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Toll roads, once old, new again

Pages 6-8

Inside

- Sudan's loss is gain for Dallas District, Page 9
- Message signs help AMBER alerts, Page 10
- Employees face fines, surcharges, Page 11



Focus on road safety

by Mike Behrens
Executive Director

No matter how well our roads are designed and maintained, there's always room for improvement. In our travels, we all want a smooth ride and we don't want to be slowed in bumper-to-bumper traffic. This is true whether traveling up the street or across the state.

We want to get where we're going faster. And we want to get there safely. We know unsafe conditions lead to a steep price in damaged property and lost lives.

In Texas those costs include:

Human costs — the death of 3,500 and injury to 340,000 people each year. Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for persons between ages 3 to 34

Economic costs — the loss of \$19.7 billion annually due to motor-vehicle crashes. Further, more than 106,000 property-damage accidents occur each year.

Safety is the top priority for TxDOT. That's why we're undertaking our largest safety-improvement program with our first bond issue.

Over the years, TxDOT has worked to make sure travel in Texas is as safe as possible. On Dec. 16, 2004, the Texas Transportation Commission took a step toward improving future safety by approving issuance of \$600 million in bonds to fund 644 projects to improve safety across the state. This allows work to begin on high-priority safety improvements.

Projects considered priorities are those with the greatest potential to reduce the number and severity of crashes and save lives.

As Transportation Commission Chair Ric Williamson says, "The improvements we can now afford to make to highways all over Texas could save an estimated 1,800 lives and prevent 21,000 injuries over the next 20 years."

It's an ambitious venture that incorporates many elements of safety:

- We will widen nearly 1,600 miles of narrow, two-lane roadways to at least 24 feet. This will reduce the number of head-on collisions and vehicles running off the road.
- We will install 171 left-turn lanes at highway intersections to reduce the number of rear-end crashes.
- We will install 740 miles of concrete or cable barriers in highway medians on divided highways providing an additional margin of safety while virtually eliminating head-on collisions.
- We will construct highway overpasses in 10 locations to reduce the number and severity of crashes, even as we improve traffic flow at intersections.

I know you are excited to have a part in this important endeavor. I encourage you to help us meet the challenge of making our roads even safer.★

On the cover:

Overhead signs, such as this in Dallas, direct Texas drivers to toll stations that electronically read EZ tags. Down the road, you'll be seeing TX tags as well. See Page 6 for the story outlining the history of tolled roadways and describing what's ahead.

TxDOT photo by Geoff Appold

Contents

Straight Talk.....2

Cintra-Zachry signing.....3

TxDOT Roundup.....4

Toll roads6

TxDOT Spotlight.....9

Letter from the editor.....10

It's the law.....11

Backtracks.....Back Cover

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Signatures mark TxDOT history

by **Mike Cox**
Editor

The signing of three history-making documents in early March will have a major role in changing the future of Texas transportation.

With Gov. Rick Perry present, TxDOT Executive Director Mike Behrens, Cintra Executive Chairman Rafael del Pino, and Zachry Construction Corp. President David Zachry put their signatures on a 103-page agreement that constitutes another big step toward development of the Oklahoma-to-San Antonio segment of the Trans-Texas Corridor (TTC 35).

"In Texas, we do things bigger, better and first," Perry said after witnessing the signing of the contract.

Under the comprehensive development agreement signed at the Greer Building on March 11, Cintra-Zachry will be paid up to

\$3.5 million to begin the early planning for TTC 35, including its funding mechanism.

The agreement authorizes Cintra-Zachry to begin the master development and financial plan. The plan will include a project list, implementation schedule and funding options. For each project identified, the consortium will develop a conceptual design plan, preliminary cost estimates, toll-feasibility studies and a plan for complying with environmental requirements.

A week later, Perry and Commissioner Robert Nichols met with Richard Davidson, Union Pacific's chief executive officer, at the UP rail yard in San Antonio for the signing of an agreement between the state and the railroad company to work together to move freight-rail lines out of densely populated urban areas.

"The railroad played a key role in

the development of this state for 150 years," Davidson said at the March 18 event. "Now we are going to be applying 21st century solutions to 21st century problems."

The two-page memo of understanding signed by the governor and Davidson declares the state and the rail line will "work together in a cooperative manner... to identify potential rail-relocation projects which will improve safety and facilitate mobility."

A day later, March 19, in Fort Worth, TxDOT signed a similar agreement with officials of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad company.

Nichols stressed that no specific projects have been identified and no funding committed. "It's an agreement to develop a process," he said. "We'll be working on it month after month, year after year." ❁

Citizens to advise on Trans-Texas Corridor

The Texas Transportation Commission has appointed 23 Texans to form a citizens advisory committee for the Trans-Texas Corridor, a move that will give more Texans a say as the project develops.

The committee will advise TxDOT on potential issues that should be considered in planning and developing the corridor. The commission established the group during its meeting March 31.

"To develop the Trans-Texas Corridor successfully, we want to build greater cooperation and better understanding with the public and affected groups," said Mike Behrens, TxDOT executive director.

To ensure a cross-section of Texas is represented on the committee, members will represent groups such as affected property and business owners, representatives of local

government, chambers of commerce, environmental, community, technical and engineering experts, as well as other interested groups, and department staff.

The Trans-Texas Corridor Advisory Committee includes K. Stephen Bonnette, San Antonio; Marc Maxwell, Sulphur Springs; Louis Bronaugh, Lufkin; Anne O'Ryan, Austin; Tim Brown, Belton; Charles Perry, Odessa; Sid Covington, Austin; Jose R. Ramos, Buda; Deborah Garcia, El Paso; Wes Reeves, Amarillo; Sandy Greyson, Dallas; Grady W. Smithey, Jr., Duncanville; Judy Hawley, Corpus Christi; Linda Stall, Fayetteville; Dr. Charles Henry, Lubbock; John Thompson, Livingston; Roger Hord, Houston; Martha Tyroch, Temple; Alan Johnson, Harlingen; Roy Walthall, Waco; and William B. Madden,

Dallas. At its meeting April 28, the commission expanded the committee by two: Glen Whitley, of Tarrant County, and Kenneth Barr, of Fort Worth.

Commission Chair Ric Williamson said the commission wants the committee to meet regularly. "We'll ask them to review the department's options, pending decisions or thought processes as each option is made available to the commission," Williamson said.

"They can make their comments individually or by a majority vote. We will have a cross section of citizens to watch what we're doing."

The Trans-Texas Corridor is a proposed multi-use, statewide network of transportation routes in Texas that will incorporate existing and new highways, railways and utility rights-of-way. Specific routes have not been determined. ❁



Serna takes on TxDOT role

Edward Serna, formerly director of Service Delivery at the Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR), has been appointed TxDOT's assistant executive director for support operations, the position formerly held by Cathy Williams, who retired. Serna will assist in overseeing and coordinating support operations to ensure the department operates efficiently and effectively.



Serna

With DIR, he negotiated and managed statewide contracts for hardware and software services while managing contracts for Texas Online and with the State Data Center. He has more than two decades of agency service in Texas, having also worked at the state comptroller's office and the state's environmental commission. With each agency, he has supervised policies and procedures for human resources, purchasing, and for information services. And he has extensive experience managing legislative appropriation requests, performance measures, budgets, and strategic plans.

Serna is a 1981 graduate of the University of North Texas and holds a bachelor's degree in business administration with a major in finance and a minor in accounting.

Toll agreement a first

Transportation commissioners in Austin voted in February to execute the state's first pass-through toll agreement — one expediting transportation improvements in Montgomery County. The Texas Transportation Commission gave TxDOT staff approval to move forward on an agreement with Montgomery County to make improvements to farm-to-market roads 1484, 1485, 1488, 1314 and direct connections from State Highway 242 to Interstate 45.

"This action signifies local officials' willingness to take advantage of innovative transportation financing now available to build transportation improvements faster," said Mike Behrens, TxDOT executive director. "We hope others seek out the new options now available for expediting projects to reduce congestion and improve safety."

The pass-through "toll" really isn't a toll at all, say officials. It is a fee the state pays to local governments or local entities that have taken on the burden of financing road improvements. This fee is based on the number of vehicles or the number of vehicle-miles traveled. Individual motorists do not pay a toll for using the roadway. Instead, the charge for use of the road is "passed through" to the state.

Engineers hail Trietsch

Professional engineers in the Houston area honored Gary K. Trietsch in February, naming him the 2005 Engineer of the Year during national Engineers Week. Trietsch is TxDOT's district engineer in Houston. The honor recognizes the single person in the profession who exemplifies the standards and community responsibility inherent in providing safety and best practices in the engineering profession.



Trietsch

Trietsch has headed the Houston District for the past nine years through the largest transportation expansion in the history of TxDOT. In 2003, the Houston District designed and awarded more than \$1 billion in new construction, a local and state record. Under his leadership the reconstruction of both Interstate 610-West Loop and the I-10 (Katy Freeway) began.

During his tenure, TxDOT has adopted innovative management changes such as the use of incentives to accelerate work schedules and the adoption of technological advances to promote smart engineering practices. His support of the Houston District's Green Ribbon Project has led to the statewide use of trees and landscaping material in every state-funded project.

Engineer is 'woman of the year'

The Greater Dallas-Fort Worth Chapter of the Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) recognized TxDOT's Fort Worth District Engineer Maribel P. Chavez with its Woman of the Year Award for 2004. WTS annually recognizes an outstanding woman who is a leader and a direct contributor to the transportation industry.



Chavez

This award also highlights women leaders who contribute to the advancement of women and minorities through programs and opportunities in transportation. Chavez became the Fort Worth district engineer in January 2002. She also served as district engineer in the El Paso and Abilene districts.

University honors alumnus Simmons

Steve Simmons, TxDOT deputy executive director, has been named to receive the Distinguished Engineering Alumni Award from the Cullen College of Engineering at the University of Houston on June 3.

■ See Page 5



The award recognizes graduates “who have made significant contributions to society and whose accomplishments and careers have brought credit” to the university’s engineering college. His portrait will hang in the Hall of Distinction at the Engineering Building. Simmons is the first to receive the university’s Alumni Young Engineer of the Year Award and the Distinguished Engineering Alumni Award. He also serves as a member of the university’s alumni board.

Sue Bryant retires

Sue Bryant, director of TxDOT’s Public Transportation Division since October 2003, retired March 31. Bobby R. Killebrew, the division’s deputy director, has been appointed interim director.



Bryant

Bryant began her TxDOT career in 1977 and was soon named director of public information and education in the Traffic Safety Section of the Traffic Operations Division. She then served as an aide to former Deputy Director Henry Thomason before appointment as Traffic Safety Section director in 1989.

Under her supervision, the Public Transportation Division managed the transfer of the medical transportation program from the Health Department to TxDOT.

Causeway project complete

After three years and \$39 million for construction, dignitaries and community officials gathered in a chilling wind on the afternoon of Feb. 25 to cut a ceremonial ribbon and to open the JFK Causeway.

For most residents of Padre Island, the event marked the end of traffic-control orange barrels and the start of a more pleasant 4.1-mile drive on the causeway.

Craig Clark, Corpus Christi district engineer, pulled up his coat collar and remarked, “People said it would be a cold day before we got this project done — and here it is.”

About 75 people were on hand, gathered beneath the newly elevated causeway to celebrate the event. Partners on the project included TxDOT, Nueces County, the City of Corpus Christi, and the region’s metropolitan planning organization.

The project raises the existing roadway to a minimum of nine feet above sea level and provides an evacuation route during high tides and tropical storms. Improving the JFK Causeway from Flour Bluff to Aquarius Drive on Padre Island, the project includes wider lanes,

shoulders, and a new bridge west of Humble Channel to improve water circulation in the Upper Laguna Madre.

Report on bridges released

TxDOT’s 2004 Report on Texas Bridges, now available to the public, found that 76 percent of all Texas bridges are rated in good condition — an improvement of six percentage points from 2000. Sixteen percent of the bridges are functionally obsolete, meaning they do not meet current geometrical design standards and are not well-suited to efficiently handle today’s traffic volumes and types.

Another five percent of the state’s bridges are structurally deficient. That means they cannot indefinitely continue to handle the weight of today’s heaviest vehicles or are frequently flooded or closed indefinitely.

Less than one percent of them are classified as sub-standard for load-only bridges, meaning they are not structurally deficient or functionally obsolete but have a capacity less than the maximum load permitted by state law.

“With focused efforts by TxDOT’s district offices, the percentage of good or better bridges in Texas increased during FY 2004 to 75.8 percent, up from 70.3 percent in September 2000,” said Randy Cox, director of TxDOT’s Bridge Division. “TxDOT has steadily reduced the number of structurally deficient and substandard bridges.”

The report noted that 56 percent of all Texas bridges have been in service more than 30 years and that 20 percent of all bridges in Texas were built before 1950, with 36 percent built between 1950 and 1970. Last year, TxDOT contracted projects to upgrade 179 structurally deficient bridges and 61 functionally obsolete bridges.

Savings grow with recycling

TxDOT is a state and national leader in all phases of recycling — not just for environmental reasons but because it makes financial sense.

This is particularly true in the department’s use of remanufactured toner cartridges. Years ago, TxDOT saw the potential for big cost savings but knew it couldn’t sacrifice performance. That’s when TxDOT’s Recycling Program and Purchasing Section developed specifications that set testing and warranty requirements for remanufactured cartridges.

These requirements ensure that the cartridges meet standards for print quality and that vendors repair damage from faulty cartridges.

Of 3,700 remanufactured toner cartridges purchased since January 2003, vendors had to replace less than one percent and had to clean only five printers. During that time, by purchasing remanufactured toner cartridges, TxDOT saved up to 67 percent on the cost per cartridge.

What's old is new

Tolls for highway travel grow

by **Michelle Releford**
Dallas District
Public Information Office

Tollways, CDAs and concessions — where did all these “new” ideas come from?

Well, none is new. The oldest documented private-public projects for road development date to the 1950s in Europe, and the oldest turnpikes go back to the 1600s in Great Britain. In the past few years, the notion has taken center stage in Texas and the United States.

The United States has more than 99 toll roads in 18 states and Puerto Rico. Virtually all European nations and most of the countries around the globe have multiple toll-road systems, collecting revenue with electronic systems, yearly passes and cash. Australia has 18 tollways, Canada has three and the United Kingdom has one. All 1,200 miles of Austrian roadways were converted to toll facilities last year. Mexico has 74 toll highways covering 3,684 miles and 48 bridges — one of the largest toll systems in the world with 71 concessioned highways.

All these countries with their different governmental philosophies and economic structures have two things in common — too much traffic for the current tax-paid highways, and not enough funding for needed congestion relief.

New day in Texas

TxDOT maintains 80,000 miles of roadway, the largest state system in the nation. The state's population has grown 57 percent since 1980. In the past 20 years, the number of registered vehicles has increased 61 percent and the miles driven on Texas roads have more than doubled. Texas sends more money from its motor-fuels tax to the federal government than it gets back — a little more than 85 cents on the dollar.



TxDOT photo / Geoff Appold

Electronic toll tags, such as the one on the windshield above, allow frequent drivers of toll roads the option to save time by purchasing EZ toll tags.

House Bill 3588, approved two years ago by the Texas Legislature, opened the door to toll-road and toll-lane funding.

When HB 3588 went on the books, work already had begun on the Central Texas Turnpike Project (CTTP). The largest piece is SH 130, a 49-mile tollway around Austin that was awarded to Lone Star Infrastructure under the state's first comprehensive development agreement. The CTTP also includes the extension of Loop 1 (MoPac) and SH 45 North. All the projects are on schedule to be completed by 2007 at an estimated cost of \$3.6 billion.

TxDOT then started receiving unsolicited bids from consortia, both stateside and overseas, to build upcoming projects such as Trans-Texas Corridor and, more recently, the I-820/SH 183 project from Dallas to Fort Worth.

The request for development proposals for I-820/SH 183 is being written. Cintra, a Spanish company experienced in road projects, has proposed to develop the first component of the Trans-Texas Corridor.

■ See Page 7

new again...

growing common around globe

Global move to privatized tollways

More countries are opening their borders to trade and commerce through their highway systems. It's not considered unusual for a company in Spain to build and maintain toll facilities worldwide using concessions, as in the case of the Chicago Skyway, a 7.8-mile, six-lane divided-median toll bridge linking the I-90 Indiana toll road with I-94 in Chicago. The first privatized toll road in the United States, with a \$1.8 billion investment by Cintra/Macquarie, includes a 99-year concession starting this year.

Cintra, a subsidiary of Ferrovial, already has had much success in building and maintaining high-profile tollways. The R-4 in Madrid is 60 miles long with 33 miles tolled. It was built with \$936 million in private money and charges about 8.5 cents per mile (U.S.).

But Cintra is only one of the many consolidated

More countries are opening their borders to trade and commerce through their highway systems.

business groups known as consortia to bid on projects worldwide. The European Association of Toll Motorway Concessionaires (also known as ASECAP) is another major consortium. It represents 121 organizations managing more than 23,000 kilometers of toll roads through 16 European countries.

More tollways worldwide

The Singapore-listed China Merchants Holdings Pacific will sell five toll roads in China for \$336.5 million to a Singapore company. The toll roads had \$15.6 million in net profit last year. Shenzhen Investment in January purchased a 25 percent stake in Road King Infrastructure, a Chinese toll-road operator, for about 52 million pounds or \$93 million from Stagecoach Group, Britain's biggest bus and rail operator.

China increasingly is moving toward toll facilities during a construction boom, as the central government redirects resources to western China. Eastern provinces will need to find private capital to supplement construction programs, according to a study by the International Workshop on public-private partnerships on toll roads in China.

China's government has been considering a corporate agreement whereby five shareholders could come together in a share-limited company to develop modes of transportation, including toll roads. China also is using the concession-leasing option, and is considering a means of stock ownership for roads with shares sold at different levels on the stock exchange.

The study concludes, "The accomplishments achieved to date are both remarkable in their scope and, even more so, in the speed with which they have been achieved."

In Italy, Societa Autostrade was founded in 1956 after the Italian government granted a concession. The company was privatized in 2000, and an ambitious restructuring program, the Mediterranean Project, began in 2002 and became operative in July 2003. Autostrade SPA is a holding company quoted on the stock exchange. The network of tollways is 2,855 kilometers of road controlled by nine trunk-management



TxDOT photo / Geoff Appold

Drivers using the EZ tag will save time.

■ See Page 8

Tolled roads — back to the future

■ Continued From Page 7

centers, with about 50 percent of tolls collected electronically. The company uses environmental-impact monitoring procedures and publishes a report yearly. Tolls are paid according to distance traveled.

Six major tollway systems operated by different private-public partnerships in France cover 8,000 kilometers of motorways.

All 2,000 kilometers of Austria's motorways were wired for short-range electronic tolling based on global-positioning systems and began operation in January 2004. It's the first national motorway with full coverage by dedicated short-range communications (known as DSRC), and the only country to completely convert to tolling.

Stateside

The approach of public-private partnerships to build roads has been authorized during the past 15 years in nearly two dozen states. It is becoming more popular as state funds for infrastructure become more scarce.

In August 2004, the Virginia Department of Transportation announced it would begin negotiations with Fluor Daniel for a comprehensive development agreement (CDA) to improve the Capital Beltway. Between Springfield and Georgetown Pike, Fluor will build two new high-occupancy-vehicle/toll lanes, funding a large part of the construction. Virginia has had a public-private law similar to the Texas HB 3588 since 1995.

In western Virginia, Star Solutions (with HNTB) is negotiating to widen I-81, a major trucking corridor. One approach, to bypass congestion and move goods faster, would be truck-only toll lanes in both directions for 325 miles.

Georgia's transportation department has recently passed legislation to spur public-private initiatives expected to save millions on developing comprehensive development agreements.

Lessons learned

Tollways worldwide have not been established without problems.

When the National Highway System in Mexico was being prepared for the North American Free Trade Agreement in the late 1980s, contracts were awarded to Mexican companies offering the shortest concession periods, sometimes as short as 30 months. This required companies to raise tolls to recover costs. Likewise, cost overruns, failures to meet schedules, and shortfalls in projected traffic also influenced higher tolls. By 1994, Mexico's toll roads cost four times more than the per mile toll rate in the United States.



TxDOT photo / Geoff Appold

Drivers will become increasingly familiar with the EZ tag sign as electronic readers are installed at toll stations.

Further, in Canada, Cintra/Ferrovial was the subject of some unpopularity. The group obtained a 99-year contract to operate and extend the 407 ETR highway in Toronto — a state-of-the-art, all-electronic toll road.

The contract negotiated by the former government allowed Cintra to regulate the tolls to their own formulas, not the government's.

Future is now

Roads never have been free, nor cheap. Drivers were oblivious of this because they didn't have to reach into their own pocket every day to pay for using the roads. And they still won't.

Only drivers who use them will pay for toll lanes on public-maintained roads or on roads that are privately built (or operated) and maintained.

Toll roads are the future. It's like flying on an airline — passengers in coach pay less than the passengers in first class to go the same distance. But, the people willing to pay more out of pocket get more room and can get off the plane first with considerably less stress.

Editor's note: This article was adapted from a longer piece published this spring and appearing in the Dallas District's newsletter, Dallas Express Quarterly.✪



Sudan's loss is gain for Dallas District

by Angela Loston
 Dallas District
 Public Information Office

Life lately has been pretty ordinary for Siddig Dali. For more than eight years, he has been an employee with TxDOT designing roads and bridge replacements and even developing a project for a movable-barrier system on high-occupancy vehicle lanes.

But things were not always typical for Dali. More than 20 years ago, he found himself being more than just an engineer as he championed women's rights in his native Sudan. His fight against inequality for Sudanese women did not garner him praise — instead it cost him his freedom.

As he tells it, he was held for two weeks in 1985 in a prison in Khartoum. He was arrested for his involvement with the Republican Brothers, a group that was against the Sharia laws in Sudan and which fought for democracy and women's rights.

"The Sharia laws were a set of laws that solved the problem of the 7th century, but they are incompatible with 21st century humanity," Dali said. "These laws treat women as second-class citizens, and to treat women like this is an injustice. A woman is my mom, my wife, my sister and my daughter, so I did not think that treating women like this was necessary."

As a member of the Republican Brothers, he distributed pamphlets decrying the Sharia laws and their impact on women's rights and Islam. While passing out the pamphlets, Dali said, he was arrested.

After the execution of his group's leader in January 1985, Dali was released from prison under condition that he sign a document denouncing his opposition to Sudan's Sharia laws.

"The Republican Brothers were a peaceful movement," Dali says. "We believed in democracy, freedom and peace. The government did not like our ideas and labeled us as infidels."

Under the Sharia laws, Dali said, a Sudanese woman would have to give half of what she earned from an inheritance to a man, and she had to obey her father, brothers and husband. He said the laws required that women wear veils and have a male escort wherever they traveled abroad.

"Sudanese people respect women, but the government imposed laws that did not give women their rights," he said. "The Sharia laws distorted Islam in the eyes of our people and in the eyes of the world."

After his release from prison, Dali sought to leave



Siddig Dali

"We believed in democracy, freedom and peace. The government did not like our ideas and labeled us as infidels."

Khartoum. With his visitor's visa in hand, he left his native home of 40 years for the United States in May 1995. During his first four months in the United States, he lived in Virginia. Upon accepting a job in Fort Worth, he moved to Texas, his current residence. A year later, his wife and two children joined him in America.

"I have been very thankful for the opportunity to live in America," Dali said. "They gave me a good job, the freedom we have here, and good schools for my children."

Today, he continues to work for TxDOT as a transportation engineer with the Dallas District's Southeast Area Office. He and his family now live in McKinney. He says he is happy to be in a country where his daughter and wife do not have to be inferior to men, and his son can see women as the human beings they are.

Editor's note: This article was adapted from the Dallas District's newsletter published this spring. 🌟

Profile: **SUDAN**

Area — 967,498 square miles; largest country in Africa. (Texas is 268,601 square miles.) south. Rail connections between the north and south are largely out of service.

Population — 32.6 million; expected to double by 2050. **Quality of life** — only about 15 percent of people in the country have access to electricity. Water quality has declined and many rural people pay as much as half their family income on water, often of dubious quality.

Roadways — in northern Sudan, roads (other than those in towns) often are impassable after rain. Motor traffic in the Upper Nile region is limited to the drier months (January-May). No tarmac roads in Sudan's Opposition rebels include up to 30 armed groups.

Message signs serve important role in AMBER alerts

by Michael Peters

Fort Worth District

FORT WORTH — After 30 months, 18 missing children have been recovered safely in Texas through the AMBER alert network. At least two of the recoveries have been directly attributed to TxDOT's dynamic message signs.

"It's remarkable when a traffic device can help find an abducted child," said Fort Worth District Engineer Maribel Chavez. "In the blink of an eye, you send a vital message to millions of drivers."

The statewide network combines more than 400 of the signs into local AMBER alert systems to issue alerts for children 17 years or younger who are believed to be in danger.

AMBER is short for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response. The alert system originated in the Dallas-Fort Worth area when local residents worked with area radio stations to develop a system

in 1996 to track abducted children. Creation of the system came after the kidnapping and murder of 9-year-old Amber Hagerman from Arlington.

Today, the Texas AMBER alert network starts when local AMBER officials contact the Department of Public Safety in Austin, which then decides if the state should participate. The Fort Worth District's AMBER Alert Team is then called into action, responsible for the posting of alerts on message signs either statewide or within 200 miles of the abduction. In addition, alerts are carried on radio and TV.

The Fort Worth District has served as TxDOT's single point of contact since the network was established Aug. 12, 2002. Just three days later, TxDOT had its first AMBER alert when an 11-month-old boy in Fort Worth was abducted. A school bus driver spotted a car in Forest Hill described on a dynamic-message sign and reported it to local police, who then safely recovered the missing infant. 🌟

Letter from the editor

by Mike Cox

When properly cured, the concrete used in building TxDOT's bridges, overpasses and other facilities is quite rigid (and that's a good thing), but there's nothing wrong with a little flexibility in other areas.

So, with this issue, we're back to monthly publication. TxDOT is simply too large an organization with too much going on for us to do justice to our wide-ranging activities on a quarterly basis. Like many things, producing only four issues a year seemed like a good idea at the time, but an informal survey convinced us that TxDOT employees like their agency news on a regular basis.

That said, we are not all-knowing. We welcome your news tips and story suggestions. If you'd like to take it a step further and write something for us, that's even better.

■ Patsy Harrison had just returned to her house from dropping her daughter off at

Buffalo Middle School last Sept. 9 when she heard her pickup honking. Thinking that strange, she went outside and saw flames shooting from the front of the vehicle. (The fire had affected the vehicle's electric system, hence the honking.) She grabbed a water hose, but the low-pressure hose didn't have much impact on the flames. In fact, the flames soon threatened to catch her house on fire. "Out of nowhere," as she later put it, two TxDOT employees appeared.

They sent her to call 911 and took over the garden hose. Police and volunteer firefighters succeeded in getting the fire out before it spread to her home. "They were here, they helped, and they were gone before I got a chance to say thank you," she told the local newspaper.

Bryan District's public information officer, Bob Colwell, identified the two TxDOT workers as Jeff Massey and David Willis, both with the Leon County Maintenance Office.

■ Last summer, it seemed as if a giant bull's-eye had been pinned on Florida. A staggering four hurricanes slammed the Sunshine State, claiming dozens of lives and causing billions of dollars in damage. One of those storms, Hurricane Ivan, threatened New Orleans before veering into Florida. As residents of the low-lying Crescent City evacuated their homes and businesses, thousands of Louisiana residents traveled to Texas. TxDOT employees at our travel information centers in Waskum on I-20 and at Orange on I-10 stayed open late into the night to help the refugees in finding hotel rooms or public shelters. 🌟

NOTICE

Due to technical problems, the listing of names seen under the headings of Service Awards, Retirements, and In Memoriam will not appear in this issue. We hope to have a comprehensive listing available in the next issue. We apologize for any inconvenience.

It's the law: Employees face points, surcharges

Editor's note: TxDOT's Human Resources Division provides the following as a matter of interest to all TxDOT employees

New driving laws that are administered and enforced by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) affect TxDOT employees. Failure to comply with these laws and failure to pay accompanying fees or failure to maintain a valid license may result in administrative or disciplinary actions.

TxDOT employees are responsible for knowing the status of their license at all times and must not drive for the department if they do not have the legal authority to do so. Employees must maintain a current address on their driver's licenses in order to receive notification from DPS concerning these laws.

Driver Responsibility Law

Effective Sept. 1, 2003, the new Driver Responsibility Law (in HB3588) established a point-and-surcharge system for Class C misdemeanor moving violations. DPS now assigns points to a person's license at conviction. A surcharge will be assessed when a driver accumulates a total of six points or more during a three-year period.

Additionally, a driver who receives a conviction for a DWI or a DWI-related offense, failure to maintain financial responsibility, or driving with an invalid license will pay an annual surcharge for three years. No points are placed on driver records for these offenses because the fine is automatic on the first offense.

The point system is as follows:

- Two points for a moving violation conviction in Texas or another state.
- Three points for a moving violation conviction in Texas or another state that resulted in a vehicle crash.
- Points will not be assigned for speeding less than 10 percent over the posted limit or seat belt convictions.

Drivers must pay a \$100 surcharge for the first six points and \$25 for each additional point.

A first-time DWI results in a \$1,000 surcharge, a second-time DWI results in a \$1,500 surcharge. The charges are cumulative. For example, a driver could

pay \$1,000 as a result of the first DWI and an additional \$1,500 for a second DWI, paying a total of \$2,500 annually for three years.

In addition, a conviction for driving with an invalid license or failure to maintain financial responsibility results in a surcharge of \$250, paid annually for three years. A driver convicted of driving without a valid license receives a \$100 per year surcharge for three years.

The notification of surcharge assessment and license revocation by DPS will be mailed first class to the address on the current driver's license. For some people, the notification of surcharge or revocation of driver's license by DPS may be a surprise. If the surcharges and other administrative fees are not paid within 30 days of date mailed from DPS, the license will be revoked automatically and will not be reinstated until the payment arrangements have been made or the surcharge is paid in full.

If notices of surcharge or license revocation are mailed to an old address, some may not be aware their driver license has been revoked as a consequence of this new point-and-surcharge system. As a possible result, some could end up driving for the department without legal authority.

Therefore, employees must maintain a current address on the driver's license and inform DPS immediately of any address change.

Further, TxDOT policy about substance abuse requires employees not to drive for the department if they have lost the legal authority to drive. Employees also must report the loss of legal authority to drive to supervisors and they must obtain a valid regular or occupational license to be able to return to driving duties.

A TxDOT employee who drives for the department without legal authority is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Employees should know the status of their driver's license at all times. The status of driver licenses can be verified through local DPS offices or through the department's Web site (www.txdps.state.tx.us).

Next issue: New rules for drivers holding commercial licenses.

Calendar

2005

MAY

- 26 Commission Meeting, Austin
- 30 Memorial Day (holiday*)

JUNE

- 6-9 Research Management Committee Meeting, Austin, RTI
- 30 Commission Meeting, Austin

JULY

- 4 Independence Day (holiday*)
- 6-8 Texas Ports and Waterways Conference, CC, TPP
- 18-20 Annual Sign Shop Meeting, Fort. Worth, TRF
- 19-22 Value Engineering Conference, San Antonio, DES
- 21 Research Oversight Committee Meeting, Austin, RTI
- 28 Commission Meeting, Brownwood

AUGUST

- 16-18 Design and Bridge Conference, Dallas, DES/BRG
- 25 Commission Meeting, Austin

SEPTEMBER

- 12-14 Save a Life-Safety Belts & Sober Drivers, Austin, TRF
- 29 Commission Meeting, Austin

OCTOBER

- 11-12 Transportation Short Course, College Station
- 27 Commission Meeting, Corpus Christi

NOVEMBER

- 7-10 Research Management Committee Meeting, CC, RTI
- 17 Commission Meeting, Austin

DECEMBER

- 7 Research Oversight Committee Meeting, Austin, RTI
- 15 Commission Meeting, Austin

* = 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



Order up! — Remember the smell of a good ol' fashioned hamburger sizzling on an open grill? What about a waitress with five gallons of hairspray in her hair? Where was this diner and how did it survive the storm? Oh, and what storm? If you have more information about this picture, contact Anne Cook, TxDOT's photo librarian, at (512) 486-5838, or by e-mail at acook@dot.state.tx.us.



Four people each offered different suggested locations for the Spring 2005 **backtracks** photo. Each suggestion was forwarded to the local TxDOT maintenance office. So far, we have no confirmation on any of the suggested answers. 🗳️



125 E. 11th St.
Austin, Texas 78701

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED