Volume 5, Number 1

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1. First Q&A of 2009 Examines TTI Opportunities

In his first question-and-answer session of the new year, Director Dennis Christiansen told employees, “This is the most exciting time in my career to be involved in transportation research.”

During the hour-long session, Christiansen reviewed some of the agency’s accomplishments of 2008 and discussed the challenges and opportunities for TTI in the new year.

“Our growth in non-TxDOT research has been phenomenal (up 9 percent to $45 million in FY 2008),” he said proudly, urging employees to continue their efforts to broaden and diversify TTI’s research program in 2009.

The main topics he discussed include:

- the national economy and how it affects TTI,
- TTI’s strategic plan,
- the 2009 legislative session,
- how TRB travel is determined,
- the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board and
- other miscellaneous updates and reminders.

Read the entire Q&A notes:
http://ttinet.tamu.edu/Mgmt_org/from_the_director/index.htm

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2. TTI Aids 2030 Committee in Determining Transportation Needs

Maintaining the current quality of highways and levels of congestion over the next 22 years will cost the state of Texas $313 billion, the 2030 Committee told members of the Texas Transportation Commission in December in Austin. The 2030 Committee’s preliminary findings came six months after the committee was formed with volunteer business and civic leaders — appointed by Transportation Commission Chair Deirdre Delisi.

To help determine future transportation needs, the 2030 Committee was aided by researchers and experts at TTI, the Center for Transportation Research at The University of Texas at Austin, and the Center for Transportation Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio.

“TTI’s duties ranged far and wide,” says Associate Agency Director Bill Stockton. “And to the best of my knowledge, few, if any, states have ever done such an exhaustive transportation study by an independent body.”

TTI researchers helping with the project included Linda Cherrington, Curtis Morgan, David Ellis, Tim Lomax, Kevin Hall, Tongbin Qu, Phillip Reeder, Danny Morris, David Schrank, Jeff Arndt, Steve Roop, David Ungemah, Jeff Borowiec, Jim Kruse and John Mounce.

Other staff contributing to either the development of the 2030 report or the conduct of the public hearings included Shanna Yates, Becca Simons, Richard Cole, Mary Cearley, Tobey Lindsey, Kandis Salazar, Linda Castillo, Kathy Montemayor, Michelle Hoelscher, Rhonda Brinkmann, Michelle Young, Terri Parker, Clyde Hance, Karen Smith, Teresa Kohnert, Tommy Clement and Bonnie Duke.

“What TTI was able to contribute to the 2030 Committee really emphasized the breadth and depth of our agency, and it should make all of us proud,” Stockton says.
TTI will compile a draft report on Texas transportation needs. The report will be posted on the 2030 Committee website for public comment and will be presented to the commission in February.

View the 2030 Committee executive summary, slide presentation and news release:
http://texas2030committee.tamu.edu/meetings/preliminary_findings.stm

3. TxDOT Changes Trans-Texas Corridor, Seeks Transparency

The Trans-Texas Corridor (TTC) “is not the choice of Texans, so we’ve put the name to rest,” Executive Director of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Amadeo Saenz announced in Austin January 5. The surprise announcement during the opening breakfast of the Fourth Annual Texas Transportation Forum set the tone for the two-day gathering of 1,200 transportation professionals.

TxDOT, TTI, the Associated General Contractors and the Texas Good Roads Transportation Association hosted the forum.

“To be clear, TTC as it is known no longer exists,” Saenz said, describing the new way TxDOT will build roads in the future, called “Innovative Connectivity in Texas” — a series of individualized projects that will rely heavily on local input. “We need to do a better job of communicating and listening.”

Saenz told the crowd that finding adequate funding for transportation will be
TxDOT’s priority. He referred to the recent findings of the 2030 Committee that showed Texas will need to spend $313 billion to maintain the current quality of highways over the next 22 years. It’s “a lot bigger than our current funding,” Saenz said. “But we now have a starting point.”

Several of the forum speakers said it was time that Texas approved an increase in the fuel tax, or at least tied it to inflation. Since the early 1990s, the Texas Legislature has turned down similar proposals.

State and federal transportation officials and current and former politicians (including former Majority Leader and presidential candidate Richard Gephardt) took turns at the podium discussing Texas and national transportation initiatives and policies. The lack of road funds was the dominate issue.

Keynote speaker, T. Boone Pickens, founder of BP Capital, detailed his now-famous plan to reduce our dependency on foreign oil with the help of wind power and natural gas.

In the final address of the forum, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst praised TxDOT for the changes it is making. “I’m seeing some progress in TxDOT, and I want to put our differences behind us,” Dewhurst said. “I see this as a new day. We have a lot of challenges in front of us.”
4. Lomax Honored by A&M System Board of Regents

World renowned for his work on TTI’s Urban Mobility Report, Research Engineer Tim Lomax has been awarded the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents’ highest honor. Lomax was presented with the Regents Fellow Service Award during ceremonies held December 4.

The Regents Fellow Service Award is given to those A&M System employees “who have provided exemplary professional service to society that has created large and lasting benefits to Texas and beyond.”

Full story:  
http://tti.tamu.edu/infofor/media/feature.htm

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5. TTI Anniversaries

5 Years

Yatinkumar Rathod, Associate Transportation Researcher (HSO)  
Mark Robinson, Scientific Instrument Maker (BFP)

25 Years

Pam Kopf, Administrative Coordinator (BSU)
6. Red-Light Cameras Preventing Accidents, TTI Study Shows

TTI made headlines across the state in early December as a result of a Texas Department of Transportation study conducted by Assistant Research Scientist Troy Walden. The Center for Transportation Safety researcher compared the number of accidents at intersections in 10 Texas cities before and after red-light cameras were installed.

“Overall, the study showed a 43 percent decline in the more serious, right-angle collisions,” Walden said. “As expected, rear-end collisions were up slightly for an overall crash decline of 30 percent.”

Walden is quick to point out that the study, mandated by the Texas Legislature, is only preliminary because other traffic variables at the 56 intersections that were studied were not accounted for. As a result, there may be other things that affected the crash rate at the camera-controlled intersections that need to be investigated.

“Even though we had to annualize some crash data, we feel confident that the preliminary evidence shows that red-light cameras are responsible for fewer overall crashes,” Walden said. “We will be conducting further studies that will include all Texas cities that have red-light cameras.”

7. TTI in the News

There have been numerous mentions of TTI and our experts in recent media reports. Here are links to some of the stories.

Red light cameras among top stories in College Station (KBTX-TV) Dec. 29

Top transit stories in Houston (Houston Chronicle) Dec. 28

Teens die in small town (San Antonio Express-News) Dec. 24

Robots used to inspect Ike damage (Insciencies) Dec. 23

Texas transportation needs (Ft. Worth Star-Telegram) Dec. 18

2030 Committee news release (PRWeb) Dec. 17

Driving decreases despite dropping fuel prices (Bloomberg) Dec. 16

Texas port may include TTI Freight Shuttle (Corpus Christi Caller-Times) Dec. 9

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8. First Delta-T Leadership Class Ends, New Team Sought

The first 10 members of TTI’s Developing Leaders for Today and Tomorrow (Delta-T) leadership program wrapped up their year-long class with several recommendations that could impact professional development initiatives for all TTI employees.

The inaugural class examined the way new researchers are nurtured by the Institute. Some new researchers have expressed a need to better understand career advancement and professional development opportunities at TTI. The 2008 class looked at these and related concerns and outlined recommendations to improve the Institute’s ability to meet new researchers’ needs. All TTI employees, not just researchers, can benefit from these new initiatives.

Members of the first Delta-T class included Joe Zietsman, Bill Eisele, Tony Voigt, Heather Ford, Justin Malnar, Mark Coppock, Beverly Storey, Melisa Finley, Tina Geiselbrecht and Cesar Quiroga. The next class will begin soon and will be selected through a nomination process.

For more information: http://ttinet.tamu.edu/training/#news5013
Some 40 years later, Senior Research Fellow Joe Button knew he had made the right decision to start working for TTI as a chemical engineering student in 1968. “TTI was created when I was six years old, but I got here as fast as I could,” he told attendees of his retirement party December 12.

Former bosses, colleagues and people who worked for Button took turns at the podium but were redundant in their descriptions of the man for whom they hold enormous respect — using words like “dependable,” “professional,” “devoted” and “reputable.”

“You have to look a long time to find someone more sincere,” said Assistant Agency Director Gene Buth, who was first to hire Button for TTI 40 years ago at the Riverside Campus. Buth was not surprised about Button’s accomplishments. “He became one of the world’s leading experts in pavements.”

Earlier this year, Button was the recipient of the TTI/Trinity Industries Charley V. Wootan Career Achievement for Research Award, which was announced at TTI Day. “What people don’t know is that he could not attend the presentation because he was accepting another lifetime achievement award out of town on the same day,” said Andrew Wimsatt, division head of the Materials and Pavements Division.

Despite his retirement, Button decided four decades is not enough. He will continue working at TTI — on a part-time basis.
10. Christiansen Weighs In on Transportation Issues

Director Dennis Christiansen has joined a team of national professionals invited to answer timely questions posed in the online transportation blog of the National Journal. The publication “is the leading source of nonpartisan reporting on the current political environment and emerging policy trends.”

The experts tackle weekly questions about transportation issues. Some of the most recent topics have included the subject of earmarks, cheap gasoline, challenges facing the incoming transportation secretary and the recent increases in mass transit ridership.

Besides the subject of transportation, other National Journal expert blogs include the economy, energy and environment, health care, and national security.

Christiansen’s bio on the National Journal:
http://transportation.nationaljournal.com/contributors/Christiansen.php

National Journal Transportation Blog:
http://transportation.nationaljournal.com/
11. Houston Office Spreads Cheer

Several employees of TTI’s Houston Office took on the role of “Santa’s helpers” December 15 at the Salvation Army Secret Santa Warehouse, sorting and packaging toys to be distributed to various organizations and housing projects.

The community project “is a way for us to give back,” says Research Scientist Jeff Arndt, who is among the Houston Office employees who wanted to express their holiday spirit. “Next year, I plan to spend more time at the warehouse. It does make you feel good about the season.”

12. Editor’s Corner: Tips for Microsoft Word® 2007

In my last CenterLine editor’s column, I gave a few tips for new users of Microsoft Word 2007. Since then, readers have asked for suggestions on formatting some of the trickier aspects of technical reports. I’m happy to oblige.

For additional assistance on word processing for reports, check the TTINet editing
resource page for styled template files you might want to use in setting up technical reports, project summary reports, tech memos or software manuals. You’ll find additional word processing tips in Appendix C of *Guidelines for Preparing, Editing and Submitting TxDOT RMC Reports*, though they’re presented in Word 2003 instructions. Now for a few ideas.

**Word Count**
Word 2007 helps you quickly figure out the number of words in your document or parts of it. That’s especially helpful when working on project summary reports, which face strict length requirements. The quickest way to determine word count is to check the status bar at the bottom of your screen. It shows you the word count for the entire document. If you select a portion of your document, it will show you the word count of the selected section alongside the count for the entire document. You can also find the Word Count function on the Review ribbon.

**Paragraph Characteristics**
Using paragraph characteristics has always been the best way to ensure your text uses a consistent look. Word 2007 makes it easy by placing paragraph characteristics on the Home ribbon. The Paragraph section holds icons for several of the most-used functions, but I like to choose the little diagonal arrow at the bottom right of the section to bring up a dialog box:

- Adjust the look of your paragraphs using the Indents and Spacing tab of the dialog box. If you’re using single-spaced text, I recommend about 12 points of space before paragraphs and none after. That keeps you from having to add a blank line between paragraphs.
- On the Line and Page Breaks tab select Widow/Orphan Control, which prevents a lone line stranded at the top or bottom of pages. For headings or figure captions, select the Keep with Next checkbox, which ensures your heading doesn’t split off from its section text or caption from its accompanying graphic.

**Text Styles**
Text styles are a great way to create consistency throughout your document and create autogenerated front matter lists. On the Home ribbon, choose the little diagonal arrow at the bottom right of the Styles section to bring up your style options. If you have questions on using styles, give me a shout and I’ll try to help.

Page Numbers on Landscape Pages
Placing page numbers in portrait orientation (along the short end of the page) on landscape pages takes a little effort. Word inserts section breaks before and after your landscape pages automatically when you choose orientation (on the Page Layout ribbon). To change the page number placement:

- Double-click into your header and deselect Link to Previous for both the header and footer. (Once you double-click into the header, you’ll get a Design ribbon that will let you break the link.)
- Choose Next Section and deselect Link to Previous for both the header and footer there too.
- Return to your landscape page footer and clear the existing incorrect page number placement.
- Using your Page Number icon on the Design ribbon, choose Bottom of Page and then Plain Number 2 (if you want centered page numbers). When the page number pops up, select it and choose Text Direction on the ribbon to turn it 90 degrees.
- If your page number comes up with a line under it, simply select the text box and choose No Border to erase it.

As an alternative to this process, you can copy and paste a preformatted text box into your landscape page footer. If you’d like the file I have set up for the preformatted page number text box, just let me know.

Editor’s Corner is written by Rhonda Brinkmann, research editor in TTI Communications. Thanks to Jessica Franklin for the tips on placing a landscape page number!
13. Reminders/Calendar

January 19 — Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

January 20 — Texas A&M University Spring Semester Begins

March 19-20 — Spring Break

CenterLine is a production of TTI Communications. We encourage your comments and suggestions for articles about TTI people and research efforts. Please send email to news@ttimail.tamu.edu or call Rick Davenport at (979) 862-3763.