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On the cover:

Stan Williams, photographer with the TxDOT Travel Division, recorded this autumn view of State Highway 43 in far north-east Texas a few years back. For some, the photo may call to mind Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" and the lines: "I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference."

TxDOT photo / Stan A. Williams

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Straight Talk



Time for giving thanks

by Mike Behrens

Executive Director



Mike Behrens

At the recent Short Course held in October, the thousands of people present and those viewing remotely in TxDOT's districts, divisions and offices via video-conferencing, were fortunate to hear from some of the brave men and women from the department who are serving or have served in the war against terror in the Middle East.

While watching a video honoring TxDOT men and women in the military, we were sitting in safety and comfort while they were overseas risking everything so that we could leave our homes each morning, drive to work on superior roads and attend meetings such as this one in College Station.

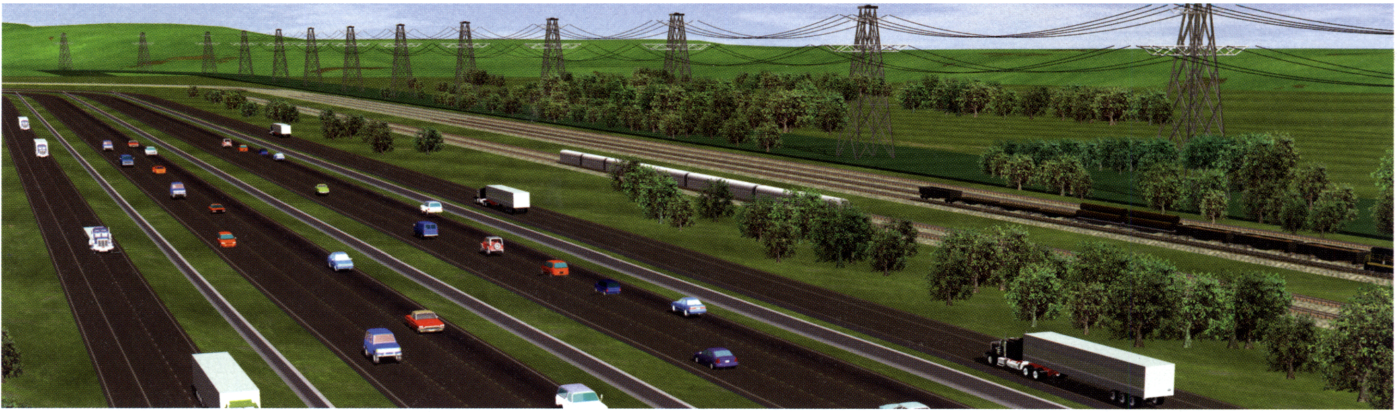
During the holiday season especially, let's all give thanks to our fellow TxDOT employees and all their comrades who are thousands of miles away, unable to celebrate Thanksgiving with their families, observe Christmas or Hanukah with their loved ones, or welcome the new year without the sound of gunfire, the fear of explosions, and the uncertainty of their everyday life.

These TxDOT employees and their comrades are making the world safer not only for you and for me, but for all people. It fills me with pride and a sense of security knowing we are in the hands of these capable employees, both on the job and as they serve our country in the military.

It struck me while watching the excellent video produced by TxDOT's Travel Division that these brave Texans are the same people we all see on the job here at TxDOT, the people we have all worked with each day over the years.

And they are heroes, whether they don a combat helmet or a TxDOT hard hat. At work or at war, these men and women represent the best of TxDOT: honest, good, hard working, courageous, fast on their feet, and uncompromising when it comes to quality, integrity and follow-through.

I want to thank the TxDOT employees who have served in the war on terror. You make us proud. And I want to thank all of you for being the kind of employees who make me proud — a staff made up of heroes.



Commission receives TTC-35 master plan

by **Judith Curtis**
Associate Editor

AUSTIN — Just five years ago the concept seemed so large that it instantly drew comparisons to some of history's greatest public works projects.

That idea — the Trans-Texas Corridor — in recent days has moved from rough draft to a clear roadmap on how to approach, operate, finance and maintain the project's first phase, TTC-35.

In fact, the master development plan for TTC-35, a document 16 months in the making, estimates that actual construction of TTC-35 could begin in four years.

That is just one of the projections outlined in a long-awaited master development plan that Cintra-Zachry has delivered to TxDOT. The results of the report were made public at the transportation commission's September meeting.

"The plan for the corridor proves that partnerships between government and private industry result in innovative solutions to tough problems," said Chairman Ric Williamson. "We are at the center of the universe when it comes to transportation innovation."

TTC-35, which would generally run parallel to I-35, would relieve congestion, improve safety, aid economic opportunity, increase the value of existing infrastructure and improve air quality.

"Breaking the gridlock on Interstate 35 is critical to the success of our plan to reduce congestion, maintain our infrastructure and improve air quality, economic development and safety," said Mike Behrens, executive director.

When the first TTC-35 facilities are built, they will form the longest open-road toll corridor in the world, according to the plan.

The benefits of such a system include improved safety by removing road hazards, along with reduced maintenance, emissions and noise normally associated with stopping at toll plazas.

Here is what the plan doesn't do: it does not set the route for TTC-35, it does not authorize construction yet. Nor does it outline the setting of toll rates.

The plan outlines how the public-private partnership between the corridor contractors and the state would work in numerous areas, including:

Maintenance: The developer will have to maintain roads and other facilities using the same standards the department follows. That will include minimizing disruption and delay to the public, identifying and repairing defects or damage that result from vehicle crashes, removing litter and debris, and performing regular inspections.

Economic development: The report notes that Texas has an annual level of economic output that would make it the world's 10th largest economy if it were an independent nation. "As a key player in the global marketplace, Texas must offer a transportation system that allows for quick and inexpensive movement of products," said Behrens.

Indeed, says Williamson, "The march of civilization as we know it has always been across the roads of a modern transportation system. TTC-35 begins Texas' contribution to this hemisphere's next generation of transportation."

Funding: Because Texas needs \$86 billion more than it has to build transportation infrastructure, more user fees, public-private partnerships and alternative financing will be used to build roads, rail and utility corridors. TTC-35 will use a variety of financing options.

The report notes that private investment in the corridor could be worth \$8.8 billion with additional concession fees to the state of \$1.9 billion.

Trends: By building the Trans-Texas Corridor, communities are likely to change their growth patterns and build homes and businesses around transit. This could slow the trend toward outlying suburbs.

"The development of TTC-35 could result in plans for local communities that are fundamentally different than the traditional suburban model," states the report. "The possibility of mixed-use, transit-oriented developments could make proximity to the multi-modal TTC attractive." Dallas and Central Texas are the likeliest areas to adopt such transit-centric developments.

Location: The plan recommends that the toll road extend south of San Antonio, connecting to I-35. In north Texas, the toll road could connect to I-35 north of Dallas-Fort Worth. Also included in the plan is a loop around Dallas-Fort Worth.

The final alignment of TTC-35 will be determined after public input and completion of environmental impact studies.

The 1,600-page master development plan is available on TxDOT's Web site or at www.keeptexasmoving.org ☪

Extra Mile Award

By Mike Cox
Editor

The TxDOT Extra Mile Award recognizes individual employees who have shown extraordinary courage. They have put their own lives in danger to prevent injury or to save the life of another. As part of the opening ceremonies at the 2006 Transportation Short Course in mid-October, TxDOT honored five employees with the Extra Mile Award. Since the recognition program began in 1983, TxDOT has presented the awards to 162 employees.

Waco District

A two-man roadside assistance team patrolled the interstate looking for travelers needing help on an uneventful Thanksgiving night in 2005.

The two TxDOT maintenance workers, Kevin Pederson and Billy Watson, stopped their state truck behind a car with its hood up on the outside shoulder of southbound Interstate 35 West just north of Hillsboro.

The occupants of the car, a young couple with no idea of what was wrong with their vehicle, stood by helplessly as Pederson and Watson tried to figure what was wrong.

As they worked to get the vehicle started, the heavy holiday traffic began to back up in both the north and southbound lanes.

In the adjacent lane, a woman driving a midsize foreign car noticed too late that traffic had come to a virtual standstill. She slammed on her brakes to avoid hitting the vehicles in front of her. Her delayed reaction to the situation in front of her allowed no time and space for the 18-wheeler behind her to stop. The tractor-trailer rammed the woman's vehicle with tremendous force.

That crash started a chain reaction that was so powerful it knocked one vehicle into the median and the other vehicle onto the outside shoulder close to where the TxDOT team and the young couple were parked.

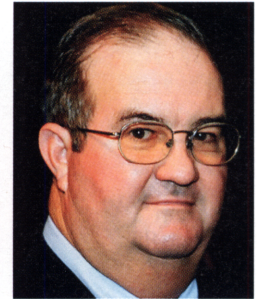
The truck, now on top of the woman's car, plowed into the median and burst into flames as all the vehicles came to a stop.

With traffic at a standstill and debris scattered across the roadway Pederson and Watson swung into action.

Each grabbed a fire extinguisher from



Kevin Pederson



Billy Watson

their truck and rushed to the burning vehicles to help the drivers.

As the two TxDOT employees assessed the situation, they realized the truck driver had only minor cuts and bruises. The occupant of the compact hadn't been so fortunate. Trapped in the car underneath the burning tractor-trailer, she died on the scene.

Pederson and Watson began fighting the fires started by the crash as they waited for the DPS, firefighters and local law enforcement to arrive.

After the arrival of emergency officials, the men turned their attention to working with EMS personnel in comforting and helping the occupants of the other disabled vehicles involved in the accident.

Over the three hours that followed the accident – and in the finest tradition of public service that is exemplified by TxDOT employees – they did everything they could to help those involved.

An off-duty Garland police officer, who witnessed the crash and the team's subsequent actions, commended the TxDOT employees. He characterized their actions as “selfless courage and calm professionalism in the face of a chaotic and potentially life-threatening situation.”

Dallas District

Tired from a busy day on the job, TxDOT Construction Inspector Michael Peavy headed home for the day.

Whatever plans the Ellis County Area Office employee may have had for that evening of Jan. 31, 2006, those plans changed when he drove up on a silver sedan that had run off the pavement on FM 66 three miles west of Waxahachie. Smoke rose from beneath the front of the 1998-model car, which had careened off the roadway, struck a mailbox and rolled across someone's driveway before coming to a stop in the barrow ditch.

Since the accident had happened on a section of the roadway being widened, Peavy used his cell phone to notify that project's inspector, Jeremy Woods. Still on the job, Woods immediately headed for the accident location.

After completing the call, Peavy got out of his vehicle and ran toward the car. Now he saw flames shooting from the wrecked car on the driver's side, between the engine and the front door. Then Peavy could see that the



Michael Peavy



Jeremy Woods

driver remained inside the burning vehicle.

Peavy and a passerby tried to pull the young man from the vehicle, but couldn't budge him. Seeing that the driver's left foot had been trapped between the dash and floorboard of the vehicle, Peavy stuck his left hand in the car hoping to pull the man's leg free.

When that didn't work, Peavy untied the man's left shoelace in an effort to pull the victim's foot from his shoe. Still the foot remained stuck.

Focusing totally on his rescue effort, Peavy did not realize that the flames continued to spread. But when he began to feel heat through the soles of his boots, he realized he did not have much time left.

On Peavy's fourth try, the man's foot

finally came loose from the twisted wreckage. As Peavy and the other passerby carried the driver across the highway away from the crashed vehicle, it burst fully into flames.

By that time, Woods – a trained emergency medical technician and a volunteer firefighter – had reached the scene of the one-car accident. He checked the driver's condition and worked to keep him from going into shock until an ambulance arrived.

Meanwhile, the burning vehicle had ignited the dry grass around it. Flames now moved toward several nearby houses.

Falling back on his firefighter training and Peavy's help, Woods used the contractor's water truck to battle the blaze. Working with a Department of Public Safety trooper, the two TxDOT employees succeeded in extinguishing the fire within a half hour.

The 19-year-old driver had suffered a broken left foot and left femur in the crash. Had it not been for the heroic efforts of Peavy and Woods, the young man could have perished in the resulting fire.

Laredo District

On the misty morning of Dec. 18, 2005, maintenance crew chief Terry Gonzalez operated her Courtesy Patrol vehicle on Interstate 35 between Encinal and Laredo. Traffic ran heavier than normal due to the holiday season. Not long after beginning her rounds, she drove up on a family needing more than routine roadside assistance.

Seeing an overturned SUV on the southbound lane of the interstate, she stopped her truck. Instructing TxDOT colleague David Enriquez to stop traffic, Gonzalez ran to the vehicle to see what she could do to help the occupants.

As she neared the crashed vehicle, she heard screams coming from the upside-down wreckage. She marveled that anyone could have survived the crash, which caved in the roof of the vehicle and left it looking like an accordion. Gonzalez peered inside to



Teresa Gonzalez

see several cut, bleeding and scared children and an hysterical woman who turned out to be the children's mother.

Some of the children managed to get out

of the vehicle on their own, but two younger ones remained trapped inside. One infant hung upside down in a child seat with arms and legs dangling. Another child had been lodged between the middle and front seats.

While trying to calm a chaotic situation with orderly, safety-related directions to bystanders, Gonzalez reached into the crumpled vehicle and managed to free the two trapped children.

Next, she turned her attention to the children's mother, pinned in the back seat. Though mindful that the

vehicle might burst into flames at any second, Gonzalez crawled through a broken passenger window. Despite the danger, she never hesitated.

Pushing aside luggage and Christmas presents, she finally reached the trapped woman, whose legs had been pinned under the headrest of the upside-down vehicle. Carefully pushing the headrest down, Gonzalez succeeded in releasing the woman's trapped limbs.

Gonzalez then managed to get a blanket beneath the injured woman. Next, she asked someone to break out the back window of the vehicle. That done, she and others pulled the woman through the window to safety. An ambulance crew then rushed the woman and her children to two hospitals in Laredo.

A mother of six children, Gonzalez knows the importance of family. She waited at the scene for some of the victims' family members to arrive and then took them to be with their injured relatives. ☆

Excellence shines

Five receive TTI honors at Short Course opening

The Texas Transportation Institute presented annual transportation-related awards during the opening session of the 2006 Transportation Short Course in October at Texas A&M University. These awards recognize the best within TxDOT and among the department's supporters. The following profiles are taken from remarks made at the presentations.

■ Greer Award



Robert L. Stuard

The award:

Honors skill, dedication, civic-mindedness, innovation and performance excellence of TxDOT engineers.

The winner:

Robert L. Stuard, deputy district engineer, Austin District ... known as diplomatic, calm during tense situations, caring, unassuming and reluctant to take the limelight, but a true leader respected by employees and supervisors ... outstanding communicator with keen ability to explain complex issues in terms non-engineers and non-TxDOT employees can understand ... represented TxDOT at more than 100 meetings of the local metropolitan-planning organization; often called on to discuss numerous technical issues ... led a team that successfully procured a comprehensive development agreement for a much-needed toll road ... serves on a committee developing criteria for high-speed design facilities applicable to the Trans-Texas Corridor ... cares deeply about preparing the next generation of TxDOT leaders; has supervised three engineers who have since advanced to become TxDOT district engineers ... native of north-central Texas and a TxDOT veteran of more than 31 years ... started TxDOT career in Air Quality Section of the Design Division ...

little-known fact: graduated with bachelor's and master's degrees in meteorology from Texas A&M; later obtained a master of science degree in civil engineering from the University of Texas at Austin.

■ Gilchrist Award



Paul E. Williams

The award:

Honors the performance of an outstanding TxDOT engineer.

The winner:

Paul E. Williams, Northeast Dallas County area engineer, Dallas District

... chose engineering as a way to improve the lives of others ... has been active in a local organization for minority engineers, serving as co-chair of the organization for two years ... in the mid 1990s, was promoted to assistant area engineer and managed three projects on a major expressway expansion — at the time the largest projects let in TxDOT history ... involved in an expressway expansion affecting an African-American cemetery; worked with the community, local organizations and family members to relocate 1,600 graves; due to his leadership and the cooperation fostered with local citizens, the sensitive project was completed with strong community support and no delays ... designed the first section of State Highway 190 that ties to the President George Bush Turnpike — a task he will oversee to com-

pletion next summer with the design of the eastern extension of the Bush Turnpike ... responsible for the final section of the North Central Expressway Project, known as South One, which received the National Quality Initiative Achievement Award for completion under budget and nine months ahead of schedule ... little-known facts: Bronx (NY) native, team captain of his university baseball team, drafted by the Houston Astros; instead graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a civil-engineering degree.

■ DeBerry Award



Julia Brown

deputy district engineer, San Antonio District ... blazed a path that others will follow as she accepts any challenge and implements a “we can find a way” approach to problem-solving ... early in career as a project engineer, she supervised all phases of construction for several urban projects totaling more than \$30 million — including a major interchange ... as an advanced project-development engineer, oversaw the development of schematics and environmental studies for a metropolitan district, and supervised the district’s professional services contracts for environmental testing. In this job, she was the design and planning engineer for dozens of projects totaling more than \$200 million ... by 1993, she was district transportation planning and development director, overseeing project development and supervising a staff that developed more than \$2 billion in projects ... present job involves her in every aspect of dis-

The award:

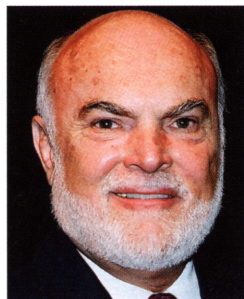
Honors outstanding contributions to the state of Texas in the field of transportation.

The winner:

Julia Brown, deputy district engineer, San Antonio District ... blazed a path that others will follow as she accepts any challenge and implements a “we can find a way” approach to problem-solving ... early in career as a project engineer, she supervised all phases of construction for several urban projects totaling more than \$30 million — including a major interchange ... as an advanced project-development engineer, oversaw the development of schematics and environmental studies for a metropolitan district, and supervised the district’s professional services contracts for environmental testing. In this job, she was the design and planning engineer for dozens of projects totaling more than \$200 million ... by 1993, she was district transportation planning and development director, overseeing project development and supervising a staff that developed more than \$2 billion in projects ... present job involves her in every aspect of dis-

trict operations; she supervises three of the most important aspects of district operations: mobility, safety and public transportation ... graduate of Texas A&M University with a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering ... with TxDOT 23 years ... Louisiana native ... little-known facts: Journey Toward Excellence award winner, two TxDOT Metro Design Awards, TxDOT Communication Achievement Award.

■ Perry Award



Robert L. Nichols

The award:

Honors citizens for leadership in creating public awareness of the need for adequate transportation facilities in the state.

The winner: Robert L. Nichols, businessman and former commissioner of the Texas Transportation Commission; also known as the “employees’ commissioner” ... described by commission chairman Ric Williamson as “the absolute best workhorse that transportation in this state has ever had” ... passionate about improving mobility and safety in Texas ... listens to others and learns the smallest of details to help him develop great knowledge of the state’s transportation system — how it works and how it can be improved ... non-stop force in promoting and achieving transportation solutions across Texas ... developed the nation’s first agreement with railroad companies to move rail away from congested metropolitan areas ... played a key role in implementing the Trans-Texas Corridor ... active in the community and newly elected as a Texas state senator, exemplifies the meaning of “public servant” ... little-known facts: private pilot, avid exotic and big-game hunter, registered Longhorn cattle rancher.

■ Stotzer Award



Janelle H. Gbur

The award:

Honors non-engineer from TxDOT for outstanding leadership, dedication, and service to the department.

The winner: Janelle H. Gbur, public information officer, Houston District ... reputation: sets standard for professionalism, dedication and patience; has the confidence of management, employees, coworkers and citizens ... always puts TxDOT first, but understands that the department belongs to the citizens of Texas ... works well with diverse groups and organizations; able to build trust with many different and sometimes conflicting audiences; an influential role model for other TxDOT employees; sensitive to the impact to citizens and the public perceptions of work done by TxDOT; provides accurate, timely, meaningful information; known for her grace under pressure on a daily basis ... a calming voice in the midst of the storm when millions of people evacuated southeast Texas in 2005 ... eases the impact of highway construction on motorists and nearby residents through effective, pro-active information campaigns ... appointed to current position in 1986 ... member off the Executive Women in Texas Government ... Houston native; 32 years with TxDOT (began in the Signals Section of the district’s Traffic Operations Office) ... little-known facts: first non-engineer to serve on a Traffic Study Advisory Committee; also has served as an engineering technician, records administrator, administrative supervisor of support services and assistant public-affairs officer. ⚡

Awards cite projects, people

AUSTIN — In September, TxDOT recognized department projects whose participants showed exceptional cooperation in completing a complex task. The annual awards, presented at the Austin luncheon sponsored by the Associated General Contractors, singled out TxDOT employees for their cooperation and partnership in project construction and design. Design Awards recognize people who have designed a major project with no or only minor construction problems. Construction Awards single out those who have gone “above and beyond” in using cooperation and partnership to do a quality job.

Brownwood District

■ Design Award & Construction Award

U.S. 180 in downtown Breckenridge (Stephens County) is one of the few remaining brick roadways on the U.S. highway system. This half-mile project, valued at \$2.8 million and completed eight days early in October 2005, first was paved with bricks — back in 1923. The need to rehabilitate this roadway, combined with the desire to preserve the integrity of a brick street that met the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places, created an opportunity for a partnership between TxDOT and the city. Funds from the State Transportation Enhancement Program (STEP) were used for landscaping and to remove, clean and reposition the antique bricks in a four-block section of roadway in the city’s downtown. Key to this success was the plan devised to create a safer, more accessible transportation section of roadway AND to preserve the history and nostalgia of the old brick street. TxDOT representative for Design Award: **Taina Bonilla**; TxDOT representative for Construction Award: **Darren Poe**.

Corpus Christi District

■ Design Award

Recognizes a 4.6-mile roadway project with three bridges that connect the Texas mainland and Padre Island. Work began in February 2002 and saw completion in February 2005. The project, contracted with

Zachry Construction for nearly \$41 million, called for elevating the JFK Causeway at least nine feet above mean sea level.

Everyone involved was called on to deal with environmental issues, coastal conditions, community impacts and public safety — along with tight timelines and constrained working conditions. The improvements allowed traffic to move without being blocked by water on the road during seasonal high tides or from strong wind-driven tides, and the design increased the “time window” for evacuation ahead of the high tides that can occur days before landfall of a tropical storm or hurricane. TxDOT representatives: **Mary Perez, Paula Sales-Evans, Victor Vourcos, Martin Timmerman** and **Pete Stricker**.

■ Construction Award

This \$9.2 million project called for building 2.3 miles of a new interchange connector ramp in Nueces County at the interchange of Interstate 37 and U.S. 77. Work began in April 2005 and is substantially complete. This project is notable as the first in the district to use concrete-maturity testing to determine the strength of the curing concrete in the bridge footings. The contractor met its self-imposed accelerated schedule, finishing the project in 10 months instead of the 24 months originally scheduled. The biggest benefit went to the public, which gained use of the facility all the earlier due to the accelerated completion. TxDOT representative: **America Garza**.

Amarillo District

■ Construction Award

This \$8 million project called for removal and replacement of an off-system bridge on Ross Street in Amarillo. The structure spans the railroad switching yards in the city's center. The city was eager for the bridge to be opened quickly, especially since emergency vehicles and school buses often use the route. Faced with an abundance of obstacles, those involved saw and heard Amarillo city officials declare their appreciation for completion of the job in 255 days — less than half the time scheduled. Motorists, pedestrians and nearby businesses all saw benefits resulting from the close working relationship between TxDOT and the contractor. TxDOT representative: **Sammy J. Harris**.

Austin District

■ Construction Award

The project consisted of rebuilding 1.5 miles of frontage road and replacing the FM 2001 overpass in Hays County. Valued at nearly \$9 million for the contract, work on the high-volume site (Interstate 35 at FM 2001) began in August 2004. Completion came in July 2005. There was high-level interest in this project, involving the Governor's Economic Development Commission, the city of Buda, and the sporting-goods store, Cabellas. Throughout the project, the contractor worked with TxDOT inspectors to minimize impacts to the public. The contractor completed the work before the opening of Cabellas in 2005, even assisting with traffic control during opening week of the new store. TxDOT representative: **Wyette P. Williams**.

Dallas District

■ Construction Award

This \$100 million project, begun in January 2003 and completed this past June, consisted of the reconstruction of five miles of Interstate 30 just west of downtown Dallas. A major piece of the project included widening the interstate from six to eight lanes and addition of high-occupancy-vehicle

lanes and auxiliary lanes. Other features included the demolition and reconstruction of five major interchanges, along with installation of decorative retaining walls.

Cooperation between TxDOT and the contractor started from the outset with a revised traffic-control plan that resulted in saving \$350,000 and reducing the contract time by 500 days. TxDOT representative: **Bill Compton**.

Fort Worth District

■ Construction Award

In the past 10 years, traffic doubled along the Interstate 35 West corridor in north Fort Worth. It's the fastest growing area in North Texas. This \$2.7 million project of auxiliary lanes began in February 2005 and achieved completion in April 2006. However, traffic control and travel safety — compounded by continuing congestion, the need for timely change orders and issues with the roadway's sub-grade — all presented big challenges during construction. One of the biggest hurdles was achieving safety in the work zone. TxDOT representatives: **John Gibbs** and **Otto Lopez**.

Lubbock District

■ Construction Award

Work began on Phase 1 for the Marsha Sharp Freeway project in May 2003 and was substantially complete in September 2005. For \$46.5 million, the work widened Loop 289 and converted U.S. 82 from non-freeway to freeway. The project came to substantial completion 50 days ahead of schedule, making for a bonus to the contractor. Other signs of success: few complaints, many compliments. The traveling public especially appreciates the project for its eye-appeal. TxDOT representative: **Robert W. Ratcliff**.

Odessa District

■ Construction Award

Work began in June 2004 and was completed in 11 months for a \$4.5 million project in the city of Midland. Intersections along Loop 250 required repair and use of a special concrete design at four key intersections. The

concrete (a three-inch thickness over an asphalt base) is expected to extend the life of the intersection pavements by 10 years. Its "fast-track" design enabled it to bear traffic within 48 hours. This is much less than the usual four to seven days needed for curing. The biggest issue facing TxDOT and the contractor was the round-the-clock work schedule. If ever there was a time for cooperation, this project brought it out in everyone. The result of the reconstruction at the four intersections is a long-lasting surface and an exceptional ride. TxDOT representative: **Richard Underwood**.

San Antonio District

■ Construction Award

The Houston Street Project, though small in scope, had a big impact in the heart of San Antonio's downtown business district. This three-quarter-mile project attracted significant public attention. All those involved adopted a very effective "community-first" approach to management of the project. Work for the \$2.9 million project included expanding Houston Street from one to two lanes in each direction, and improving storm drains, curbs, sidewalks, traffic signals, sewers and water systems. Right of way was tight and all intersections were busy. With the success of this partnership, new plans for more enhancement projects in San Antonio are in the works. TxDOT representative: **Myles Thisis**.

■ Construction Award

This \$3.1 million project called for reconstruction of existing frontage roads on Interstate 10 near Seguin. It required nearly 11 months (but 80 days fewer than scheduled) to meet completion in November 2005. Early completion brought a bonus to the contractor. Work included grading, placing new base material and surfacing, and all the other details (from traffic control to striping) that go into such projects. Communication was a key to success. Those involved ensured that the nearby businesses, property owners and the public were well informed about the project's activities. TxDOT representative: **Henry Felix**. ☼

Drought not 'just another dry spell'

Judith Curtis

Associate Editor

"Just another dry spell, men said at first. Ranchers watched waterholes recede to brown puddles of mud that their livestock would not touch. They watched the rank weeds shrivel as the west wind relentlessly sought them out and smother them with its hot breath. They watched the grass slowly lose its green, then curl and fire up like dying cornstalks."

— Elmer Kelton, *The Time it Never Rained*

If Texas author Elmer Kelton had been working for TxDOT when he wrote his classic novel of the terrible 1950s drought, he also might have added that the roads cracked and buckled as the expansion and contraction from the heat and dry air caused the pavement to react, just like the grass and livestock did, to the lack of water.

A half-century after the prolonged dry spell that became the background of Kelton's 1984 novel, Texas finds itself in another drought. (A drought can be loosely defined as a period of dry weather that persists long enough to cause serious problems, such as crop damage and water shortages, not to mention pavement cracking.)

This year, TxDOT recorded the damage to roads in the state, based on a call for districts to nominate what they considered to be the worst victims of the drought.

Some 21 districts nominated more than 8,000 lane miles of drought-ravaged roadway. More than 3,100 lane miles (38 percent) were in the Paris and Fort Worth districts alone.

What's clear is that pavement conditions among the nominated stretches of roadway showed a "noticeable decline" in condition because of the drought. Of the 8,000 lane miles of drought-affected roadway, the percentage of lane miles in "good or better" condition dropped from 87 to 80 percent in 2006. The TxDOT Pavement



Effects of drought degrade road surfaces.

TxDOT photo

Management Information System defines a roadway in good or better condition as one having a pavement condition score equal or greater than 70. That score is based on a combination of distress, such as cracking, ride, average daily traffic and speed limit.

"There were some noticeable trends that look like they could be drought-related," said Bryan Stampley, pavement engineer, Materials and Pavements Section, Construction Division.

Changes in moisture cause changes in soil, which is what the roadbed sits on.

"It was reasonably wet before the drought," said Stampley. "Then it stopped raining. (Soil) shrinkage occurred, and that pulled the road apart."

Thirsty plants also grab moisture from the soil, making things worse. The cracks usually start at the edge of the roadway and move inward.

In some low-traffic areas, such cracks might not cause a district to report such fissures as problems. But in other areas, they can wreak havoc. "These distresses are made worse by the amount of traffic you have, especially truck traffic," said Mike Murphy, branch manager, Materials and Pavements Section, Construction Division.

Repair costs are high. "Depending on the weather conditions this fall and winter, the drought could have or will cost TxDOT between \$60 and \$100 million," said Zane Webb, director of

the TxDOT Maintenance Division. Those costs are higher because of increases in the cost of asphalt, which is derived from petroleum, and from tight supply due to competition among commercial and residential construction in Texas.

"All of these things together work to reduce the amount of repairs that can be made with the available money," said Murphy. "TxDOT is not only paying higher costs for materials, but is also competing with commercial construction for some materials used to build highways."

The drought appears to be ending with welcome rain in the forecast. Texas state climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon says, "Rain has returned to the state of Texas this fall in some places, causing flooding. That's been expected because El Niño is forming in the Pacific, and usually with an El Niño in the wintertime, we have above-normal precipitation across the state of Texas. So, the large-scale indications suggest that the drought we have experienced over the past year and a half should end or at least decrease in severity over this coming fall and winter."

Unfortunately, said Tammy Sims, transportation engineer in the Maintenance Division, the real damage from the drought may be only beginning. "With the recent rains, the cracks still in the pavements from the drought are soaking up the water, which will cause failures in the base," she said. ☼



Exit Ramp

() = state service years/month of retirement

■ DISTRICTS

Abilene

Garry L Jennings (29/July)

Amarillo

Richard A Jennings Jr (27/July)

Atlanta

Donald G Rhyne (37/Sept)
Don R Carter (20/Aug)

Austin

Ernest R Bizzell (41/Aug)

Beaumont

Richard E Titus (21/Sept)
Travis R Cupples (29/Aug)
Larry J Gordon (29/Aug)

Brownwood

Tommy F Treadaway (27/Sept)

Bryan

Joe E Pingleton (19/Aug)
Patricia S Jaster (35/Aug)
Leroy D Batts Sr (21/Aug)
Brenda O King (35/Aug)

Corpus Christi

Armando G Chapa (20/Aug)
Amparo A Havemann (26/Aug)
Alfredo F Naranjo (24/July)

Dallas

Danny J McKinnon (33/Aug)

Fort Worth

Lloyd Clifton (22/Sept)
James E Walling (22/Aug)
Richard M Little (5/Aug)
Mike B Myers (10/Aug)
Mark C Schluter (30/Aug)
Glenn E Elliott (32/July)

Houston

Sally G Wegmann (22/Sept)
David G Perez (20/Aug)
Joe L Cobb (24/Aug)
Jhy Chen Liu (24/Aug)
Benedict J Bartos (36/Aug)
Ron J Garrison (22/July)

Laredo

Simon Aguirre Jr (32/Aug)

Lubbock

Rodolfo V Moreno (32/Aug)
Ricky L Walker (32/Aug)
George L Villarreal (30/July)

Lufkin

Patricia F Adams (24/Aug)

Odessa

Pete V Trevino (13/Aug)

Paris

Ray Mucker (9/Aug)

Pharr

Maria C Gwynn (16/Aug)

San Angelo

Nicolas S Ortega Jr (32/Aug)

San Antonio

William Koerner (12/Sept)
Gregorio G Aguilar (20/Aug)
Ignacio C Villarreal Jr (40/Aug)
John A Saldana (30/Aug)
Ervin R Brooks (37/Aug)
Gilbert L Meier Jr (40/Aug)
Mary S Nelson (26/Aug)
Janice M Gieber (19/July)

Tyler

Mary L Deel (12/Aug)

Waco

Edward R Ewing (10/Sept)
Ronnie B Wiley (27/Sept)

Wichita Falls

Joseph L Carnley (10/Sept)
Linda R Vanvacter (20/Aug)
Julian Martinez (19/Aug)
Davis L Powell (26/Aug)

Yoakum

Wilbert E Wendt Jr (19/July)

■ DIVISIONS

Aviation

Edward M Mayle (24/Aug)
Berl D Mummy (21/Aug)

Construction

John B Beckham (22/Aug)

General Services

Albert J Fairchild (31/July)

Maintenance

Stanley M Wade (37/Aug)
Mary C Barry (24/Aug)
Ofelia G Frias (22/July)

Motor Carrier

Gracie A Jaber (28/July)

Public Transportation

Beatriz R Herrera (16/Sept)
Edna J Salas (31/Aug)
Beverly C Ham (29/July)

Vehicle Titles & Registration

Joy E Jones (31/Sept)
Susan V Wall (30/July)

■ OFFICES

Public Information

Albert H Glasscock (32/Aug)



In Memoriam

Corpus Christi

Rodrigo Cantu Jr
construction inspector
retired February 2000
died Nov 9, 2006

Billy Valentine
machinist
retired 1991
died Aug 31, 2006

Fort Worth

Calvin Coolidge Maxwell
construction inspector
retired 1986
died Nov 8, 2006

John "Johnny" Marquez Jr
carpenter
retired 2000
died Oct 27, 2006

Wilbur Grady "Buck" Perry
engineering technician
retired 1979
died Aug 23, 2006

Raymond "Mack" McCullough
asst. maintenance supervisor
retired 1975
died Oct 2, 2006

Houston

Allen Earle Ranft
engineer
retired
died Nov. 10, 2006

Paris

Darvis L Davison
engineering technician
retired November 1983
died Sept. 25, 2006

Tyler

George J Beddingfield
engineering technician
died Sept 13, 2006

Yoakum

Robert L Hentschel
Fayette County maintenance
retired May 1987
died Sept 20, 2006

Rudolph F Wagner
Lavaca County maintenance
retired 1975
died Aug 23, 2006

Bridge

Donna Marie Norris
executive assistant
died Sept 23, 2006

Design

John King Jr
letting management
retired 1991
died Sept 10, 2006

Human Resources

James (Jim) D Markle
human-resources specialist
died Aug 18, 2006



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TNotes

■ Commission OKs improvements

The Texas Transportation Commission, at its Nov. 16 meeting in Austin, approved some \$14 billion in highway, aviation and public transportation improvements that are part of the TxDOT Statewide Mobility Program.

The program represents the blueprint that controls project development and construction for the department.

"Approval of this program allows us to continue to pursue our goals of reducing congestion, enhancing safety, expanding economic opportunity, improving air quality and increasing the value of transportation assets," said Mike Behrens, executive director.

Behrens noted that the department is using all the financial options at its disposal to build transportation projects. He added, "Still, we have a significant funding gap between what we can afford and what we need to meet our growing state's future mobility challenges."

The commission also heard a report from TxDOT staff on pass-through financing, which is a funding option for communities to pay up front for construction costs that the state will reimburse for building a state transportation project. To date, TxDOT has approved 12 pass-through financing agreements.

■ 'Don't Mess' tops fav ads

TxDOT's "Don't Mess with Texas" anti-litter slogan has been voted America's favorite in Advertising Week's 2006 Walk of Fame contest.

Some 400,000 votes for the 20-year-old advertising motto made Texas the winner over such well-known campaigns as Nike's "Just do it," Burger King's "Have it your way," and the California Milk Processors Board "Got Milk?"

"Don't Mess with Texas" victory banners lined Madison Avenue in New York and the slogan gained permanent recognition in the Advertising Museum in Kansas City.

TxDOT launched the campaign in 1986 to reduce littering in the state.

This year, television ads supporting the campaign featured celebrities Matthew McConaughey, Owen Wilson, Lee Ann Womack, Lance Armstrong and Jennifer Love Hewitt — all of them announcing "Real Texans Don't Litter."

■ Paying for Ports-to-Plains

The department is studying private investment and partnerships to pay for moving freight and utilities along the Ports-to-Plains corridor.

The research will look at how local governments and regional entities can work with the private sector to finance needed infrastructure.

Ports-to-Plains is a proposed divided-highway corridor stretching from Laredo through West Texas to Denver, Colo. Designated a "high-priority corridor" by Congress in 1998, the Ports-to-Plains corridor is intended to expand economic opportunity and serve international trade from Mexico to Canada. The study should be completed by next year.

— Judith Curtis, associate editor



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