



# TEXAS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FACTS AND ISSUES

A Study by the League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund

## INTRODUCTION

The League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) adopted a study of Public Transportation in Texas at the 2004 LWV-TX convention. Transportation has been an important issue in Texas since the first settlers moved across the territory. Recent contemplated changes to the infrastructure and funding methods have given rise to diverse views.

### The scope of the study is to review and evaluate:

- Current public transportation systems
- Future needs
- Funding availability
- Community resources and support

**Focus:** Impacts of public transportation on air quality, land use and social indicators and the need for regional public transportation networks.

The federal government establishes planning and funding guidelines for transportation facilities throughout the U.S. This study concentrates on state and regional involvement in planning and funding.

**Demographics:** As shown in the tables below, U.S. Census Bureau population projections released in April 2005 indicate that Texas' transportation challenges will continue at least through 2030. By 2027, Hispanics are expected to displace Anglos as Texas' majority population group.

Total Population

<b>U.S.</b>	2000	281,421,906
	2030	363,584,435
	Change	82,162,529
	% Change	29.2%

<b>Texas</b>	2000	20,851,820
	2030	33,317,744
	Change	12,465,924
	% Change	59.8%

Population 65+

<b>U.S.</b>	2000	34,991,753
	2030	71,453,471
	Change	36,461,718
	% Change	104.2%

<b>Texas</b>	2000	2,072,532
	2030	5,186,185
	Change	3,113,653
	% Change	150.2%

As shown in the following table, senior citizens who do not drive are more likely to stay at home if they live in Texas than if they live in California.

Driving among 65 and Over Population		
	CA	TX
Non-Drivers 65+ Staying Home	46%	66%
Pct of 65+ who are non-drivers	22%	16%
Non-Driver 65+ Population (2000)	782,932	339,048

Source: 2001 National Household Transportation Survey.

According to the 2001 National Household Transportation Survey (NHTS), households with an annual income of less than \$25,000 are almost nine times as likely to be a zero-vehicle household than households with incomes greater than \$25,000.

The 2003 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Consumer Expenditure Survey, found households across the nation spent an average of 19.1 % of their income on transportation, unchanged from 2002. Houston led the nation's major metropolitan areas in percentage of income spent on transportation at 20.9. Dallas-Fort Worth was in 8<sup>th</sup> place at 19.7 %. If Houston households had spent the national average 19.1 % of their income on transportation, they would have saved \$1.2 billion. Those statistics were based upon average gasoline prices of \$1.60 per gallon compared with the current \$2.00-plus-price. As a footnote, the gasoline price increases between 2003 and 2004 are estimated to have cost Texas' consumers over \$3.2 billion.

According to the 2003 BLS survey, the automobile remains the dominant mode of transportation to and from work even in major metropolitan areas with highly developed subway, rail, and bus service. The New York Metro area had the lowest percentage of auto use to work at 69%. Chicago was second at 84%. Houston was at 94% and Dallas-Fort Worth at 96%. The U.S. average was 91%.

In her keynote speech at the League of Women Voters of Texas Environmental Awards Luncheon on April 17, 2004, Ginger Goodin from the Texas Transportation Institute presented a snapshot of how we travel in Texas. Goodin said, "based on U.S. Census data for 2000, three out of four Texas workers drove alone to work. The one out of four workers who did not drive alone, carpooled for the most part. (Texas has among the highest carpooling rate in the country.) Still only two percent of Texas workers used public transportation, two percent walked, one percent biked, and nearly three percent worked at home.

While use of public transportation has increased over time as population has increased, the percentage of transit users out of overall travelers has declined. The average travel time to work in Texas is 25 minutes, and that has been gradually increasing. We are also seeing fewer people working in central cities in 2000 than in 1990, with jobs moving to suburban and outlying areas.”

### **Texas Department of Transportation History**

In 1917, the Texas Legislature established the Texas Highway Department for the purpose of administering federal funds for highway construction and maintenance. In 1975, it was merged with the Texas Mass Transportation Commission and renamed the State Department of Highways and Mass Transportation. In 1991, the legislature combined the State Department of Highways and Mass Transportation, the Department of Aviation, and the Texas Motor Vehicle Commission to establish the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The state’s 254 counties are grouped into 25 geographical districts, each with a district office. The district offices implement the state transportation plans.

### **The Texas Transportation Commission**

The governor, with the advice and consent of the senate, appoints the five-member Texas Transportation Commission. This commission governs the Texas Department of Transportation. The commissioners’ six-year terms are staggered so that an appointment is generally made every two years. The governor designates the chair.

### **The Planning Process**

TxDOT’s 25 districts select most of the projects involving local roads or improvements to existing highways based upon the transportation plans prepared by the 25 Council of Governments (COGs) or Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), with input from local elected officials and public hearings.

The Texas Transportation Commission selects major projects that improve mobility and/or safety as a part of the Unified Transportation Program, a 10-year statewide plan for transportation project development. Projects compete statewide for limited funding. Each project must follow three authorization stages: planning, development, and construction. Projects are selected up to four years in advance.

Public comment and input is required by federal regulations for all projects funded totally or in part with federal funds. Texas also requires public input during all stages of the planning process. Getting a project from the idea stage to implementation requires many steps.

1. Proposal - Anyone can suggest a project to the local transportation planning agency.
2. Benefit - Local transportation planners and engineers determine if the project will benefit the community and/or the region.
3. Sponsors include appropriate agencies such as county or

municipal governments; TxDOT; COGs; transit agencies; chambers of commerce; and private, non-profit, or civic groups.

4. Priorities - Sponsors usually prioritize projects to meet their particular goals.

5. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) drafted by the respective COG or MPO contains the plans, projects, programs, and policies to improve mobility and demonstrate conformity with federal air quality goals.

6. The MTP is presented to the public for review and then adopted by the regional transportation council.

7. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the 3-year implementation plan that includes the highest priority projects in the MTP. The TIP must be evaluated to make certain each project meets federal and local air quality standards.

8. The TIP is released for public review and comment and then is adopted by the regional transportation council.

9. The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is a combination of the TIPs from around the state. The Texas Transportation Commission, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration must approve it.

10. Implementation - Project sponsors work with TxDOT to design projects and acquire right-of-way and construction begins.

### **Statewide Coordination of Public Transportation**

The 78th Texas legislative session (2003) enacted Article 13 of House Bill 3588. This law calls for statewide coordination of public transportation to improve the delivery of transportation services, generate efficiencies in operation, increase levels of service, encourage cooperation and coordination, and develop a regional plan. A TxDOT Commissioner formed the Regional Planning and Public Transportation Study Group to oversee the coordination process.

The group has twenty-five (25) members: five from COGs or MPOs; six, from TxDOT; two from human health/workforce services; five from transit providers; one from local government; one from a nonprofit; two from the Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC); and three border officials. Michael Morris, Transportation Director of the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), is chair of the group.

After determining recommendations, the group held a kickoff conference in Austin on June 14, 2005, to include grassroots participation in the process. Staff from some of the 24 Texas COGs and city officials attended along with representatives from private and public transit services, workforce groups, health and human service organizations, and community groups. Participants heard a review of the study group activities and learned about transportation services that offer examples of increased efficiency. At the end of the event, participants were directed to take the next steps in the process by meeting in their regions to devise plans for presentation at the state level in October. Recommendations for implementation including policy changes, funding sources, and legislative action, will be considered at that time.

## System Size

TxDOT maintained 79,535 centerline miles in 2005. Centerline miles are miles traveled in a one-way direction regardless of the number of lanes in a roadway.

Type	Centerline Miles
Interstate Highways	3,233
U.S. Highways	12,102
State Highways	16,199
Farm or Ranch to Market Rds	40,985
Frontage roads	6,677
Park roads	339
Total	79,535

There are 61 % more cars on Texas roads today than in 1980. The average daily vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on Texas maintained highways are 449.5 million miles. The average VMT on all roadways in the state are 597.8 million miles. In 2005, public transportation systems in Texas operated over 7,500 buses and vans for public transportation. In 2002 (the latest statistics available), Texas had two of the worst traffic bottlenecks in the U.S., both in Houston. Number 2 in the nation is the intersection of Interstate 610 and I-10, representing 25,181 annual hours of delay. The twentieth worst bottleneck is I-45 (Gulf Freeway) at Highway 59 with an estimated 13,944 annual hours of delay.

## TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE

*“You can start with land use, or you can start with transportation; in either case the basic feedback leads inevitably to a hierarchy of central places and transportation links connecting them.”* (Moore and Thorsnes, 1994)

Although a number of state departments of transportation address the link between transportation systems (roads, highways, transit—bus and rail, bike trails, sidewalks, railroads), land use and the interactive effect, neither the Texas Department of Transportation in its Strategic Plan ([www.dot.state.tx.us](http://www.dot.state.tx.us)) nor the report of the Transportation Committee of the Texas Governor’s Business Council (GBC) ([www.texasgbc.org](http://www.texasgbc.org)) mention land use. The focus of both is on *mobility* and its relationship to economic growth and development.

**The Transportation Committee of GBC** assessed the transportation system (both supply and demand), the cost to meet mobility goals, and the benefits of reaching mobility goals. They used such measures as lane miles on the highways, travel time index, increase in population, vehicles registered, miles driven, and mode choices (drive alone, carpool, public transportation, walk, work at home). Even though “miles driven” has a relationship to land use since it reflects the location of homes and places of work, that relationship is not explored. Their following recommendations primarily focus on mobility and funding:

- Shift focus of construction and funding to urban areas
- Reduce travel time
- Increase collaboration between TxDOT and local planning groups

- Base funding on need and reward local funding efforts
- Use tolls, bonds, and other funding methods in addition to current tax sources since taxes are based on units, not price, and thus do not respond to inflation.

The **TxDOT Strategic Plan** identifies five major areas of operation: Plan it; Build it; Use it; Maintain it; Manage it. Goals are: reliable mobility, improved safety, system preservation, accelerated project delivery, economic vitality

The first goal (reliable mobility) and the last (economic vitality) address the societal needs of economic growth and development. The effects of these projects on the communities in which they are built, used, and maintained are not included in the Strategic Plan. However it may be assumed that some societal needs are addressed locally prior to the overall plan being approved by the respective city councils and forwarded to COGs to be included in the regional plan.

Other states, as well as many academics, factor land use management into transportation plans, either by rule or by incentive, to produce the effect of reduction in automobile use with benefits seen in reduced congestion (greater mobility), environmental quality, and perhaps most important—quality of place.

## SOURCES FOR LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

**Paul Waddell at the University of Washington** has developed a simulation program, *Modeling Urban Development for Land Use, Transportation and Environmental Planning* ([www.urbansim.org/papers](http://www.urbansim.org/papers)). He begins, “The relationship between land use, transportation, and the environment is at the heart of growth management. The emerging concern that construction of new suburban highways induces additional travel, vehicle emissions, and land development, making it impossible to ‘build our way out’ of congestion, has reshaped the policy context for metropolitan transportation planning.”

**The Washington Department of Transportation** ([www.wsdot.wa.gov/mobility](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/mobility)) recognizes the concept and provides aid in decision making for urban transportation investments: “Research has shown that land use and urban design characteristics can influence how people travel, and land use strategies have generated interest as one important way to meet or support transportation objectives.”

The Washington study identifies six elements of transportation efficient development:

- Compact development
- Mixed use development
- A fine-grained street network
- A pedestrian friendly environment
- Limited parking
- Affordable housing

**The New Hampshire Department of Transportation** has issued a “How to . . .” series that includes “How to Link Land Use and Transportation Planning.” ([www.strafford.org](http://www.strafford.org)) The guidelines urge consideration of land use and transportation issues *together* pointing out that “improved integration of land use and transportation planning can reduce the need for highway construction and maintain the quality of our communities.”

It includes, among other useful information, a diagram illustrating the Land Use-Transportation Cycle: land use change—increased traffic generation—increased traffic conflicts—deterioration in level of service—roadway improvement—increased accessibility—increased land value—land use change—and so on. The cycle continues until it encounters physical and/or economic limits.

**The Transportation and Land Use Coalition** ([www.transcoalition.org](http://www.transcoalition.org)) has developed a Livable Communities Platform to address current crises in the East Bay area of California: traffic congestion and lack of affordable housing. The Coalition proposes a number of strategies, including using the land around transit centers wisely—creating transit villages of homes, shops, and offices near transit stations. The Coalition asserts that the “families who live near BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) or near frequent transit are five times more likely to use transit and own fewer vehicles, with many saving \$5,000 per year or more on transportation costs.” A goal of the strategic plan is nothing less than changing the framework for growth.

**The Urban Land Institute** resident fellow, Robert Dunphy, et al, has recently published *Development Around Transit* ([www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org)), a collection of “proven strategies for dealing with the special considerations involved in developing vibrant, attractive transit districts that can revitalize neighborhoods . . .”

Land use decisions affect transportation systems; transportation systems decisions affect land use. Many would say that transportation infrastructure is the primary influence in the shape of a city. The creation of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950’s coupled with VA and FHA low interest mortgages enabled and encouraged suburban sprawl and the draining of retail from central cities to the suburbs, hastening the deterioration of the urban core in many cities. A comprehensive, integrated approach to transportation and land use planning could not only improve mobility but also affect the maintenance of the urban tax base, encourage economic development and support the desire for enhanced quality of place and of life.

A relatively new concept in transportation planning is consumer-based transportation systems. The concept is to plan transportation systems to meet the needs of individual consumers rather than building fixed systems that force consumers to fit their lifestyles around the transportation system. Consumer-based systems require various modes of transportation to be compat-

ible by focusing on a consumer’s entire trip from home to final destination creating a seamless transportation system.

The real estate market appears to be supporting mass-transit. A new study by Boston-based real estate advisory firm Richards Barry Joyce and Partners, as quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, found that office vacancy rates near a suburban mass-transit station are well below the average. According to the National Association of Realtors, also quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, homes are selling for a premium in some locations along proposed routes for two ambitious mass transportation projects in the Seattle area.

Obviously, the private automobile is the most flexible mode of travel when it isn’t bogged down in traffic. Stringent land use controls run counter to the American ideal of unfettered property rights. But some argue that the public good must always be weighed against individual rights.

#### **AIR QUALITY**

The 79<sup>th</sup> Legislature (2005) passed no significant clean-air legislation, although the Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, Beaumont-Port Arthur, and San Antonio Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) are categorized as non-attainment areas under the new eight-hour ozone criteria. El Paso County is a non-attainment area for carbon monoxide and PM-10 (particulate matter).

The enactment of Texas Emissions Reduction Program (TERP) in 2001 was hailed as a model for the nation and was crucial to gaining Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval for State Implementation Plans (SIPs) in Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston-Galveston Areas. TERP is an economic incentive program to reduce air pollution instead of punishing polluters. It has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to help companies replace older, dirtier diesel-powered construction equipment and funded grants to help low-income motorists repair vehicles that fail the annual emissions test required in non-attainment areas of the state. But in a compromise, the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislature (2005) allowed unrestricted use of heavy construction equipment during the summer ozone season and did not impose a requirement for faster replacement of old high-polluting diesel engines. Off-road equipment like bulldozers and cranes are reported to produce roughly 25% of smog-forming emissions in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

#### **TRANSPORTATION FUNDING**

“Currently Texans pay more than \$11 billion annually for road and transit projects throughout the state. These payments come in the form of state and federal fuel taxes, vehicle title and registration fees, sales taxes, transit fares, and tolls to name just a few.” (*Texas Journey* May/June 2005, page 45). Senate Bill 1713 in the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislature authorized the creation of a nine-member commission, including four legislators, to study and report to the legislature on how Texans pay for roads. Under

the current system, 50% of all state appropriated funds for transit are allocated to rural transit districts and the remaining 50% to urban transit districts.

Highway Funding The Texas gasoline tax on motor and diesel fuels of \$0.20 per gallon was the median for state gasoline taxes in 2002 (latest data available). Some states tax motor and diesel fuels at different rates, but Texas does not. Seventy-five percent (75%) of motor fuels tax makes up the State Highway Fund; 25% of the state fuels tax is allocated to the Available School Fund pursuant to a 1923 provision in the Texas Constitution. House Bill 2702 passed by the 79<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature did not authorize any increase to the gasoline tax thus confirming that new and expanded highways will have tolls on the added highway lanes. Some highways will have new toll lanes and existing free lanes. Current free roads can be made toll roads by a public vote. These roads would be called “conversion roads.” Under HB 2702, TxDOT will not be able to declare roads currently under construction as toll roads...with some exceptions.

The pass-through “toll” really isn’t a toll at all, say officials. It is a fee the state pays per vehicle or per VMT to local governments or local entities that have taken on the burden of financing road improvements. Individual motorists do not pay a toll for using the roadway. Instead, the charge for use of the road is “passed through” to the state to enable local officials to fund construction sooner rather than waiting years to obtain state highway funds. TxDOT has approved two pass-through projects, one in Montgomery County north of Houston and the most recent one in Weatherford west of Fort Worth.

Usage Taxes for Commercial Vehicles - Some Americans feel that heavy commercial trucks passing through Texas should pay increased highway user taxes to assist in paying for the additional maintenance required on the highway system. Truckers contend they already pay for their road usage through sales and excise fuel taxes and tolls.

Federal Highway Trust Fund – The federal motor fuel tax (highway user tax) is \$0.183 cents per gallon on gasoline and \$0.243 cents per gallon on diesel fuel. The producer or importer of the product pays it to the Internal Revenue Service. Texas receives \$0.905 cents for each dollar of federal fuels taxes collected in the state. Texas policy makers want to see this share increased to parity of \$1.00. The U.S. Congress periodically extends the authorizing act. The next expiration date is September 30, 2005.

Federal Transportation Funding for Disadvantaged Populations The Government Accounting Office (GAO) study, released in June 2003, identified 62 federal programs that fund transportation services to populations that are transportation disadvantaged, the majority of which are funded by four cabinet departments. The GAO study found that transportation resources for the elderly, disabled, and other groups were often not coordi-

nated, leading to duplication of services. In Texas, the 78<sup>th</sup> Legislature (2003) authorized all transportation programs for disadvantaged populations to be combined under TxDOT in an effort to reduce duplication. Case management remains with the original human services agencies.

Privately Funded Toll Roads (Trans-Texas Corridor Plan). The 78<sup>th</sup> Legislature (2003) authorized the largest transportation project in Texas to be funded through private developer sources. The Trans-Texas Corridor will be a superhighway that will include passenger vehicles and trucks, passenger bullet trains, commuter trains, pipelines and electrical towers as well as support facilities such as gas stations, restaurants, toll collection centers, and some maintenance facilities, pumping stations, etc. The final plans have not been developed. The project is not a single corridor, but a transportation system that includes the following corridors:

- I-10 from El Paso to Orange
- I-45 from Dallas-Fort Worth to Houston
- I-69 (proposed) from Texarkana to Houston to Laredo.
- I 35-69-37 (proposed) from Denison to the Rio Grande Valley

TxDOT has signed a Comprehensive Development Agreement (CDA) with Cintra of Spain and Zachry Construction Corporation of San Antonio to develop plans for the first 600 miles of the corridor that will run between the Dallas and San Antonio areas. The exact route has not been determined, but initial plans put it 30 to 50 miles east of I-35. Construction of the 316-mile, \$17.2 billion toll road is scheduled to begin in 2007 and completed in 2015. The first public hearings on the I-69 corridor plan are scheduled for the fall of 2005. Completion of the total corridor plan is expected to take more than 50 years.

Opponents of the corridor point to the failure of the private, developer-owned road, the Camino Columbia, which connects I-35 and the Columbia Solidarity Bridge, north of Laredo. Even though traffic in this area had rapidly grown from 17,000 to 41,000 vehicles per day, after the toll road opened in October 2000, it carried less than 15% of the traffic anticipated. The operating company declared bankruptcy and on January 6, 2004, the Camino Columbia was auctioned on the Webb County Court-house steps.

According to [www.corridorwatch.org](http://www.corridorwatch.org), at least 29 counties have adopted formal resolutions in opposition to the corridor, also known as “TTC-35.” Other opponents include the Texas Farm Bureau, environmentalists, and various local politicians who question the need, sources of funding, and proposed locations of the corridors. Governor Perry introduced the plan as an innovative, long-term solution to highway congestion along our interstate highways.

Cintra builds and operates toll roads in Toronto and Chicago. Those contracts gave Cintra the authority to raise the tolls without government approval. Mike Colle, a Member of Parliament

in Toronto was quoted in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, “My advice is to make sure motorists in Texas are protected against extraordinary tolling, and at least have input. I hope you don’t follow our lead.” The fine points of the Texas contract are not available at this time for public study because the contract is still under negotiation.

State transportation planners using the following guiding principles developed the Trans-Texas Corridor concept:

- Efficient, reliable transportation is essential to public safety, economic vitality and quality of life.
- Transportation improvements in Texas must be completed faster.
- The planning and decision-making process must be open, with frequent and ongoing opportunities for public input.
- Separate lanes for cars and large trucks will improve safety and relieve congestion.
- Transportation routes for hazardous materials must avoid population centers whenever possible.
- Rail must play a more prominent role in improving mobility and safety in Texas.
- The Trans-Texas Corridor will be built in phases as transportation demands warrant.
- Government does not have all the answers to the transportation challenges facing Texas and it needs the innovation of the private sector.
- Where feasible, the Trans-Texas Corridor should use existing infrastructure by aligning with existing highways, railways and utility corridors.
- Local officials should help determine how communities access the Trans-Texas Corridor.
- Trans-Texas Corridor planners must consider ways to minimize right-of-way needs.
- People who use the Trans-Texas Corridor must be treated as customers. State officials and contractors must work in concert with local entities to provide high-quality service to these customers.
- The Trans-Texas Corridor must be built with public/private partnerships in order to minimize costs to taxpayers.

The Texas Transportation Commission appointed 22 persons to the Trans-Texas Corridor Citizens Advisory Committee that had its first meeting May 25, 2005. This “watchdog” committee has both opponents and proponents of the corridor plan, but no legal authority.

### Local Contributions to Transportation Funding

Municipal and county governments propose and develop capital bond projects to fund long-term infrastructure in their areas. The funds are used to provide a required match to state and federal funds and to meet local infrastructure needs.

### REGIONAL RAIL

Many urban areas around the state are exploring regional rail

service to combat road congestion, improve air quality, and foster economic development. Impediments include lack of taxing authority, governance, and prioritization of service areas.

**The Dallas-Fort Worth area** has two existing transit systems (DART and The T) and a newly created Denton County Transportation Authority. *Dallas Morning News* columnist Henry Tatum pinpointed the challenge in comments he made September 24, 2003. “Every city in this region that agrees to work with other cities to resolve problems or address recognized needs will have to give up something. Some cities may be asked to revise their economic development strategies so they will have a funding source available for mass transit. Others may have to commit tax dollars now for projects that might not see financial returns for years. And still others might have to surrender a certain amount of autonomy to a regional authority.”

Area leaders agreed to a proposed \$3.5 billion, 260-mile commuter rail blueprint for Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Johnson, and Tarrant Counties that called for an increase in sales tax of half of a percentage point. Leaders had considered other possible funding sources including a regional gas tax increase or expansion of the motor vehicle sales tax. The proposed sales tax increase, however, was deemed the most workable. The 79<sup>th</sup> Legislature disagreed, preferring to reserve any increase in the sales tax percentage to fund the state’s contribution to public schools.

**The Houston area** is moving ahead with additional commuter rail lines. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has granted formal approval to METRO to begin preliminary engineering on the north and southeast corridor rail extensions. The action represents a major step toward qualifying the two rail lines for federal funding. When preliminary engineering is complete, METRO will ask the FTA for approval to complete design of the rail extensions and begin negotiations for a full funding grant agreement for the projects. The north and southeast Corridor light rail projects are components of the METRO Solutions Transit System Plan approved by voters in November 2003.

The SMART Starter Line is a \$10 - \$11 million light-rail project connecting the **El Paso-Juarez** border bridges with downtown El Paso. The Starter Line will be planned in a manner providing future technology flexibility and expandability as the first phase of a greater strategy for light rail service to cultural, educational, medical, financial, residential, and business centers of the greater El Paso metro area.

While it remains off the air quality non-attainment listing and has none of the 25 worst national bottlenecks, the **Austin Area** suffers from major traffic congestion, especially where I-35 crosses the Colorado River. Capital Metro, the local transit provider, has received voter approval to develop a 20-mile long commuter rail route on freight rail lines that it owns. Funding utilizes part of the \$.01 sales tax awarded to Capital Metro and

available federal funds. The recently approved Capital Area MPO 2030 Plan contains five proposed toll roads. Existing traffic lanes will not be tolled.

**Austin-San Antonio** and their suburbs have formed a rail district that is holding discussions with the Union Pacific Railroad about the use of their right of way. Plans are to build a new freight rail line around Austin and San Antonio, freeing up the existing rail line for commuter rail.

**High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes (HOV)** are designated lanes in existing roadways for the exclusive use of vehicles with two or more passengers to encourage drivers to carpool. However, a Texas Transportation Institute study reported that on the Dallas area LBJ Freeway the crash rate increased 41% after the HOV lanes were completed. I-35E in the Dallas area had an increase in crashes of 56%. The crashes seemed to be related to the lack of barriers between the HOV lanes and the other lanes of traffic. TxDOT recommends the construction of permanent barriers between HOV lanes and other lanes of traffic that should reduce crashes.

**Bus Service** is the cheapest, most efficient way of serving low-density residential areas with public transportation. However, service must be frequent and traffic congestion high to induce consumers to favor the bus over the private automobile. Bus rapid transit is a new concept that allows buses to travel within a city on special bus-only lanes. Capital Metro in Austin and the T in Fort Worth are planning bus rapid transit lines.

**Inter-City Bus Service** While most cities in Texas are connected with commercial bus service, Greyhound Lines, Inc., (GLI) has eliminated services to ten cities in Texas: Canton, Ennis, Gladewater, Hempstead, Jefferson, Linden, Madisonville, and Marlin. While Dallas and Houston will continue to have Greyhound terminals, the Amtrak stations will no longer have Greyhound service.

**Smart Commute** is a new program in Fort Worth sponsored by the City of Fort Worth, banks, and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority (The T) that will make it easier for people to qualify for home loans if they buy or build near the bus lines in southeast Fort Worth, an area where the city wants to encourage redevelopment. The loan program requires a down payment as little as \$500. The T is offering a free one-year bus pass to qualified buyers.

## SUMMARY

Will the transportation systems throughout Texas be prepared to deal with the 33 million or more people anticipated to be Texans in 2030? That is the challenge.

## GLOSSARY

**Fine-grained street network** is a street pattern like a grid with many streets of varying carrying capacity serving an area with

many connections to collector streets and major thoroughfares. This kind of network disperses traffic. By contrast, a neighborhood street pattern that converges into one or two exits to larger, collector streets produces bottlenecks and traffic back-up at those few exit points—both in the neighborhood and on the larger street.

**Centerlines miles** are the distance from point A to point B with no consideration to the number of traffic lanes the road has.

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