coming off I-40."

Later that night, the wind changed direction and came from the northwest. The fire blew across I-40 and quickly spread farther into Donley County. To make matters worse, a well-meaning landowner set a back fire that quickly got out of hand. Crews from Donley, Collingsworth and Hall counties, as well as a track loader and crew borrowed from the Amarillo District, worked until Wednesday afternoon cutting fire guards to contain the fire.

The Forest Service declared the fire that had burned 50,800 acres "100 percent contained" when rains came on Saturday, March 18.

At the same time, the cities of Wheeler and Mobeetie had to be evacuated when a finger of the raging main fire north of I-40 got out of hand in Wheeler County.★

*Note: full text available at
<http://crossroads.org/pio/TNews/tnol.htm>*

Plane drops colorful load, puts truck 'in the pink'

Wes McDougal, Dumas Area maintenance supervisor in the Amarillo District, was in his truck about two miles from a fire in Hartley County on March 10.

"I was sitting on the road by a farmhouse talking to a fireman, when he suddenly turns and runs back to his fire truck," he recalls. "I'm wondering what's up. The key word is 'up.' A Texas Forest Service plane was on line to spray retardant on the farmhouse and I was in the direct line — and got a direct hit!"

TxDOT employees know this substance is sticky and colorful. Crews worked around the clock to mix the pink powder with water,

getting it ready to load into planes.

Perhaps more amusing to some is that McDougal at the time was on the phone with Amarillo District Engineer Mark Tomlinson. "When it was about to happen I said, 'Oh, no! — I've been hit and my truck is pink. I look like a Mary Kay salesperson,'" McDougal says. "Mr. Tomlinson was laughing so hard I couldn't talk to him for about five minutes."

The truck was later cleaned with relative ease. McDougal wasn't hurt, except maybe for his ego — "Please," he says, "no Mary Kay jokes, Pepto-Bismol jokes, and, surely, don't call me Pinky."

— Paul Braun, Amarillo District



Flowers still adorn Texas roadsides

*Tip to viewers:
'Seek and ye shall find'*

by **Bill Powell**
TxDOT Public Information Office

"Psst ... Wanna see some bluebonnets?"

The question seems less humorous when reminded of the dry weather of this past winter in many parts of Texas. Winter rains determine the abundance — or lack — of wildflowers in springtime.

And TxDOT knows where the flowers are to be found.

"Unfortunately, wildflower growth will probably be below average due to the drought and warm winter across much of the state," said Dennis Markwardt, section director for vegetation management with TxDOT's Maintenance Division.

Markwardt is one of many experts who say this will not be a banner year for the bluebonnet. So what can those who are determined to see bluebonnets do in the face of adversity?

Bluebonnets (and other wildflowers) can be found — just not in the abundance that people have come to expect along wide swaths of Texas roadsides.

Dedicated flower finders can check the TxDOT wildflower hotline at 800-452-9292 for the latest reports of where the wildflowers are. Information also is available online at www.dot.state.tx.us.

The telephone hotline and the Web site, with weekly updates, have the latest information from district maintenance offices and local chambers of commerce.

The information is available by phoning the 800 number and selecting from these options:

- 2 — a recording with the latest wildflower information
- 4 — travel counselors available between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays
- 5 — Spanish-speaking travel counselors for those who want to ask about wildflowers in Spanish.

The Web site offers access to maps, and text of the recorded report by wildflower type, and points to where wildflower "hotspots" can be found.

Each seed of the 30 varieties of wildflowers in each of the 33,000 pounds that are spread act like a time-release capsule. Bluebonnets grow and show first, followed by other varieties. As one wildflower group fades, another blooms to replace it.

Wildflower seeds not growing out this season will remain dormant and grow out the next if conditions are right. People in Texas who admire the colorful flowers know they're not really for picking along roadsides. For every blossom removed from the roadside, also lost are seeds the plant would have produced. If something must be taken, it's best just to take pictures.

The Texas State Highway Department first spread wildflower seeds in 1924. The first flowers graced the roadside of U.S. 77 in Fayette County. William Pape, a maintenance foreman, is noted as first to sow the seeds.

The department's first landscape architect, Jac Gubbels, was hired in 1932. Gubbels was responsible for planting trees and for the growth of wildflowers to make Texas beautiful.

The program for highway beautification had thrived for decades when, in 1964, Ladybird Johnson, as first lady during her husband's presidency, emphasized the importance of highway beauty and wildflowers nationwide.

Since then, maintenance budgets have reflected an increased emphasis on wildflowers and on making roadsides beautiful. ♡

Highway history: What's in a name?

by Mike Cox
Editor

The right of way along the figurative road to better transportation in Texas is dotted with long-forgotten highway names that never went anywhere.

Take, for example, the International Pavedway. It never existed anywhere but on a map — under a different designation, though, most Texans have traveled it many times.

In 1917, when the Washington-based American Highway Association issued the sixth edition of its yearbook, the Texas Legislature had just passed a bill creating a state highway department. But the agency had not yet been organized, and Texas had fewer than a thousand miles of paved roads. The rest of the state's 10,000 or so miles of roadway amounted to gravel-surfaced or worse.

Even so, the transition from horse to horseless carriage was well under way. In Texas and across the nation, the business community realized the need for good roads. With road-building just developing as a responsibility of the federal and state governments, numerous road-boasting associations came into being to press for specific transportation routes.

"For a number of years," the 1917 yearbook explained, "associations have been increasing rapidly in number which have for their object the improvement of highways ranging in length from roads connecting adjacent county seats to transcontinental routes."

The roads were to be marked "more or less fully by colored bands on poles, fences and bridges, so that the traveler can follow them easily."

One of those association-promoted routes was the International Pavedway. As envisioned, the IP would stretch 1,960 miles, cutting through seven states and 88 counties. Beginning at Detroit, it would end at the international bridge in Laredo.



Entering the Lone Star state at Texarkana, the IP would proceed south of the Red River through Clarksville, Paris, and Sherman.

From Sherman, the roadway would have turned south to Dallas and then west to Fort Worth. Down from Cowtown, the proposed road continued to Cleburne, Walnut Spring and Waco.

After Waco, the IP was to have extended to Austin, San Antonio and stopped at Laredo. Today, of course, the Brazos-to-Rio Grande segment of this route is Interstate 35, the busiest transportation corridor in Texas.

Eventually, most of the dots along the proposed IP got connected by paved roads, but it never became a single, named highway.

Another major roadway envisioned

back in 1917 was the Jefferson Davis Memorial Highway, a coast-to-coast highway covering 3,780 miles between Miami and Los Angeles.

In Texas, the roadway would have gone from Beaumont to Victoria, via Liberty and Houston. At Victoria, the highway would have divided, with one route going down the coast to Brownsville in the Rio Grande Valley and up the river through Laredo and Eagle Pass to Del Rio. The other leg of the roadway honoring the first and only president of the Confederate States of America would have headed west via San Antonio to Del Rio.

From Del Rio, the highway would have split again, one route hugging the river all the way to El Paso (a road that still doesn't exist as a complete route) and the other through Ozona, Fort Stockton and Marfa.

At El Paso, the highway would have gone to the now-extinct town of Alfalfa Station to New Mexico.

Other association-promoted corridors through Texas included the Jefferson Highway (not to be confused with the Jefferson Davis Memorial Highway), the Meridian Road, the Ozark Trail and the Southern National Highway.

Transportation boomers envisioned the Jefferson Highway as stretching from Winnipeg, Canada, to New Orleans. In Texas, it would have cut through Denison, Lenora, Greenville, Mount Pleasant, Sulphur Springs, Gilmer, Longview and Marshall before crossing into Louisiana.

The Meridian Road was seen as connecting Manitoba, Canada, to Galveston, via Fargo, N.D., Columbus, Ohio, Wichita, Kan., Fort Worth and Houston. Much of the Texas portion of this route is today I-45.

Running from St. Louis, Mo., to Albuquerque, N.M., the Ozark Trail would have cut across the

■ See Page 13

Self-service:

Employees can access statements online

Statements of earnings and detailed leave-accounting statements soon will be available to all employees to view or print online through the Human Resources Division's online site and its new service known as Employee Self Service (ESS).

The department's online service is seen as an efficient and cost-effective way to provide information to each employee.

Employees can access personal and professional information such as personal contact data, job history, education, licenses, certifications, training summary, and emergency contacts.

ESS also includes a link to apply for jobs using an online application.

Statements of earnings are being made available to TxDOT employees in phases. The first phase began on Feb. 22 and included a pilot group of division and office employees.

By May 1, all TxDOT employees in the state can access their statements of earnings through ESS.

Statements of earnings are added to the system after each pay period. Eventually, users will be able to view or print all statements for the previous 24 months. Employees should contact their Accounting or Human Resources staff if information is needed for a statement prior to Feb. 1, 2006.

Individual detailed leave-accounting statements (formerly known as vacation sick leave statements) are expected to be available to all employees on June 1.

With the proper password, information can be accessed from work or home. Employees should review their information online, and contact their Human Resources staff if corrections or updates are needed.

More information on using ESS: <http://crossroads/terms/hronline.htm> — then click the link under Employee Self Service.

Those needing assistance signing into the online application should contact their local Information Resources staff. ☼

Editor's note: TxDOT's Human Resources Division provided this article.

Medina heads Laredo District

Mario G. Medina, P.E., has been appointed district engineer for the eight-county Laredo District, effective April 1.

He fills the post held by Luis Ramirez, who retired Aug. 31, 2005.

Born in Laredo, Medina has 21 years with TxDOT and first worked for the department five summers leading up to earning an undergraduate degree in civil engineering from the University of Texas in 1986.

He has held full-time positions in the Design Division, and with the Transportation Planning and Programming Division where he directed the multimodal section dealing with railroad plans, railroad safety, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, pedestrians and bicyclists, and intermodal planning. ☼



Medina

Highway history

■ Continued from Page 12

Panhandle through Amarillo, essentially tracking what would become Route 66 and eventually I-40.

The Southern National Highway would have connected Washington, D.C., with San Diego, Calif. The roadway would have gone through Dallas and Fort Worth and then across West Texas to Roswell, N.M., and back into Texas to El Paso. Much of this route eventually became I-20.

Associations continue to play a role in promoting transportation improvements, but the notion of using names instead of numbers for interstate highways went the way of the Model A. ☼



Service awards / March 2006

■ DISTRICTS

Abilene

25 years — Jimmy D. Clanton
5 years — J Derrell Long

Amarillo

25 years — David C. Cody, Marilyn B. Morrow
5 years — Hugh W. Durbin, Terry L. May, William L. Young

Atlanta

20 years — Don R. Carter, William M. Stillwell
10 years — Christopher L. Jeanes
5 years — Bruce R. Allen, John M. Morris

Austin

20 years — Imelda L. Barrett, Angela M. Estlack, Clayton K. Weber
10 years — William Serrano C., Shawn K. Weeks
5 years — Cathleen A. Kratz, Sarah B. Ramos

Beaumont

25 years — Rose T. Pugh
15 years — James L. Strong, Robert C. Warner
5 years — Linda G. Arnold, Lloyd A. Seegers, Nathan L. Stansbury

Bryan

20 years — Linda S. Steele
10 years — Rhonda G. Carpenter

Childress

20 years — Brent W. Foard, Jerry D. Reed, Robert L. Snider

Corpus Christi

20 years — Armando G. Chapa
10 years — Guadalupe J. Guerrero, Roberto Pulido Jr.
5 years — Emilio R. Amador

Dallas

25 years — Johnny M. Haley
20 years — Vincent D. Washington
15 years — Ronald B. Gober
10 years — Stephen M. Endres, Wesley M. McBride, Michael G. Stanley
5 years — Catrina D. Doolin, Troy L. Graham, Steve A. McNeely

El Paso

20 years — Jorge L. Gomez, Ernesto S. Nigro Jr.
5 years — Christine E. Barraza, Eduardo Perales

Fort Worth

25 years — Harlan K. Stucker
20 years — John W. Broussard, William F. Gilpin Jr., Randy D. Moore, Weldon E. York
15 years — Zelma A. Myers, Sheree L. Norton-Ward
10 years — Clinton L. Hyatt, Larry D. Long
5 years — Michelle D. Branch, Daniel M. Donahue, Ronnie J. Gilbreath, Michael A. Reason

Houston

30 years — Alan W. Stephenson
25 years — Stephen Gbur, Stephen L. Shaw,

Jimmy A. Turner

20 years — Ricky J. Alcocer, Joe Cantu, Juan C. Gonzalez, Ronald L. Lorraine
10 years — Annie D. Campodonico, Susan S. Hood, Aletha R. Jarmon, Kourosh Vahedi
5 years — Willa F. Brooks, Diony D. Chandler, Michelle L. Graham, Teresa N. Green, Loretta S. Loftin, Terry M. Sakar, Shane C. Smith, April F. Taylor

Laredo

25 years — Francisco J. Hernandez
20 years — Gerardo M. Martinez
5 years — Servando Casas Jr., Rodolfo Garza Jr., Brian Perez, Manuel Rosas Jr.

Lubbock

25 years — James H. Gehring, Thomas E. Martin II, John E. Rantz, Jarod G. Withrow
15 years — Kathryn G. Deatherage
10 years — Miguel T. Galvan, Robert Reyes
5 years — Rodolfo Gonzales Jr.

Lufkin

35 years — David K. McCoy
20 years — Weldon K. Gaston
5 years — Mary L. Brinkley, Melissa A. Masters, Donald G. Mathews

Odessa

20 years — Ramon M. Prieto Jr., Gary E. Rumbaugh Jr.
5 years — Yvonne O. Mora, Rene B. Muniz

Paris

25 years — Paul L. Helms, Lee M. McDonald
20 years — Michael L. Smith
15 years — Linda J. Barnes, John D. Wright Jr.
10 years — Daniel W. Blackmon, Tommy J. Langford, Susan R. Pittman, Teddy G. Ryan, Timothy R. Wright Jr.
5 years — James R. Woodson

Pharr

25 years — Sandra G. Bowers, Abelardo Mireles III
15 years — Rogelio F. Gonzalez

San Angelo

5 years — Robert H. Bridwell, Louis J. Leitner

San Antonio

20 years — William T. Shuler
10 years — Cullen T. Pfeiffer
5 years — Lawrence E. Cherry, Jeff Fischer, Matthew G. Frias, Edward M. Guerrero, Roger J. Lopez, John A. Polito, Steven C. Rodgers, Marta R. Swanson

Tyler

25 years — Danny R. Scott
20 years — Billy B. Ferguson, Barnie M. Trussell Jr.
15 years — Steven P. Tugwell
5 years — Roy M. Lunsford

Waco

25 years — Leesa C. Brueggeman
10 years — Gary L. Rushing
5 years — Edward A. Kabobel Jr., Raymond C. Meade, Brett E. Miller, Roland W. Napps, Maria D. Padua

Wichita Falls

10 years — Paul E. Bennett, Michael D.

Brannon, Richard P. Hardin

5 years — Michael B. Jones, Donal R. Ross Jr.

Yoakum,

25 years — Eduigen F. Rodriguez
10 years — Anthony W. Janda, Mark A. Koeppen
5 years — James C. Perry II

■ DIVISIONS

Construction

25 years — Thomas R. Bohuslav, Raymond B. Merrill
15 years — Reese M. Herd, Vincent M. Pena
5 years — Michael C. Dawidczik

Environmental Affairs

5 years — Carla S. Kartman, Sarah Stroman

Finance

35 years — Gordon L. Lehman
15 years — Peggy W. Gonzenbach
5 years — Silvia Morales

General Services

25 years — Donna E. Bandy
20 years — Guadalupe De La Fuente, Daryl D. Starkes
15 years — Prudencio J. Espitia
5 years — Robert J. Herrera

Human Resources

15 years — Edmund P. Rader
5 years — Yolanda Cabrera

Information Systems

25 years — Severo Castillo Jr.
10 years — Gary W. Harris, Rolando Tovar

Motor Vehicle

5 years — Lori A. Smith

Occupational Safety

5 years — William R. Clawson

Right of Way

5 years — Siamak Saeedi

Traffic Operations

15 years — Joyce A. Seebeck

Transportation Planning & Programming

5 years — Laura L. Norton, Lung Y. Tang

Travel

5 years — Erick L. Knowles

Vehicle Titles & Registration

35 years — Bobby J. Meeks
25 years — Nancy S. Kendrick
20 years — Debra S. Taylor
15 years — Debbra L. Johnson
5 years — Owedia L. Dancy, Bonnie J. Fickling

■ OFFICES

Audit

15 years — Roberto Manzo

General Counsel

5 years — Felicia E. Daniels, Tamela C. Saldana,



Exit Ramp () = service years/month of retirement

■ DISTRICTS

Abilene

Jere W. Cowan (12/January)

Amarillo

Benton M. Rogers (28/January)

Atlanta

James H. Voss (26/January)

Austin

Harold G. Bunch (18/January)

Houston

Dennis E. Zimmerman (32/January)
Sherry L. Randall (27/January)

Lubbock

Tommy L. Echols (19/January)

Paris

Nick W. Adams (21/January)

Waco

James R. Stimmel Jr. (23/January)
Layton D. Nehring (8/January)

Yoakum

Patricia C. Zella (25/January)

■ DIVISIONS

General Services

Francisco A. Nieto (9/January)

Vehicle Titles and Registration

Charles H. Nail Jr. (22/January)



In Memoriam

Corpus Christi

Pedro Flores Jr.
construction inspector
retired August 1995
died March 21, 2006

Matilde Dimas
engineering technician
died Feb. 24, 2006

Theodore J. Rippstein Jr.
maintenance office technician
retired November 1986
died Oct. 25, 2005

Fort Worth

Florine "Flossie" Davis
secretary and bookkeeper
retired 1980
died March 18, 2006

Charles H. Marshall
construction inspector
retired 1996
died Jan. 21, 2006

Paul Aston
appraiser
retired 1984
died Jan. 16, 2006

Houston

Joseph Kravetz
motor-vehicle technician
died April 3, 2006

Robert K. Williams
engineering technician
died Feb. 27, 2006

Paris

Billy Joe Kennedy
supvr. management auditor
retired May 1987
died Feb. 28, 2006

Rayford Weldon Jones Jr.
engineering technician
died April 5, 2006

Yoakum

Patrick Hughes Keefe Jr.
resident engineer
retired March 1977
died March 22, 2006

Elijah Prince
retired April 1987
died March 6, 2006

Billy J. Biggerstaff
maintenance specialist
died March 5, 2006

TNotes

■ Continued from Page 5

West corridor by reducing bottlenecks," said Michael Behrens, TxDOT executive director.

The projects will combine the mobility benefits of express and high-occupancy-vehicle lanes, offering greater flexibility in controlling congestion. Designed to accommodate

both high-occupancy vehicles and single-occupancy vehicles, the new projects will provide opportunities for congestion management by allowing for control of three variables: hours of operation, auto occupancy and value/toll pricing.

—Judith Curtis, Associate Editor

Calendar

2005

April

17-21 ATPA Annual Grantee Conf. & Board Mtg., SAT, ATPA
21 San Jacinto Day**
25-26 Maintenance/Traffic Operations Conf., Waco, MNT, TRF
27 Commission Meeting, Brownsville

May

2-4 Statewide Hurricane Exercise, MNT
9-11 Biennial Permit Coordinator's Round-Up, Austin, MCD
25 Commission Meeting, Austin
29 Memorial Day*
31-6/2 Transportation Planning Conference, Corpus Christi, TPP

June

31-6/2 Transportation Planning Conference, Corpus Christi, TPP
5-7 Research Management Committee Meeting, Austin, RTI
5-9 Internal Audit Conference, Austin, AUD
8-9 1st Annual Texas Transportation Forum, Austin, GBE
12-14 Human Resources and Civil Rights Conference, Austin
14-15 ATPA Board Mtg., and 2007 Grant Review, Austin, ATPA
19 Emancipation Day**
26-28 Design and Bridge Conference, San Antonio, DES
29 Commission Meeting, Austin

July

4 Independence Day*
18 Research Oversight Committee Mtg., Austin, RTI
27 Commission Meeting, El Paso

August

24 Commission Meeting, Austin
27 LBJ's Birthday

September

4 Labor Day*
10 AASHTO Standing Committee on Rail Transport., SA, TPP
23-24 Rosh Hashanah
28 Commission Meeting, Austin

October

2 Yom Kippur***
10-11 Transportation Short Course, College Station
19 ATPA Board Meeting, Austin, ATPA
26 Commission Meeting, Denton

November

3-4 General Services Division Conference, Austin, GSD
6-9 Research Management Committee Mtg., Arlington, RTI
11 Veteran's Day
16 Commission Meeting, Austin
23-24 Thanksgiving*

December

12 Research Oversight Committee Meeting, Austin, RTI
14 Commission Meeting, Austin
24 Christmas Eve Day
25 Christmas Day*
26 Day after Christmas*

* = all agencies closed
** = skeleton crew holiday
*** = optional holiday (in lieu of any state holiday where a skeleton crew is required)

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

backtracks



While these travelers may have had window-mounted air units to help provide relief on a hot road trip, the presence of this roadside park seems to be a greater source of relief. The question is where? If you have more information about this picture, contact Anne Cook at (512) 486-5838 or by e-mail at acook@dot.state.tx.us



The **backtracks** photo in the last issue of *Transportation News* has not yet been identified. Can you help solve this mystery photo?🔍



Looking Back

Around 50 people attended the short-course meeting on electronic computer programming held Aug. 27 through noon, Aug. 31, in Austin. This very condensed course ... was to acquaint those attending with terminology involved in using the machine (IBM type 650), and give them a reasonable insight into the possible problems the computer could work. ...

One woman, Mrs. Barbara Foster, has been hired as Computer Programmer, and several others will be hired after keypunch machines are received.

— from Highway News,
Texas Highway Department newsletter, September 1956



125 E. 11th St.
Austin, Texas 78701

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