1. Christiansen Outlines TTI Issues in Employee Meeting

Compared to other parts of the Texas A&M University System, TTI researchers are receiving relatively high salary increases in the 2007-2008 budget in recognition of the need for TTI to remain competitive, Director Dennis Christiansen reported during his July 16 “Meet the Director” session with Institute employees. Christiansen said the fiscal year budget should be approved by the Board of Regents Aug. 22.

Christiansen discussed the reorganization of system agencies, the development of a TTI strategic plan and the status of the TTI State Headquarters Building. “Plans for the new building will go before the Regents for a third time next week and we expect it to be approved, authorizing the chancellor to spend the money,” he said. Christiansen urged employees to visit TTI’s intranet to view drawings of the building. (On July 27, the A&M System Board of Regents gave final approval for the construction of the new TTI building. Facilities Planning is now authorized to get construction bids. Assuming the low bid is close to the estimated cost,
construction should begin before the end of 2007. Occupancy is anticipated for spring or summer of 2009.)

Christiansen asked for employee input on a detailed strategic plan that is being developed. The plan will spell out the Institute’s goals over the next 3 to 5 years, how to accomplish the goals and how progress will be measured. A draft of the plan was emailed to all employees July 17 for their review.

Christiansen mentioned the recently concluded Texas Legislative session and its impact on TTI. “If nothing bad happens you’re successful. In that regard, it was successful,” he said.

View meeting summary:
http://ttinet.tamu.edu/Mgmt_org/from_the_director/index.stm

2. “Keep Texas Moving” Forum’s Message

Considering the many challenges facing transportation professionals, “Keep Texas Moving” was an apt theme for the second annual Texas Transportation Forum held in Austin on July 18-20.

The conference—hosted by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and co-sponsored by the Texas Good Roads/Transportation Association, the Associated General Contractors of Texas and the Texas Transportation Institute—united attendees toward a common goal of improving the transportation system in Texas by encouraging the sharing of knowledge.

Topics emerging from the two-day conference included the increase in freight movement, the need for creative financing and updates on the proposed Trans-Texas Corridor.

Keynote speaker and expert on commuting issues Alan Pisarski offered insights on America’s unique challenge, calling it the “tyranny of distance.” In his speech, Governor Rick Perry stressed the importance of teamwork and the need for using innovative financing tools to build and maintain the roadways. “We can get there from here and we are going to do it together,” said Perry.
Several of the speakers also praised outgoing TxDOT Executive Director Michael Behrens for his 37 years of service to the state of Texas. Behrens will retire at the end of August.

TxDOT Executive Director Michael Behrens makes one of his last public appearances before his retirement at the end of August.

3. Employee Recognition Program to Undergo Enhancement

TTI employees will be honored in a new way for their years of service, beginning next year. An Employee Recognition Committee has been formed to look into ways to enhance the current program, which primarily consists of a service pin awarded after employees reach a milestone such as 5, 10 or 15 years of service.

“We’ve looked at how other agencies honor their loyal employees, and are finding popular ways to have the TTI team recognized in a similar fashion,” said Russell Henk, who is co-chair of the Employee Recognition Committee with Becca Simons. “TTI is such a special place with so many talented, hard-working people—we want to make sure they know their efforts are appreciated.”

Although the plans are not finalized or approved, employees will probably, in addition to service pins, select from a variety of merchandize that has been categorized depending on the number of years of service. The value of the items will increase as years of service increase. “We are also looking at all employees (including new hires) being given a TTI cap or shirt as part of the new program,” Henk said.
Members of the Employee Recognition Committee include Henk, Simons, Ashley Lott, Suzie Edrington, Chris Sasser, Karen Parker, Lisa Palmer, Emmanuel Fernando, John Mounce and Wanda Menges.

4. TTI Anniversaries

5 Years

Amit Bhasin, Associate Research Scientist (BDV)
Nancy Pippin, Lead Office Assistant (KWE)
Rick Seneff, Research Technician (BFP)
David Zeig, Research Associate (BFP)

15 Years

Sheila Fields, Executive Assistant to Agency Director (ADM)

20 Years

Jim Schutt, Assistant Research Scientist (AEM)

30 Years

Anna Jo Mitchell, Director of Fiscal Affairs (BUS)

5. Chancellor, TAMUS Officials Meet at TTI

Chancellor Mike McKinney conducted a meeting with Texas A&M University System leaders July 25 in the Gilchrist Building in preparation for the Board of Regents meeting the next day.

Attendees included agency directors, vice chancellors and university presidents. Because the Gilchrist Building can accommodate large groups of people and has plenty of parking, the chancellor has held his pre-Board of Regents meetings at TTI
6. Good, Bad News in Latest National Fatality Rate Report

A slow but steady decrease in the overall traffic fatality rate is welcome news to TTI safety experts, but it’s partially overshadowed by an increase in motorcycle and alcohol-related deaths.

According to 2006 preliminary figures from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the number of people killed in traffic crashes in the U.S. declined from 43,510 in 2005 to 42,642. It’s the lowest number of motor vehicle deaths in 5 years. However, motorcycle rider deaths continued a nine-year increase from 4,576 in 2005 to 4,810, a 5.1 percent rise in one year.

“These early numbers showing a reduction in fatalities on the nation’s highways are good news, but the influence of alcohol and speeding on traffic deaths is still overwhelming, especially on rural roadways,” said John Mounce, TTI’s director of the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS). According to the NHTSA report, alcohol-related fatalities increased slightly (+0.1 percent) in 2006.

“Excessive speed, inexperience, impairment, and rider and driver inattention are common factors in motorcycle deaths,” said Associate Research Scientist Patricia Turner, who leads motorcycle research efforts at CTS. “It’s unfortunate that as the popularity of motorcycles increases so too does the number of
fatalities. We have a lot of work to do in finding ways to prevent these deaths.”

Overall, Texas had 61 fewer reported total traffic deaths in 2006, a 1.7 percent decrease. Similarly, there was a 2 percent decline in nationwide fatalities.

NHTSA’s revised figures will be released in a final report later this year.

Read news report:

View NHTSA report:
http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810791.PDF

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**7. Texas Rain and TTI Research**

The Texas summer of 2007 will be one of the wettest in history. The rain has forced rivers to flood stage and created dangerous driving conditions across the state. The flooding in Texas highlights the importance of research conducted at the Institute involving bridge support erosion and sign visibility.

**Jean-Louis Briaud**, manager of TTI’s Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Program, has been researching the effects of bridge piling erosion, or scour, with funding from TxDOT. Briaud is developing methodologies for predicting scour. “Based on the research we’ve conducted in the laboratory we can more accurately determine those bridges that are indeed at the greatest risk of failure,” he said. Currently, 600 of the 40,000 bridges in Texas are on the scour-critical list, which pinpoints bridges that could be at the highest risk for failure due to erosion.

The new method of predicting erosion could result in removal of some bridges currently on the scour-critical list. A second part of the research will begin in September and will involve placing monitors at some of the most critical bridge locations to measure erosion.

The Institute is also conducting research on sign visibility during night-time, rainy conditions with the help of its 1,600 foot rain tunnel constructed at the Riverside Campus facility. The rain tunnel simulates virtually all rain conditions, enabling researchers...
to measure the visibility of pavement marking systems. “The tests will have a far-reaching impact on night-time visibility for drivers that find themselves on the road during rainy conditions, such as the ones we’ve been experiencing over the last two months,” said Jeff Miles, an associate transportation researcher in TTI’s Signs and Markings Program.

The TxDOT project is in its final stage, with a report due out this year. Project Manager Paul Carlson says the findings so far have prompted ASTM International to change its existing standards and specifications for measuring performance of wet pavement markings. “Our ultimate goal is safety. We want to make sure motorists clearly see pavement markings even in the worst driving conditions.”

8. 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.

Traffic and pollution rankings (Forbes) July 24
Pros and cons of night-time work zones (News-Journal) July 24
Speed limit debate (Citizen-Times) July 22
How cities battle congestion (USA Today) July 19
Non-paying toll users (Palm Beach Post) July 08
Night-time work zone dangers (Wall Street Journal) July 05
9. Student Worker Spends Summer as Washington Intern

Student Worker Krizia Martinez, 20, is heading back to the San Antonio office this month after spending an event-filled summer in the nation’s capital. Martinez was one of 34 college students picked from across the country for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute summer internship program.

“All the theory about how the government works that you read about in school we actually see in action,” Martinez said. “It’s been an amazing experience.”

Martinez, who began working for TTI in 2005, was selected by Division Head Russell Henk to help launch the Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS) program in San Antonio. “Krizia was the lead student spokesperson for TDS at our inaugural news conference,” he said. “Her poise and determination is really remarkable. She is a very impressive, intelligent young lady who has a great future. We are all very proud of her.”

Martinez will graduate next spring from The University of Texas at San Antonio, where she will also pursue a law degree. Martinez and the other members of the internship program were highlighted in a Washington Post article July 26.

“The response to that article has been very positive,” she said. “My parents are very proud, and my grandmother went out and bought a billion copies for her friends.”


10. Input Needed to Strengthen Internal Communications
You have until Aug. 14 to let members of the Internal Communications Task Force know how you prefer to be informed about happenings within TTI.

A brief survey, which can be taken anonymously, is designed to improve internal communications efforts by answering a few questions about what information is needed, who should receive it and how the information should be delivered.

Take survey:
http://ttisurvey.tamu.edu/?sid=58

11. 2007-2008 TTI Holiday Schedule Approved by Regents

TTI’s 2007-2008 fiscal year holiday schedule has been approved by the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents. The schedule is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Nov. 22-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas-New Year’s Day</td>
<td>Dec. 24-Jan.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</td>
<td>Jan. 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Break</td>
<td>March 13-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial Day</td>
<td>May 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence Day</td>
<td>July 4</td>
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</tbody>
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View holiday schedule for other system agencies/universities:
http://www.tamus.edu/offices/shro/holidays.html#tti

12. Editor’s Corner: Email Etiquette
by Rhonda Brinkmann

I have a friend who teaches etiquette. She insists that etiquette rules are based on sound common sense. I don’t know about that when it comes to four forks at a place setting, but I do think it applies to email. With that in mind, here are a few commonsense email practices to think about before you hit that send button.

First, let’s deal right up front with whether it’s “email” or “e-mail.” Quick answer: If you aren’t required to follow specific editorial guidelines, use either “email” or “e-mail” consistently throughout your document.

Now the long answer: In September 2006, a little-known organization called the Email Experience Council announced the spelling of “email” as its first official standard. Some authorities, such as the Oxford English Dictionary, support that spelling. Other references—such as the Associated Press Stylebook, the Chicago Manual of Style and Webster’s dictionary—still show the “e-mail” spelling only. I side with leaving out the hyphen, primarily because using a hyphen can cause end-of-line problems with readability. If you do include a hyphen, use a “hard hyphen” to prevent splitting (in Microsoft Word®, press CNTL+SHFT+hyphen).

Whew, and all that was just about how to spell the word. Now on to a few conventions for using email most effectively:

- **Put a meaningful subject line.** Your subject line helps you and your message recipients recognize content, sort and store messages and respond quickly. When you reply to a message, leave the “RE:” notation with the original subject line if you are responding specifically to that message so everyone involved can monitor the thread of the conversation. Change the subject line if you veer to a new topic.

- **Cover only one topic per message.** People often respond to the first item in a message, get sidetracked and then never get around to subsequent topics. In addition, many people use email messages as task reminders. Covering more than one topic in a message makes it difficult to respond, sort and store.

- **Identify yourself.** Yes yes, I know, the recipient should know who you are by your email address. But in many cases, mail programs will display only part of your address or not display it the way you think they will. Maybe the recipient receives email from several people identified as “b-smith.” It makes sense to clearly identify yourself using at least your first name.
• **Use automatic signature blocks with awareness.** An automatic signature block can be very helpful, but remember it appears with the same information on every message unless you suppress it.

• **Give a phone number if the recipient doesn’t have easy access to it.** If you are sending a message within TTI, your recipient can usually check the address book to find your phone number. However, if you contact someone outside TTI it’s a courtesy to include your phone number. An automatic signature block can be helpful here.

• **Remember the niceties of conversation.** While email is effective for its brevity, don’t confuse conciseness with bluntness. At least on the first message of a thread, consider using salutations and signoffs. Reread each message before you send it to make sure you have expressed your sentiments clearly and courteously.

• **Capitalize correctly.** Most people know to avoid all caps in an email message—it equates to yelling at your recipient. However, it’s still common to use all lowercase letters, which makes it difficult to scan a message. As a courtesy, take the time to use standard capitalization in your messages.

• **The phone and the hallway still work.** Email isn’t the best communication method for all situations. Especially for sensitive topics or ideas that require discussion, phone calls or in-person visits might be more effective than an email message.

*Editor’s Corner is written by Rhonda Brinkmann, research editor in TTI Communications. Rhonda is happy to take requests for column topics.*

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13. **Calendar/Reminders**

**Aug. 7** — Short Term Statistical Help Desk (St. Stats) Seminar
   8:30-9:30
   Rm. 217 CE/TTI Building
   For more information contact Eun Sug Park

**Aug. 23** — Short Term Statistical Help Desk (St. Stats) Seminar
12:00-1:00
Rm. 102 Gilchrist Building
For more information contact Eun Sug Park

**Aug. 31**— Check your contracts for deliverable due dates to TxDOT or TTI COM

**Sept. 01**— Fiscal year 2008 begins

**Sept. 19-21**— 2007 Texas Ports and Waterways Conference
   For more information, registration:
   http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/ports07/

**Oct. 16-17**— 81st Annual Transportation Short Course
   http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/tsc07/

**Nov. 4-7**— 2007 National Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Conference,
   San Antonio
   For more information, registration:
   http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/rail07/

**Nov. 5-8**— RMC Meetings, San Antonio

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