

25:1 Spring 1996

In This Issue...

1996 H-GRTS Area  
Traffic Maps  
Page.....1

Freeway and Expressway  
Status Map Updates  
Page.....1

Transportation Enhancement  
Program in the  
Houston-Galveston  
Region  
Page.....2

Houston Travel  
Reduction Program  
Page.....2

Don't Get Caught  
in the Fast Lane  
Page.....3

## 1996 H-GRTS Area Traffic Maps

The Transportation Planning and Programming Division of TxDOT is conducting 24-hour state system and off-system traffic volume counts at more than 20,000 locations in the H-GRTS area in addition to the regular annual on-system highway counts.

Traffic counting is expected to begin by the fall of 1996 and continue through the end of 1996. Traffic maps including these counts will be available to the public and governmental agencies approximately one year after completion of the survey. The counts from these maps will also be utilized by the Transportation Planning and Programming Division of TxDOT for urban travel modeling studies.

This study is performed roughly once every five years and was last completed in January of 1991 for the 1990 24-Hour Traffic Maps.

The comprehensive traffic volume survey is an important and much needed endeavor. Data obtained from this survey will be beneficial to all planning agencies, public and private.

## Freeway and Expressway Status Map Updated

The Status of Freeway and Expressway System Map is published annually by the Study Office. Enclosed with this Newsletter is the updated 1995 map showing the current status of the freeway and expressway system for the eight-county Houston-Galveston Regional Transportation Study Area. Also included on the reverse side of the map is the proposed freeway construction schedule as indicated by the Ten-Year Project Development Plan of the Texas Department of Transportation.

APR 14 1997

(See Map Updated.....Page 3)



---

---

## Transportation Enhancement Program in the Houston-Galveston Region

---

---

In 1991 the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was created, establishing a new vision of our transportation system. That vision includes not only constructing roads but broadening our focus to include diverse surface transportation options. In turn, these options can contribute to the livelihood of our communities, the quality of our environment, and the aesthetics of our roadways. The transportation enhancement provision in ISTEA exemplifies this new vision and offers an exciting opportunity for all Texans and citizens in this region to work together to expand the state's transportation goals.

The Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program is a proactive community enhancement program that mirrors the spirit and intent of ISTEA. The program provides funding for a broad range of transportation related activities, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities, scenic and landscaping programs, historic preservation activities, and water pollution control. The projects that demonstrate a strong tie to transportation usually receive a higher evaluation than other projects.

Since the inception of this program, the eight-county Houston-Galveston Region has received approval for 15 projects by the Texas Transportation Commission with a total project cost of \$30 million in the past two project call sessions. Generally the U.S. Department of Transportation participates with approximately 80 percent of the funding and the local implementation agencies pay at least 20 percent of the eligible project costs.

As of now, the third project call session is in progress and the successful projects after a state-wide competitive process will be announced by the Texas Transportation Commission this summer.

---

---

## Houston Travel Reduction Program

---

---

The original mandatory Employer Trip Reduction (ETR) program which was a part of the 1990 Clean Air Amendments was repealed by the United States Congress in January 1996. This program is being replaced by a volunteer program called the Employee Commute Option (ECO) program. This program has taken some of the more popular parts of the ETR program and given them to other agencies for implementation. The ECO program includes ride matching, vanpool assistance, and Transportation Management Organizations.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) provides ride matching service. Any person living in the METRO service area can place their name and personal commute data in a database created and maintained by METRO. This database serves two purposes. The data can be used to form carpools or vanpools. Since the database contains information from many different companies, matches are easier to create. In addition to normal long term carpool matching, METRO provides emergency matches. If a commuter has transportation problems, they can dial METRO and ask for an immediate match to another commuter with a similar work trip for an instant carpool. These instant carpools can be for one trip or several trips depending on the needs of commuters.

METRO and the Houston-Galveston Area Council will provide subsidies for vanpool start up. If a company wishes to form a vanpool, METRO, working through a third-party vendor, will provide the van and a percentage of the cost for each rider. The actual subsidy offered by METRO depends on company participation. These subsidies are being financed through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) funds made available by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. These funds provide for the first

*(See Houston Travel Reduction Program....Page 4)*

---

---

## Don't Get Caught in the Fast Lane

---

---

**T**exas motorists were allowed to mash their accelerators a bit harder beginning December 8, 1995, after President Clinton signed the National Highway System Designation Act of 1995. This new federal highway bill caused speed limits on countless stretches of roads in Texas and across the nation to revert to whatever they had been in 1973. The Texas Transportation Commission pursuant to this legislation set 70 miles per hour speed limits on 1,400 miles of state and U.S. highways in Texas. The Commission has the authority to set speed limits below the state maximum (70 mph), but the variances must be based on official traffic studies which prove that speeds should be lowered due to safety reasons.

The Texas Legislature has mandated that the maximum speed for cars be set at 70 mph during the day and 65 mph at night. For commercial trucks, the limits remain at 60 mph during the day and 55 mph at night. So that you will not get caught while you are moving through the fast lane, drivers are being cautioned to adhere to POSTED speed limits. Do not assume that just because the speed restrictions have changed that you can drive 70 mph on any open road. Generally, Texas motorists are being advised to apply the new limits to Interstate and four-lane divided highways, most of which will be 70 mph in rural areas. Within the parameters of Beltway 8 and especially within the city limits of Houston, the speed will remain at 55 mph.

For those who are afraid that more people will die on Texas roadways, your apprehension is unfortunately grounded in historical reality. The number of motor vehicle traffic deaths in Texas decreased from 3,395 deaths in 1988 to 3,037 deaths in 1993; however, history suggests this trend may reverse.

According to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) when the speed limit increased from 60 mph to 70 mph, traffic deaths rose 10% from 2,729

deaths in 1963 to 3,006 deaths in 1964. When the 70 mph limit was lowered to 55 mph, the number of deaths dropped from 3,692 deaths in 1973 to 3,046 deaths in 1974.

Just remember that you can move through the fast lane but don't get caught in it. Do what makes sense, drive safely and follow POSTED speed limits.

## Map Updated

*(Continued from Page 1)*

---

### 1995 Completions

Major progress towards further transportation improvement in the H-GRTS area during the past year occurred with the completion of the SH 146 bridge across the Houston Ship Channel and two sections of BW 8 (South Sam Houston Parkway).

The terminally congested, two-lane Baytown Tunnel was replaced with an eight-lane freeway bridge when SH 146 (Fred Hartman Bridge) was opened to traffic in the fall of 1995. The bridge over the Houston Ship Channel connects SH 225 (La Porte Freeway) in La Porte to SH 146 (Robert C. Lanier Freeway) in Baytown.

This new bridge, ultimately a \$90 million project, is the longest cable stayed bridge in the United States and the second longest in the world.

With the opening of BW 8 (South Sam Houston Parkway) frontage roads from Mykawa Rd. to SH 288 (South Freeway) and at FM 521 (Almeda Rd.) in late 1995, through traffic access on a multi-lane divided highway became available from Mykawa Rd. to S. Post Oak Rd. in southern Harris County. These completions allow for further access to SH 288 (South Freeway) from previously semi-isolated regions of Southwest and Southeast Harris County, northern Brazoria county and northeastern Fort Bend County.

### 1995 Construction Starts

This past year, major construction projects were let to contract on three freeway routes in Harris  
*(See Map Updated.....Page 4)*

# Map Updates

(Continued from Page 3)

County. When completed these projects will increase traffic capacity for US 59 (Eastex Freeway) and provide new routes of travel for the northwestern and southern regions of the study area.

Widening projects on US 59 (Eastex Freeway) from Franklin St. to Clay St. on the Eastex elevated section and from Collingsworth to north of IH 610 (North Loop) were let in the summer of 1995. With these two projects the total cost for projects currently under construction on US 59 (Eastex Freeway) from north of IH 45 (Gulf Freeway) to south of FM 1960 is now more than \$340 million.

In July of 1995 a \$45 million construction project was let to contract for a new four-lane freeway on a new alignment of US 290 from the existing US 290 east of Hockley in northwest Harris County to the Waller County line.

All projects for the four-lane Sam Houston Tollway from east of US 59 (Southwest Freeway) to west of IH 45 (Gulf Freeway) in south Harris County were let to contract last year by the Harris County Toll Road Authority at a total cost of \$72 million.

## Houston Travel Reduction Program

(Continued from Page 2)

two years of the program with continued funding from METRO.

Another program supported by CMAQ funds is the Transportation Management Organization (TMO). A TMO is formed to provide support for congestion and air quality improvement for a specified geographical area. The start up funds must be matched with local money paid by members of the TMO. The local match must be at least 20 percent of the operating budget for the first year and 50 percent during the second year. Membership fees should support the TMO's operation after the second year. A TMO can be formed by either a

public or private organization such as a chamber of commerce, area association, or public agency. The TMO must operate under a separate board of directors and maintain its own financial records. TMOs typically provide the following services to members.

- Distribute trip reduction information
- Provide trip matching
- Promote the use of alternative modes of transportation
- Form a trip reduction assistance center
- Provide a guaranteed ride home service
- Sponsor community activities to generate local interest and solicit new members
- Work with local government to solve local congestion problems
- Sponsor an annual event to recognize and honor member participation

A TMOs primary goal should be to unite the community it serves to improve the quality of life by reducing congestion and improving air quality.

The final initiative to be provided by the Houston area's ECO program is to provide public education concerning air quality issues. A major factor in the failure of the Employer Trip Reduction program was the lack of positive information about it. The first information most of the public heard was from a radio personality saying that the government was going to force people out of their cars. The proposed education program would create educational material for public schools. If we can convince the youth of our community that trip reduction is important, they will pass that idea onto their parents and the ECO program will have a better chance of success.

### HOUSTON-GALVESTON Regional Transportation Study

The H-GRTS NEWSLETTER is published periodically by the Houston-Galveston Regional Transportation Study Office at 7721 Washington Ave.: Hans C. Olavson, Study Director; Lankford Bolling Jr., Editor, P.O. Box 1386, Houston, Texas 77251-1386. Tel (713) 802-5314.