



TEXAS GOOD ROADS/ TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION

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2011-A Year of Change & Triumph

By: Lawrence Olsen

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On January 10, 2011, when State Comptroller Susan Combs delivered her required evaluation of the state's fiscal status at the outset of the 82nd session of the Texas Legislature, various observers interpreted the state's deficit for the coming two years between \$16 billion and \$27 billion. Prior to the session, Texas' top three (Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and House Speaker Joe Straus) had declared that tax and fee increases to bridge the revenue gap were off limits. At the same time, these three leaders, along with a solid supporting cast in the Legislature, said that with Texas' booming population and its accompanying congestion, the state could not afford to reduce the highway construction program. And this trio, along with the leadership of the conferees on the appropriations bill, fashioned a budget that saw an increase in highway lettings over the previous two-year budget. Senator Tommy Williams championed the fight for more highway dollars in the Senate. This was accomplished by the issuance of \$4 billion in general obligations bonds (\$1 billion had been funded in the previous session) that Texas voters okayed by 63% in 2007. In addition to the conferees (see list online at www.tgrta.com) House Transportation Committee Chairman Larry Phillips and Rep. Drew Darby, who guided the House Appropriations TxDOT panel, were ceaseless in their efforts to fund the highway program. This occurred at a time when the overall state's general revenue fund was reduced roughly 10% from the previous budget.

RETIREMENTS, NEW APPOINTMENTS ABOUND AT TxDOT

For the second consecutive session, the Department underwent the Sunset process in the Legislature. Two years ago it did not pass. But the treatment was much gentler this go around because of the outstanding job done by Chairman Deidre Delisi, her fellow Commissioners and the Administration during the interim between 2009 and 2011. Even severe past Department critics praised the Department's efforts in simplifying the planning process and increasing transparency. TxDOT was extended through 2015. At the beginning of the year, executive director Amadeo Saenz and his deputy Steve Simmons, announced they would both step down Aug. 31, 2011.

Chairman Delisi resigned her post Oct. 6 for a full time role in Gov. Perry's presidential campaign. Ted Houghton of El Paso, a member of the Commission since Dec. 2003, was named Chairman by Gov. Perry Oct 7. On Sep. 29, the Commission unanimously elected Phil Wilson to become TxDOT's first non-engineer executive director. The engineering requirement was removed by the 81st Legislature. West Texas native Wilson is a former Secretary of State and most recently served as senior vice president for a major Texas energy company. Gov. Perry named Tyler banker Jeff Austin III to the commission spot vacated by Chairman Delisi on Oct. 20.

In November, Mr. Wilson unveiled his new organizational chart (can download from our website). Mr. Wilson has been a whirlwind of activity since officially taking the reins Oct. 17, having visited 11 of the 25 districts and aiming to complete the full cycle by March. His enthusiasm for the promoting the department seems to be infectious with the employees.

FERRY BOAT JOHN W. JOHNSON COMMISSIONED

In a busy year for the Department's navy, this Galveston-Port Bolivar ferry boat named for the former

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Houston commission chairman was christened Nov. 18. Mr. Johnson was named to the Commission by Gov. George W. Bush in 1999, served four years as chairman and stepped down in 2007. Earlier in the summer, Port Aransas based ferries named for former executive directors Mike Behrens and Wes Heald were also inaugurated.

STOTZER AWARD TO OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY DIVISION DIRECTOR

During a recent ceremony at the Department, Jerral Wyer received the Raymond Stotzer Award given annually to a non-engineer who demonstrates outstanding leadership, dedication and service to the department. This two-decade veteran of the Department has achieved national recognition for his extraordinary efforts to improve TxDOT safety programs.

TGR PASSED THE GAVEL

Many thanks for the outstanding efforts, including appearances before the Texas Legislature, to Elizabeth (Beth) Adler, Surety Manager at Zurich Surety, of Dallas who recently stepped down after two years as our president. She will be succeeded by Quanah native Kirby Carpenter, Central Texas Area Manager of ASCO Equipment's office in San Antonio.

Also a tip of the hat to the following TGR leaders who again last year gave over and above in voluntary time to bolster the TGR effort: Amanda Abrams-Rimer, J.D. Abrams, LP; Adrian Acevedo, Anadarko Petroleum; Mike Behrens, Michael Baker, Inc.; Will Burney, Trinity Highway Safety; Perri D'Armond, Greater Fort Bend Economic Development Council; Joe Forshage, Foremost Paving, Inc.; Jose Hernandez, Dispute Management Group; Lane Lennon, D.L. Lennon, Inc.; Jim Nelson, Warren CAT; Tim Newton, CDM Smith; Doug Pitcock, Williams Brothers Construction Co.; Rodney Scott, CMC Construction Services and Johnny Weisman, Hunter Industries.

And more kudos to those who helped put together a very successful golf tournament last fall: committee members Bruce Bayless of Hunter Industries, Amanda Abrams-Rimer of J.D. Abrams, Dewitt Carnes and George Meihaus of TXI and Rodney Scott of CMC. Many thanks to special sponsors Aggregate Haulers and J.D. Abrams. (Please see our website for all our tournament sponsors).

IN MEMORIAM

Sadly, again this year TGR witnessed the passing of many great friends allies and participants in our efforts to promote our state's positive growth. In the industry, those who died included Ruth Becker, wife of Phil Becker; Sylvia Eckroat, mother of Rosann Pebley; Bill Herod; Mrs. June Hodges, wife of Frank Hodges; JoAnn McGehee; Gene Reynolds; Alfred H. "Spike" Robinson; Gilbert Turner and Wade Whitmer, nephew of Robert and Kayla Hall. TxDOT folks who died included Luther Deberry, former state highway engineer; Benny Alley, Lubbock d.e.; Al Castello, deputy director and first recipient of the Stotzer Award; Vance "Huck" Castleberry, Childress d.e.; J. Don Clark, head of Travel Information Division; Ray Lindholm, Paris d.e. and Alvin (Al) McKee, Amarillo d.e. We are sorry to note the passing of these Texas Road Hands: Jere Ruff, John Windham and Tom Vandergriff. Gov. Bill Clements was elected in 1979 and was the first Republican governor in the 20th century, defeated for reelection in 1982 and won a second term in 1986. The former oilman and philanthropist was 94 when he died May 29, 2011. We send sincere condolences to the families of these outstanding Texans.

REMINDER: Join us for the 7th annual **Texas Transportation Forum** February 15-17, 2012 at the Grand Hyatt San Antonio. Go to www.TexasTransportationForum.com for more information.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!