1. Senate and Legislative Ladies Day a Smashing Success

A crash test and detonation demonstration were the highlights of a tour of TTI and the Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEX) March 4 for members of the Senate and Legislative Ladies Day. It was apparent that the 67 guests, all wives of Texas Legislators, enjoyed the out-of-the-ordinary show.

In attendance were Julie Straus, wife of Speaker of the House Joe Straus; Sen. Steve Ogden’s wife, Beverly; and Michelle Dunnam, wife of Rep. Jim Dunnam of the House Transportation Committee. Chancellor Mike McKinney and his wife, Lou Ann, played a key role in planning and executing the event.
The Senate and legislative ladies took part in a similar tour in 2007, and it was very well received and appreciated. During this year’s visit to the Texas A&M University Riverside Campus and following a detonation demonstration at TEEX’s Disaster City, the group witnessed a crash test of a 2007 Chevrolet pickup truck smashing into a standard steel guardrail at 62.5 mph. The test was a spectacular failure (which is always quite entertaining for those observing the crash) and generated over 20 minutes of questions for Lance Bullard, head of TTI’s Safety and Structural Systems Division.

Following the morning at Riverside, the ladies were treated to a luncheon at the Clayton W. Williams Jr. Alumni Center, a performance by the Texas A&M University Singing Cadets and a video presentation about The Texas A&M University System. Also participating in the lunch were the mayors of Bryan and College Station, and other local and Texas A&M University System officials.

“We are very pleased and honored that the chancellor provided TTI this important opportunity to tell the TTI story to this distinguished group of ladies,” said Agency Director Dennis Christiansen. “Numerous TTI staff members helped make the event a great success.”

After lunch the ladies returned to TTI’s Gibb Gilchrist Building, where they received a TTI overview presentation. They also heard from Assistant Agency Director Steve Roop, who gave an overview of his newly proposed elevated design for a Texas Universal Freight Shuttle System. The ladies also learned more about TTI’s crash testing program from Assistant Agency Director Dean Alberson.

At the close of their visit, the Honorable Ben White, mayor of College Station, briefed the ladies on the Bryan/College Station Mobility Initiative, and they took a tour of the TransLink Laboratory Research Center, which will be the headquarters for the initiative.
2. Christiansen Testifies before Senate Panel

Agency Director Dennis Christiansen testified before the Texas Senate Finance Committee in Austin February 5, making the case for continued state funding to TTI and an increase in spending for the Institute’s Center for Transportation Safety (CTS), as well as funding for a new Center for Strategic Transportation Solutions.

Christiansen’s appearance before the committee is a regular occurrence. Every two years, state agency directors appear before legislators as the state’s budgeting process begins.

“In a resource-constrained world, the need for innovation is crucial,” Christiansen said. “The base funding provided through state appropriations is critical for us to address these changes, successfully compete for federal research dollars, hire and retain nationally recognized staff, and maintain essential, and often unique, transportation research facilities.”

Christiansen assured the panel that TTI provides a significant return on the investment of direct state appropriations by generating 80 percent of its budget through research contracts. As an example, he told the committee members that TTI increased its 2008 research program by more than 8 percent to a record $45 million.

“Our state leads the nation in both speed-related and heavy truck–related fatalities. Texas could save an additional 1,000 lives annually if we can simply attain the national average in accident rates in the areas of speed, heavy trucks, work zones, alcohol and unlicensed drivers, reducing our fatalities by almost a third. We are requesting additional legislative funding [for CTS] to help continue the recent
3. TTI Symposium Examines Mileage-Based User Fees

Paying a fee for the number of miles you drive — instead of paying fuel taxes at the pump — is the subject of a TTI research project that will include the nation’s first symposium on the subject of a mileage-based user fee. The symposium, co-hosted by the University of Minnesota, will be held in Austin next month.

“In the last several years, there’s been growing interest in exploring an alternative to the fuel tax,” says Senior Research Engineer Ginger Goodin, who heads up the University Transportation Center for Mobility research project. “For the first time, researchers and government officials that have played a role in exploring the concept of a mileage-based user fee will come together for this symposium.”

In part, the symposium will explore the likelihood of implementing a roadway user fee. Goodin knows, however, that motorists are not onboard yet. In a presentation about her research to the Texas Transportation Commission January 28, she told members that the biggest hurdle in employing the fee is public sentiment. “Many want to focus on the mechanics of a new system and the technology that would be used, which are certainly important discussion points. But undoubtedly public and political acceptance of a new system will be the greatest challenge.”

Despite the lack of support from the public about a new system, the fuel tax — the current funding mechanism for road construction — is losing its viability. Inflation, rising construction costs and increased vehicle fuel efficiency have caused a decline...
in the purchasing power of the fuel tax. As a result, many experts believe an alternative to raising road project funds is needed.

“For two decades, there has been some limited discussion of a fuel tax replacement,” Goodin says. “The idea of a user fee has picked up steam in the last few years, spurred by findings from several national commissions who support mileage-based fee research and demonstration.”

The symposium April 14-15 will include presentations from members of the Oregon and Puget Sound pilot projects, the University of Iowa’s National Road User Charge Study, the German truck tolling system and the Federal Highway Administration. Panels representing a variety of government, private sector and stakeholder interests will discuss institutional, public acceptance and technology issues. The symposium will conclude with a unique, interactive discussion session that will allow participants to provide input on a potential path forward.

In addition to Goodin, TTI employees who will have a role at the symposium include Richard Trey Baker, Kevin Balke and Katie Turnbull. Those providing organizational support include Casey Dusza, Kerry Fillip and Karen Smith.

Symposium program:
http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/mbuf09/program.htm

Dennis Christiansen’s National Journal blog entry:
http://transportation.nationaljournal.com/2009/02/should-a-mileage-tax-eventually.php#1301489
4. TTI Anniversaries

**15 Years**

Abbe Saenz, Business Coordinator II (SHR)

**20 Years**

Paul Adamson, Assistant Research Specialist (JHO)

**25 Years**

Brenda Manak, Office Associate (JHO)

**30 Years**

Danny Morris, Senior Research Associate (TCA)
Having completed their fourth Texas Motorcycle Safety Forum, Center for Transportation Safety (CTS) Director John Mounce and Associate Research Scientist Patricia Turner can look back and feel a sense of accomplishment. But they know their work is far from over.

Past forums have produced some major initiatives including the creation of the Texas Motorcycle Safety Coalition and the Texas Education Agency’s work to incorporate motorcycle awareness into driver education courses.

The goal of the forum is to identify ways to reduce the rate of motorcyclist fatalities and injuries, and statistics show that much work remains to be done. Preliminary figures for 2008 show a whopping 32 percent increase in fatalities in Texas over the year before. “Motorcycle deaths have risen more than 75 percent across the country since 2000,” says Mounce. “They account for a disproportionate number of all traffic deaths based on VMT [vehicle miles traveled], so our efforts are extremely important.”

More than 100 people gathered at the Fourth Annual Texas Motorcycle Safety Forum in Austin on February 12, including researchers, safety groups, riders, instructors, law enforcement and government agencies, to share information on crash statistics, motorcycle awareness initiatives, bystander assistance programs and legislative issues affecting motorcyclists. The annual event is co-sponsored by TTI, the Texas Department of Transportation and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

“We are all working together to increase motorcycle safety in Texas,” Turner said. “The statewide public awareness campaign, Look. Learn. Live, is an excellent example of how agencies have come together to make motorcycle safety a priority in
6. Jasek Launches Career Academy to Aid Construction Business

In what could become the standard for training women and minorities for the state’s road construction business, TTI is heading up a new two-week program called the Texas Construction Career Academy funded by the Federal Highway Administration’s Office of Civil Rights.

The innovative program will teach the basics of highway construction to create a pool of entry-level women and minority employees for eager contractors.

“For years now, despite the federal requirements, most construction companies have been unable to attract or retain qualified minority and female employees,” says Debbie Jasek, a member of TTI’s Center for Professional Development. “In many cases, women often quit their construction jobs soon after they’re hired. In part, the Texas Construction Career Academy will act as a screener to find the people who are suited for this type of work.”

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

In an effort to attract females and minorities to the construction business, TTI is launching a Texas Construction Career Academy.
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.

Rush hour merge *(The Oregonian)* March 2

Streetcar desires *(Arizona Daily Star)* March 2

Sea alternative *(The Press-Enterprise)* Feb 28

Gas tax hike versus increased tolls *(The Boston Globe)* Feb 26

High-speed rail stimulus *(Temple Daily Telegram)* Feb 24

Marine shipping *(Associated Press)* Feb 22

Mileage-based fee *(Inside GNSS)* Feb 22

Where stimulus money is going *(Logistics Management)* Feb 20

Florida transportation improvements *(The News-Press)* Feb 19

Pennsylvania college driver simulation study *(Lancaster Online)* Feb 14

Texas A&M research funding *(Austin Business Journal)* Feb 12

Student driver safety *(The Courier of Montgomery County)* Feb 5
8. Record Set at First 2009 Blood Drive

February’s blood drive was TTI’s most successful ever, according to organizers. There were 58 donations, which equates to saving the lives of more than 170 people.

“I am thrilled with the growing number of donors at TTI,” says Nancy Stratta, who helps organize the two-per-year blood drives. “More employees are becoming regular donors — not just one-time givers — so that really helps.”

TTI blood drives started in 2003. The next drive is scheduled for June 23.
**9. UTCM Tackles Freight Planning**

Making sure deliveries make it to their destination on time has never been more important to private-sector logistics practices. *Logistics for Public Freight Planners: Theory and Practice* was the latest University Transportation Center for Mobility (UTCM) presentation, held March 2.

“There is a great need for improved public freight planning by better knowing logistics practices,” Bruce Wang told attendees of the lunchtime meeting. The Zachry Department of Civil Engineering assistant professor demonstrated the basics of supply chain management during his presentation, which was based on a short course developed by Dr. Wang along with his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin.

The next Mobility Colloquium is scheduled for April 16. It features Mark Benden’s new vehicle design for transporting rural and urban patients to medical facilities.

**For more information:**
[http://utcm.tamu.edu/colloquium/last_colloq.stm#synop](http://utcm.tamu.edu/colloquium/last_colloq.stm#synop)
10. Reminders/Calendar

March 16 — RMC proposals due

March 19-20 — Spring break

April 14-15 — Symposium on Mileage-Based User Fees  
http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/mbuf09/program.htm

May 6 — TTI Day

May 11-13 — 27th Annual Texas Aviation Conference  
http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/tac09/

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