1. Director Reveals Updates, Changes during Employee Q&A

The construction contract for TTI’s new research building should be finalized in the next month, Director Dennis Christiansen revealed during his quarterly employee meeting October 22. He also told employees that the TTI State Headquarters and Research Building will have expansion space for five to 10 years. This space can be leased to a university or private entity with needs that are compatible with TTI. “By leasing out the space, we will be able to pay for the build-out of the third floor and some of the alternatives, like a covered walkway between the new building and Gilchrist,” he said. Christiansen told employees that Trinity Industries has offered to provide concrete for the new building at a significantly reduced cost. Move-in for the new building is planned for the summer of 2009.

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16. Calendar/Reminders
Christiansen also detailed the changes starting in January for the Employee Recognition Program. “The program was created in 1993 and is in need of an overhaul,” he said. Employees who reach an anniversary level of service (e.g., 5, 10, 15 through 40 years) will be able to pick from a variety of items based on their years of service. New employees will be directed to an Intranet web page to choose gifts.

Other topics covered in the director’s Q&A included his urging of additional purchases from historically underutilized businesses, the upcoming hiring of a full-time safety officer for the Institute, research diversification and an update of the changes at the System level and their impact on TTI.

He also mentioned changes within TxDOT and how those changes have prompted others to seek input from the Institute. “TTI is continually being sought out for independent, reliable information. We are highly valued by a lot of people. We are in a very good position with the Legislature, and we want to maintain that,” Christiansen said. “You are all doing some great stuff.”

View meeting summary:  
http://ttinet.tamu.edu/mgmt_org/from_the_director/

2. TDS Leads News Conference on Nighttime Driving Dangers

Most teenage driving fatalities happen at night and, based on a survey by TTI researchers, teens are in the dark about the dangers associated with nighttime driving. That was the message of an Austin news conference conducted by the Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS) Program on Oct. 30, just days before the end of Daylight Saving Time.

“The teen driver safety problem has reached epidemic proportions — here in Texas and around the world,” Director Dennis Christiansen told members of the news media gathered in the Texas state capitol. “It’s an urgent public health crisis, and TTI has been working for years to better understand it. Now, we not only know more about what causes the problem, we also know more about how to address it.”
TTI researchers surveyed more than 4,400 teens at 17 Texas high schools to determine how much they know about driving risks, and how often they engage in dangerous driving behaviors. The findings highlight the reasons why driving is the number-one cause of death for teenagers in the U.S.:

- Less than one percent of Texas teens understand that driving at night is unsafe, while almost half say they routinely drive after 10 p.m.
- Only a third of teens recognize that it’s dangerous to talk or text on a cell phone while they drive, and roughly half admit doing so frequently.
- 72 percent of teens think drug and alcohol use is the number-one risk factor, even though it ranks fifth on the list of crash causes.

The survey also determined that teen drivers in rural areas are twice as likely to talk or text message and three times more likely to have received a speeding ticket. The study revealed that rural teens are more likely to drive at night than teens in urban areas.

After the news conference, officials with State Farm Insurance presented TDS a check for $500,000 representing the company’s commitment to funding the program for the next five years. State Farm Insurance representative Ronnie Vandiver spoke at the news conference, as did other proponents of TDS, including Texas Transportation Commissioner Hope Andrade and Texas State Senator Kirk Watson.

One of TTI’s fastest-growing initiatives, Teens in the Driver Seat is led by Russell Henk, TDS Program Director, and Bernie Fette, TDS Public Affairs Director.

Read/view media reports:

KDFW

Austin American-Statesman

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3. Argentina and TTI Form Transportation Partnership

With a growing population and improved economy, Argentina is facing some unique challenges related to highway safety and road construction and design. The Asociación Argentina de Carreteras (Argentina Roads Association) and TTI will be working together to find transportation solutions in Latin America. The agreement was signed by the president of the association, Miguel Salvia, and, on behalf of TTI, Assistant Agency Director Dean Alberson.

The agreement was made at the conclusion of the Argentina Roads Safety and Traffic Congress in Buenos Aires this summer. In part, the memorandum of agreement (MOA) “recognizes that a collaborative effort will be of mutual benefit and will serve to establish enduring ties of cooperation.” The MOA will last for five years and is renewable.

“Argentina is serious about improving its roads and the safety of its traveling public,” said Alberson. “We are honored to work with them in this endeavor, sharing with transportation colleagues in Latin America what has worked here in the United States, and applying that to the unique challenges in Argentina.” In addition to his assistant agency director duties, Alberson is the program manager of TTI’s Crashworthy Structures in the Safety and Structural Systems Division.

This agreement is an example of how TTI is establishing partnerships worldwide to improve the global transportation network. In addition to these initiatives, TTI researchers are reaching out individually to share their expertise. For example, Associate Transportation Researcher Carlos Chang-Albitres was recently elected to the International Road Federation board of directors for a three-year term. “The need for transportation improvements is not only great in the United States, but in every country I’ve visited,” Chang-Albitres said.
4. TTI Anniversaries

5 Years

Kwaku Obeng-Boampong, Associate Transportation Researcher (GSA)

10 Years

Alex Ferrazas, Groundskeeper III (AEM)

15 Years

Bill Frawley, Research Scientist (HUA)
Kelly West, Manager of Editorial Services (KWE)

20 Years

Tom Bradley, Electronics Technician II (CPG)

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5. New TxDOT Leader, Meeting Place for Short Course

The 81st Annual Transportation Short Course was the first chance for TTI staff and the transportation community to hear from recently appointed TxDOT Executive Director Amadeo Saenz in his new role. The first Hispanic leader of TxDOT rose through the ranks in the Pharr District, beginning in 1978 as an engineering laboratory assistant, to become the nineteenth director in the department’s 90-year history.

Saenz takes the TxDOT helm at a challenging time. Throughout the opening session of short course, speakers emphasized the need for change as they looked to the future of Texas transportation. Reduced funding due to tighter federal budgets and the diversion of state tax dollars to non-TxDOT programs will challenge transportation professionals charged with enhancing and maintaining the Texas transportation system in the future.

Commissioners Fred Underwood, Ted Houghton, Jr., and Hope Andrade emphasized that Texas would have to do more with less to meet the needs of its citizens as the population grows while funding resources shrink. Commission Chair Ric Williamson acknowledged that these were the “challenges of
America” as the entire nation struggles with fulfilling the needs of more citizens with less money.

Acknowledging this reality, Saenz reiterated his colleagues’ commitment to TxDOT’s strategic plan, which strives to reduce congestion, enhance safety, expand economic opportunity, improve air quality and increase the value of transportation assets. Saenz recognized the tough road ahead but assured everyone in the room that they were up to the challenge. “Together we’ll make it better,” he promised.

Numerous TTI employees contributed to organizing this year’s short course, under the leadership of Special Assistant to the Agency Director Mary Cearley. Researchers served as session co-chairs, organizing topics and speakers. Other TTI personnel assisted with on-site registration and other support. This year’s Short Course had a record attendance of 2,799 people. “Despite the logistical problems of changing locations from Rudder to Reed Arena, all of the comments from TxDOT have been positive,” said Director Dennis Christiansen. “The credit goes to the employees who made this a priority.”

The Gallaway Golf Tournament, which took place the day before short course, was also considered a success. There were 152 golfers, which set a new record for participation. TTI employees also assisted with registration and other activities at the golf tournament.

6. Reilly Named 2007 Research Champion

The 2007 TTI/Trinity Research Champion Award was presented to Dr. Robert J. Reilly at a luncheon in the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents Quarters in College Station on October 3.

“Bob Reilly is much deserving of this award,” noted Director Dennis Christiansen. “Bob served as director of the Cooperative Research Program at the Transportation Research Board for 22 years. Under his leadership, the program has grown dramatically. Bob established the hallmarks of the program, which include high-quality research, tangible and valuable results, usable products, integrity and impartiality and close coordination with sponsoring agencies and organizations.”
“It is an honor to receive this award from TTI,” Reilly said during the presentation. “TTI is one of the premier university-affiliated research groups in the country, and it is a privilege to be recognized as a research champion.” While in College Station to receive the award, Reilly presented a seminar on the Cooperative Research Program to TTI staff and students.

“The Research Champion Award recognizes individuals who provide significant contributions to advancing transportation research, technology transfer, implementation and professional development,” noted Associate Director Katie Turnbull. “The award is presented on an annual basis to an individual selected by a committee that includes members of the TTI Advisory Council and the leadership team from nominations submitted by staff and Advisory Council members.”

7. TTI Safety and Environmental Council Formed

TTI is committed to providing a safe and healthy work environment for all employees. As part of that commitment, Director Dennis Christiansen asked the leadership team to nominate individuals to participate as members of a newly formed TTI Safety and Environmental Council.

“Our employees deserve a safe work environment,” explained Christiansen. “It’s the right thing to do.”

The Council’s mission will be to address various safety and environmental issues that impact the agency. The scope of the Council’s responsibilities will include:

- identifying potential risks and developing strategies for risk management,
- reviewing and amending existing policies and procedures, and drafting new policies and procedures as needed,
- implementing policies and procedures, ensuring that supervisors and employees are aware of requirements and standards,
- evaluating and implementing training procedures and documentation,
- establishing processes to ensure timely review and certification of training documents by responsible
supervisors, and
- communicating safety and environmental best practices to coworkers.

“Safety is a critical element in everything we do,” explained Don Bugh, one of three leadership team representatives on the Council. “Adequate training, appropriate equipment, knowing what to do when something happens . . . all are vital to maintaining a safe work environment.” Chris Poe and Gene Buth are the other representatives from the leadership team.

The Council includes employees from across the Institute, including a number of urban office representatives. TTI Safety Officer Holly Crenshaw will serve as chair of the Council. The Council had its first meeting on Thursday, October 25.

8. TRB Best Paper Award for TTI

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) has notified the co-authors of a TTI research paper they are the recipients of the D. Grant Mickle Award, which is given each year for the best paper in the area of operations and maintenance. The paper is entitled “License Plate and Telephone Numbers in Changeable Message Sign Amber Alert Messages.”

Conrad Dudek, Steve Schrock and Brooke Ullman will be honored during the TRB 87th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., January 14. In response to the news of the award, Director Dennis Christiansen said, “This reflects so well on the quality of our work and our researchers. Thank you for making all of us look good.”

Read more about TRB Mickle Award:

Read more about TRB Mickle Award:
9. Heckmann Highlights Transportation Funding Solutions

The monumental task of funding Texas transportation projects was the seminar topic presented by Governor’s Deputy Chief of Staff Kris Heckmann to Texas A&M University civil engineering students on October 10. Heckmann, who has worked for Governor Rick Perry since 2001, is a member of the TTI Advisory Council. About his role as deputy chief of staff for Governor Rick Perry, he told the graduate students, “I help identify problems, create solutions and get them implemented.”

Heckmann described how Texas’ roads have not kept up with the state’s 20 percent population growth each decade since the end of World War II. He blamed the lack of funding for transportation projects on the failure to raise the state’s gasoline taxes. He spent much of his time detailing public-private partnerships, typically in the form of Comprehensive Development Agreements (CDAs), as the best choice to fund road projects.

The deputy chief of staff told students that CDAs shift the financial risks of funding road projects from the state to private companies. “They (private companies) put up all the money and they are responsible for maintenance. In exchange, they get to keep the majority of toll revenue.” Heckmann predicted that all roads built in Texas after 2010 will be toll roads constructed under CDAs.

Heckmann spent much of his time answering questions about the Trans-Texas Corridor–35 (TTC-35) project, a 600-mile stretch of roadway paralleling Interstate 35 from north of Dallas to the Mexico border. Heckmann told the students that the environmental study for the project is half-way complete, with another 1.5 years left. “Construction is scheduled to begin in 2009, and it should take about 5 years to build.”

Public-private partnerships for road construction were new in the United States when Texas suggested them in 2003. Since then, Heckmann said, several other states are using them or have plans for them in the future.

Heckmann’s presentation was part of a series of topics related to transportation issues for Associate Professor Gene Hawkins’ CVEN 681 class.

View TxDOT transportation website: http://www.keeptexasmoving.com/
10. Experts Tackle Deer-Vehicle Crash Problem

In the continuing effort to reduce the number of collisions between deer and vehicles, a symposium—headed up by the director of the Deer-Vehicle Crash Information Center (DVCIR) at TTI, Keith Knapp—was held at the New York State Department of Transportation in Schenectady on October 29.

Nationwide there are an estimated one million deer-vehicle crashes every year, which account for about $1 billion in damage.

The speakers for the symposium included Knapp, Mary Gray of the Federal Highway Administration, Patricia White of the Defenders of Wildlife, Patricia Cramer of Utah State University, Marcel Huijser of the Western Transportation Institute and David Jared of the Georgia Department of Transportation.

In addition to the speakers, members of the DVCIR Center Pooled Fund Project attended the symposium. The pooled fund is made up of representatives from the Federal Highway Administration and eight departments of transportation (DOTs) who have contributed funds for implementing research projects aimed at reducing the number of deer-vehicle crashes. Members include Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Texas and Wisconsin. The Federal Highway Administration’s Office of Natural and Human Environment is the lead agency for the pooled fund.

In addition to his duties as director of the DVCIR, Knapp maintains a website that is a clearinghouse of information dedicated to the problem.

Visit website: http://www.deercrash.com/

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11. TTI Day Site Viewed by Committee

On October 24, members of the TTI Day Committee were treated to a tour of the new Brazos County Exposition Complex, which is the site for the 2008 TTI Day on April 29. The complex marked its official opening during an open house on November 1.

“Our exhibit hall will provide TTI an additional 8,000 square feet over the Brazos Center,” said Lora Chapman, scheduling coordinator for the Brazos County Exposition Complex. “I think you will be a bit more comfortable with the space and new surroundings, and we are very pleased to have you here.”

The Exposition Complex is located on Leonard Road, east of Highway 47.

Visit Expo website:

http://www.brazoscountyexpo.com/

12. Work Zone Safety Conference Showcases Website

Every year, approximately 1,000 people die from crashes in work zones across the country. That’s why the National Traffic Management and Work Zone Safety Conference held October 9–12 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, was so important. The conference gave national transportation leaders a chance to connect with representatives from all levels of government and private industry.

One tool to help combat the danger in work zones is the redesigned website from the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse, which was unveiled at the conference. The new design and enhanced content combine all the data collected since the clearinghouse was developed nine years ago.

The new clearinghouse website is maintained by TTI Research Librarian Hong Yu and was created as a joint effort between TTI’s Communications Group, Network and Information Systems Group, and Work Zone and Dynamic Signs Program, along with the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.
13. 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.

Roads as resources (The Tribune-Democrat) Oct. 26
Red-light camera revenue (Houston Chronicle) Oct. 26
Books-on-tape benefiting from congestion (Atlanta Journal-Constitution) Oct. 18
Maryland congestion costs (WJZ-TV) Oct. 18
Motorists changing driving habits (Seattle Times) Oct. 15
Numbers and percentages (Seacoast Online) Oct. 7
East Texas transportation plan (Longview News-Journal) Oct. 5
Driving on highway shoulders to ease congestion (NC Times) Oct. 5
Parental influence on teen drivers (The Columbus Dispatch) Oct. 2
Scanning HOT lanes (Washington Post) Oct. 1

14. Blood Drive Attracts New Faces

There were 14 new donors for TTI’s latest blood drive
conducted by the Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center on October 23. One of the newcomers was Senior Administrative Coordinator Becca Simons, and it changed her life.

“I had never given blood before and finally talked myself into it,” Simons said. “It was not nearly as bad as I thought it might be.” Within 48 hours, Simons got word that her 17-month-old nephew in Missouri had to be hospitalized with a serious virus that was attacking his immune system. “They thought he would need a platelet transfusion.” It turns out, the transfusion was not necessary, but it made Simons realize how important blood donation is.

“Almost immediately after giving blood, my entire family was blessed. I will never miss another opportunity to donate,” Simons said.

Simons was one of 35 people who gave the “gift of life.” TTI’s next drive is tentatively scheduled for February 20.

15. Editor’s Corner: Mixing Microsoft Word® 2003 with 2007

The upgrade to Microsoft Word 2007 is now available, and test use is underway throughout TTI. Network and Information Systems expects to roll out conversion agencywide by summer 2008. In addition to the test sites, some staff members have fully upgraded to the new version of Microsoft Office.

For personnel who regularly use Word to write reports and develop other publications, the transition period from Word 2003 to Word 2007 holds potential pitfalls. Editors are learning to work with 2007 files for electronic edits and have discovered some tips for avoiding problems during the changeover that might help you when working with your document files.
Opening 2007 files in 2003


Saving 2007 files as 2003 files

If you're the one with the 2007 version, you can save a file as a 2003 file for someone else by using the Save As function of your menu. Just as when opening a 2007 file in 2003, new features of 2007 software will be lost when you Save As an earlier version. Word 2007 has a compatibility mode and a compatibility checker that you can invoke before creating a file to ensure you don’t use features of the new program that are incompatible with earlier versions.

Keeping communication lines open

To avoid file problems during transition between versions, keep an open dialog with coauthors, staff, reviewers and others who will be using your file. Be sure all users know what version was used for the original and what trek the file has taken since origination. If the 2007 features are integral to the file, alert users to the need to maintain the file as a 2007 version. Manually transferring changes from a 2003-saved version of the file to the original 2007 file will retain them and prevent damage to the file.

Using Word 2007 in combination with other programs, such as converting to portable document format files using Adobe® Acrobat, is bound to cause some interesting results until software manufacturers catch up with each other. MS Office 2007 promises to provide some intriguing advances for users, including expanded file navigation and graphic capabilities. Until it becomes the standard, however, keeping communication lines open among users will help avoid a few headaches of conversion.

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

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

**Nov. 7**—Support Staff Retreat

**Nov. 6-8**—RMC Meetings, San Antonio

**Nov. 22-23**—Thanksgiving Holiday

**Nov. 16**—St. Stats Information Seminar
Room 217 CE/TTI Building
8:30 – 9:30 a.m.

**Nov. 20**—St. Stats Information Seminar
Room 102 Gilchrist
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

**Dec. 24-Jan. 1**—Christmas, New Year’s Day Holidays

**Jan. 13-17**—2008 TRB 87th Annual Meeting
Washington, D.C.

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