

*House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
Washington, DC  
Tuesday, July 31, 2007  
Steve Simmons  
Deputy Executive Director  
Texas Department of Transportation*

***Introduction***

My name is Steve Simmons. I am the Deputy Executive Director of the Texas Department of Transportation. TxDOT and our 15,000 employees are responsible for maintaining nearly 80,000 miles of road and for supporting aviation, rail and public transportation across the state.

While our topic this morning is the “NAFTA Superhighway,” we have no such highway designated in Texas. We have Interstate 35 that is congested to the point of constant gridlock for some 300 miles between San Antonio and Dallas.

Shortly, I will discuss the methods in which we plan to build a multi-billion dollar parallel facility to this critical corridor. But first I would like to discuss the challenges we face in Texas with respect to the movement of freight.

### ***Freight Movement in Texas***

The United States' third largest trading partner is Mexico and Texas has always been the principal gateway for trade between the United States and Mexico. Today, our state's transportation system continues to be the single most important infrastructure link between the economies of the United States and Mexico.

The overwhelming majority of truck freight between the U.S. and Mexico is

carried on Texas highways. Bureau of Transportation Statistics data show that 83 percent of all truck freight through all ports of entry—representing more than 3 million truck units per year—uses Texas highways during some part of their journey.

That avalanche of freight traffic is concentrated on a handful of Texas highway corridors. Along the I-35 corridor, which is home to nearly half our state's population, our state's drivers share our roads with trucks hauling goods into the rest of the nation, and that constant convoy of trucks shows every sign of growing in coming years. The congestion, safety and maintenance issues created by the growing flow of trade cannot be ignored by our state.

The bottom line is that our state's portion of the national highway system plays a role that extends far beyond Texas. The endless flow of freight to and from our ports and our border with Mexico affects our state's drivers on a daily basis as they share their communities' roads with trucks bound for destinations elsewhere in our country. We have embraced that challenge, but we must respond to the demands it creates.

### ***The Trans-Texas Corridor***

The Texas Transportation Commission has established five goals for our state's transportation system. We are committed to reducing congestion, enhancing safety, expanding economic opportunity, improving air quality, and

increasing the value of our state's transportation assets.

In order to meet these goals we need to look beyond the traditional methods of delivering infrastructure. The Trans-Texas Corridor is an innovative transportation blueprint that will quicken evacuations, move the transportation of hazardous materials out of urban population centers, relieve congestion, reduce air pollution, and significantly improve opportunities for economic development.

Simply put, the private sector will compete for the right to finance new infrastructure in exchange for the right to collect some of the toll revenue. They bear all the financial risk. No one is

guaranteed a profit. TxDOT maintains oversight development of the project, speed limits, right of way acquisition, environmental clearance, and toll rates.

The two projects most likely to help us with the freight issues we are discussing here today are Trans-Texas Corridor 35 and I-69/Trans-Texas Corridor.

As I mentioned, the proposed TTC-35 corridor generally parallels I-35. The initial study area is approximately 600 miles long, extending from north of Dallas/Forth Worth to the border with Mexico.

Since spring 2004, TxDOT has held 171 public meetings to receive input on possible locations for this corridor. The

latest series of meetings was held in summer 2006, with more than 6,000 comments submitted. This phase of the environmental study will result in a preferred study area no more than 10 miles wide or a no-build option. We hope to have a final Environmental Impact Statement by the end of this calendar year for TTC-35.

No construction contracts have been awarded for TTC-35. In March 2005, TxDOT and Cintra-Zachry signed what is called a comprehensive development agreement for TTC-35 which authorizes a \$3.5 million planning effort.

Interstate 69 is a planned 1,600-mile national highway connecting Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee,

Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas. In Texas, I-69 will be developed under the Trans-Texas Corridor master plan.

The proposed I-69/TTC corridor extends from Texarkana/Shreveport to the Rio Grande Valley. The initial study area is roughly 650 miles long.

The environmental study for I-69/TTC began in early 2004, when TxDOT held public meetings to receive input on possible locations for this corridor. Another series of public meetings was conducted in the summer of 2005 to present the Recommended Reasonable Corridors and solicit additional public comments. The results of the environmental study will be presented in



a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Another series of public hearings to review and comment on the results of the initial study phase is expected this fall. To date, no contracts have been awarded for development or construction of I-69/TTC.

These new highways will go between and around our state's major population centers. Unlike I-10, I-35 and other major freeways in our state, TTC-35 and I-69/TTC are not designed to serve local commuters in San Antonio, Dallas-Fort Worth and other population centers.

### ***Myths about the Corridor***

In these respects and others, the TTC will differ from the Interstate system that has grown up around us, but I would like to

take a moment to dispel some of the myths about the Trans-Texas Corridor.

The Trans-Texas Corridor facilities will be owned by the State of Texas. Private companies, from the United States and abroad, may compete to finance, design, build, maintain and operate portions of the corridor, but ownership and control of the assets will remain in the state's hands.

The projects are being planned in the open with public participation. By the time we have identified a specific location for these highways, we will have conducted literally hundreds of public meetings, all under the close supervision of the federal government.

Our plans for TTC-35 call for a terminus just north of the Mexican border. We don't plan to build a new border crossing. That means any truck that chooses to use this new facility will enter at the same entry point that they use now and will be subject to the same scrutiny the federal government applies to them now. Our goal is give this freight traffic an alternative route away from our congested urban centers once they cross the border and clear various state and federal inspection facilities. These road plans pose no greater risk to our national security than any other highway. What is at risk is the personal security of millions of Texas commuters who currently have no other choice but to share the roads with these trucks as they pass through our metro areas.

## ***Conclusion***

These are significant changes and big plans, and we have already encountered skepticism and criticism. But I hope that you will agree with us that the need for new capacity through Texas to the rest of the country is undeniable.

I am a transportation engineer. I'll leave it up to the economics professors, and unions, and manufacturers, and legislators to determine whether international trade provides a net benefit for our nation. What I can tell you is the freight is here now and more is on the way. There is no doubt that new highway capacity is required to maintain our quality of life and the safety of the traveling public.

We cannot earmark Texas out of this deteriorating freight bottleneck. Nor will we call for an increase in the motor fuels tax large enough to meet these needs.

We ask for a partner - and a recognition that the old way of doing things is a threat to our air, our safety and our prosperity. Together, with your support, we can meet the growing mobility demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.