1. Williamson Eulogized as “One of a Kind”

Ric Williamson, chairman of the Texas Transportation Commission, was eulogized by Gov. Rick Perry and Texas Department of Transportation Executive Director Amadeo Saenz when several hundred people gathered inside the Weatherford High School auditorium for Williamson’s memorial service Jan. 3.

TTI Director Dennis Christiansen and Associate Agency Director Bill Stockton attended the service. “We wanted to pay our respects to Williamson and his family,” Christiansen said. “He was a driving force in Texas transportation who was extremely dedicated to his work.”

Williamson, 55, died Dec. 30, after suffering a heart attack at his home in Weatherford.

Gov. Perry, who shared an apartment with Williamson when they were freshmen legislators in the mid-1980s, described the chairman as “probably the most persuasive individual I’ve ever been around in my life.” Perry said Williamson was like a brother and convinced him to run for lieutenant
Saenz told the crowd that, although Perry will name a replacement, no one could really take Williamson’s place.

### 2. Simmons Details TxDOT Financial Issues

With the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) facing a budget shortfall that could impact research and interagency contracts with TTI, TxDOT Deputy Executive Director Steve Simmons addressed Institute employees Dec. 17.

“I can’t emphasize enough how important you are to TxDOT,” Simmons said at the beginning of his hour-long presentation that included a summary of the events that helped create the financial situation.

“The cash flow will come back,” Simmons assured TTI employees. “But right now we are just in tough times. We hope it’s short term, but it will be 2009 before things get better.”

Detailing causes of the department’s financial dilemma, Simmons mentioned inflation, skyrocketing construction costs and an insufficient state gasoline tax as contributing to the shortfall. “TxDOT has been part of the problem, too. We have to plan for 20-year time periods, and we never contemplated $3.00 a gallon gasoline.”

Although an internal action plan is not currently in place to combat the financial deficit within TxDOT, Simmons said that the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission review process will dictate what steps will be taken. “We will weather this storm. It’s just a bit rougher right now,” Simmons said.
3. RITA Administrator Applauds TTI in Inaugural Visit

President Bush appointee Paul Brubaker, administrator of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA), told TTI employees, “The world is going to look very, very different in 10 years.” Brubaker was referring to the nation’s growing and shifting population, the price of oil and the challenge of financing infrastructure projects. As RITA administrator, Brubaker is responsible for coordinating DOT’s $1-billion research budget and is charged with advancing technologies that will improve the nation’s transportation system.

It was Brubaker’s first TTI visit since he was sworn in as RITA administrator last summer. His associate administrator for research, development and technology, Dr. Jan Brecht-Clark, accompanied him on the tour. Brecht-Clark oversees the University Transportation Centers program, which includes the Southwest University Transportation Center (SWUTC) and the University Transportation Center for Mobility (UTCM), both located at TTI.

“TTI is on the cutting edge of transportation research, and I want to thank you for the work you do,” Brubaker said during his visit Dec. 11-12. He pointed out that transportation costs for American families exceed health care and food costs. Only housing costs more. “We need to find better ways to finance transportation because the gas tax is insufficient.” Brubaker endorsed public-private partnerships as one solution to the financing challenge.

Brubaker and Brecht-Clark were presented overviews of TTI, SWUTC and UTCM, and toured TTI’s TransLink® Laboratory, the Materials Lab and the Riverside Research Facility. The visit also included a tour of the Bush Presidential Library.

“Dr. Jan Brecht-Clark and I found the briefings and exchanges very useful to understanding the major contributions the Institute is making to improve the safety and performance of our national transportation infrastructure. Moreover, TTI is performing a great service to the nation and the state of Texas by training the next generation of national, state and local transportation leaders,” Brubaker said. “The commitment and passion of the Aggie community to creating a world-class transportation research facility at A&M was evident from all of the people we met.”
The TTI employees who helped organize the tour and make presentations included Herb Richardson, Bill Stockton, Dock Burke, Melissa Tooley, Dallas Little, Debbie Jasek, Paul Carlson, Shawn Turner, Rafael Aldrete, Gene Hawkins, Mark Burris, Tim Lomax, Gene Buth, Dean Alberson, Roger Bligh, Becca Simons and Shanna Yates.

SWUTC partners participating were Carol Lewis from Texas Southern University, Randy Machemehl and Rob Harrison from The University of Texas and former SWUTC student Nick Lownes, now with the University of Connecticut. Members of UTCM’s Executive Committee also made presentations, including John Nichols of the Department of Agriculture, Arnie Vedlitz of the Bush School and Forster Ndubisi from the Department of Landscape Architecture.

4. Man Credits TTI-Designed Guardrail with Saving Life

At only 23, paramedic Garrett Placke has a lot to look forward to. Following his crash into a guardrail Nov. 25, he says he owes the rest of his life to TTI and Trinity Industries.

It was raining that Sunday afternoon as he traveled toward College Station on State Highway 47, ironically, not far from the entrance to Riverside Campus where the guardrail was designed. He was returning home from seeing his niece’s christening when his 2005 pickup truck began hydroplaning.

“My truck was heading off the road, and I no longer had control,” Placke recalls. “I knew I was going to hit the guardrail head-on at 65 [miles per hour], so I was expecting a really big slam. Remarkably, my truck stopped very quickly, and I couldn’t believe I wasn’t hurt.” The guardrail absorbed the truck’s impact and prevented it from heading over a steep embankment into Johnson Creek. He soon wondered who to thank for saving his life.

The guardrail is a TTI-designed end terminal called an ET-PLUS manufactured by Trinity Industries. “We don’t have any idea how many people credit the ET-PLUS with saving their lives or preventing serious injury, so it’s very rewarding
to hear stories like Mr. Placke’s,” said Assistant Agency Director **Gene Buth**, who participated in the design of the end terminal. “We are all glad he’s OK.”

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5. **TTI Anniversaries**

**5 Years**

**Melissa Walden**, Research Scientist (TPE)

**15 Years**

**Janice Konecny**, Director of Projects Administration/Operational Analysis (BUS)

**Candi Martell**, Senior Projects Administrator (BUS)

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6. **Building Winning Teams**

TTI program managers, division heads, center directors and Leadership Team members met Dec. 14 at the Gibb Gilchrist Building. The meeting included full group sessions, breakout sessions and a luncheon presentation from Texas A&M University Women’s Soccer Coach, G. Guerrieri, on “Building Winning Teams.”

“Getting this group together on a regular basis was one of the recommendations of the TTI Leadership Development Committee,” said Associate Agency Director **Katie Turnbull**. “With 60 people participating, the sessions included lively discussions on research and sponsor diversification, promoting TTI’s research capabilities, internal communication and the role of the group. A number of good ideas were generated and targeted for follow-up activities.”

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Employees attending the team meeting pose for a photo in the lobby of the Gilchrist Building.
The objectives of the meeting were to foster collaboration, enhance communication, advance initiatives and promote professional development. The group plans a follow-up meeting on April 28, the day before TTI Day.

7. “Teens” Newsletter Is Latest TDS Success

The Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS) safety program grew at a remarkable pace in 2007. More than 100 Texas schools are now members of the peer-to-peer driver safety awareness program, and late last year a school district in Georgia became the first non-Texas member. Other states are also expressing interest. With the expansion, the TDS staff has produced the first newsletter about the organization, with more than 600 people signing up to receive the inaugural publication.

“The quarterly newsletter is a great way for us to communicate immediately with a growing list of members,” says TDS Director Russell Henk. “I think the newsletter will also act as a catalyst for garnering even more interest here in Texas and across the country.”

The newsletter highlights the news and activities of the TDS program, a calendar of events and the TDS contacts. In addition to a listserv distribution, the newsletter will be posted to the TDS website, www.t-driver.com.

Research Associate Jen Bordeaux is the main writer, with contributions from Henk and TDS staff members Bernie Fette, Tina Geiselbrecht, Llubia Corella, Jeff Shelton, Lori Gray, Chris Poe, Marsha Anderson-Bomar and Kathy Montemayor.

Read the TDS newsletter: http://www.t-driver.com/news/12_07_newsletter.pdf
8. TTI Exceeds SECC Goal

Thanks to the generosity of TTI employees and the hard work of State Employee Charitable Campaign (SECC) Coordinator Susie Catalina, the Institute surpassed its fundraising goal for the 2007 SECC.

Employees raised $20,325 through one-time donations, monthly payroll deductions, bake sales and online auctions. The amount represents more than $300 above the goal set for TTI.

The Texas A&M University goal (which includes the agencies located in College Station) was also surpassed. The amount raised for SECC was $704,505.

Helping with the TTI bake sales were: Dolores Hott, Susan Brown, Rhonda Brinkmann, Becca Simons, Anna Jo Mitchell, Janice Konecny, Marla Richardson, Nancy Stratta, Joyce Schaefer, Sheila Fields, (Nancy Coppock), Beth Roach, Michelle Young, Jess Junek, Toni Monroe, Beatrice Martinez, Michelle Jones and Nancy Pippin.

9. Asphalt Consortium Issues Inaugural Newsletter

The Asphalt Research Consortium (ARC) has published its first newsletter since the group was formed last summer. The Asphalt Research Correspondent details the goals of the ARC and outlines each member’s objectives.

ARC is a Federal Highway Administration project made up of experts from the Western Research Institute, TTI (Texas A&M University), the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Nevada-Reno and Advanced Asphalt Technology. The five-year project is a $27 million mission to improve and prolong the life of the nation’s infrastructure through research.

TTI’s focus will be on preventing moisture damage and fatigue cracking — the primary causes of pavement problems. Senior Research Fellow Dallas Little is leading TTI’s efforts along with Research Engineers Robert Lytton.
and Eyad Masad, Associate Research Scientist Amit Bhasin
and Associate Research Engineer Amy Epps Martin.

Visit the ARC website:
http://www.arc.unr.edu/Index.html

Read the ARC newsletter:
http://www.arc.unr.edu/Newsletter/Dec07/index.htm

10. High-Speed Rail Members Meet at TTI

Members of the Texas High Speed Rail and Transportation Corporation (THSRTC) conducted their quarterly meeting at TTI Dec. 5-6, which included a tour of the Institute and the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum. Director Dennis Christiansen welcomed members of the corporation to TTI.

The Institute is serving as a third-party resource agency for the THSRTC, providing background research to determine the feasibility of high-speed rail in Texas.

The corporation has set a 2020 target date for completion of what is called the Texas T-Bone Corridor, which would connect San Antonio to Ft. Worth-Dallas and Temple to Houston. The Houston to Temple section of the t-bone-shaped rail system is called the Brazos Express Corridor, which would include a stop in Bryan/College Station. The city of College Station and Brazos County are members of THSRTC.

“The corporation is made up of some very influential individuals,” says Multimodal Program Manager Curtis Morgan, who is heading up TTI’s research for high-speed rail. “They are working to gain the support of cities, airlines, universities and the military who will work to spread the word about the benefits of a project of this size, connecting the majority of the Texas population with high-speed rail.” Former Harris County Judge Robert Eckels is the chairman of THSRTC.

Visit the Texas High Speed Rail website:
http://www.thsrtc.com/
11. TTI in the News

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

Median proposal meets opposition Nacogdoches Daily Sentinel Jan. 5
New Dallas HOV lanes Dallas Morning News Jan. 3

Preventing pedestrian deaths Arizona Daily Star Jan. 3
(Registration may be required)

Rail support Fort Worth Business Press Jan. 3

Toll lanes to ease congestion Los Angeles Daily News Jan. 1

West Texas traffic Midland Reporter-Telegram Jan. 1

Wrong way driver Toledo Blade Jan. 1

Early rush hour Press Telegram Dec. 30

Middle Tennessee congestion examined The Tennessean Dec. 23

Teen driver safety Waco Tribune Dec. 21 (Registration may be required)

Regional transportation system planned Tampa Bay Newspapers Dec. 11

Dallas light rail delay possible Dallas Morning News Dec. 6

Read a Researcher article on high-speed rail:
12. Editor’s Corner: Electronic Accessibility Update

What is it?
You may have heard terms such as Section 508, electronic accessibility and Section 206 mentioned in relation to reports and other contract deliverables. These terms refer to making electronic information available to the widest possible audience. To be fully accessible, electronic information must be usable by all users including audiences with hearing, vision or mobility impairments. Many aspects that make electronic information compatible with assistive devices and accessible to disabled users benefit all users.

When is it?
By September 2008, TTI is committed to making all its websites fully accessible. Some additional time is available for making previously posted files compliant. Compliance applies to all electronic information, whether it comes in the form of text files, videos, slide presentations, audio recordings, independent websites or other types of electronic media.

What does it mean for your projects?
What does that mean to TTI employees? Well, for one thing, it means that projects need to include both budget and timeline allowances for conversion of files. For another, it means that you will need to thoroughly understand what your sponsor requires in the way of accessibility and clarify what types of files will be delivered. Here are a few first steps to take regarding accessibility of deliverables:

- During project concept and proposal, make sure you understand sponsor requirements and preferences. For documents, as an example, some sponsors accept accessible portable document file (PDF) formats, but most require hypertext markup language (HTML) coding.
- Determine how your project will incorporate accessibility tasks and allow appropriate funding and timelines to cover the tasks.
- In proposals, explain accessibility-related budget and timeline requirements. As a selling point, also highlight
TTI’s commitment and expertise regarding electronic accessibility.

- During the project, keep accessibility in mind from concept to ongoing maintenance when designing electronic deliverables of any kind.

**How do you comply with requirements?**
TTI Communications personnel are happy to help you understand accessibility requirements and provide the assistance you need to comply with requirements. Communications contacts for accessibility are:

- Text files: **Rhonda Brinkmann**, research editor, or **Michelle Benoit**, associate research editor
- Other electronic media: **Mark Coppack**, manager of visual media

For more information about accessibility and related links, go to: [http://ttinet.tamu.edu/training/web_development/508_standards/](http://ttinet.tamu.edu/training/web_development/508_standards/). For a brief discussion of accessibility related to report development, see TTI’s editorial guidelines (page 24) at [http://ttinet.tamu.edu/communications/editing/TTIGuidelines.pdf](http://ttinet.tamu.edu/communications/editing/TTIGuidelines.pdf).

*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**

**Jan. 13-17**—2008 TRB 87th Annual Meeting
Washington, D.C.
For more information or registration:

**Jan. 21**—Martin Luther King, Jr., Day

**Jan. 24-26**—2008 TEXite Winter Meeting
For more information or registration:
[http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/texite/](http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/texite/)
Feb. 18—University Transportation Center for Mobility
Mobility Colloquium
Tim Lomax, Guest Speaker
12:00-1:00 p.m., 103 Gilchrist

Feb. 20—TTI Blood Drive
103 Gilchrist
9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Call for appointment

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articles about TTI people and research efforts.
Please send email to news@ttimail.tamu.edu or call
Rick Davenport at (979) 862-3763.