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## **NORTH REGION RIGHT OF WAY SECTION RECOGNIZED FOR INNOVATION, TEAMWORK**

TxDOT's Sheila Mills and the North Region Right of Way Section were recently recognized by the International Right of Way Association (IRWA), which ranked the ROW section's efforts on the IH-35 Corridor Expansion Project as one of its top 10 ROW projects of the year.

IRWA recognized the project's accomplishment in creating and utilizing innovative strategies aimed at facilitating teamwork. TxDOT's ROW professionals implemented new policies and processes to streamline the ROW procedure for the complex expansion project, which currently involves dealing with approximately 1,000 parcels of land, impacting businesses, farms and ranches, and residences. More than 40 ROW professionals from several different TxDOT districts (as well as land-acquisition consultants) have converged on Central Texas to assist in the project.

"This recognition is well deserved," states Waco District Engineer Richard Skopik. "Without Sheila and her staff's ingenuity and willingness to try new methods, the project would undoubtedly be slower, more cumbersome, and eminently more frustrating for everyone, especially the landowners and business owners affected by the I-35 expansion."

The ROW team's accomplishments will be recognized in the November/December issue of *Right of Way* magazine.

## **EMBRACING SOCIAL MEDIA @TXDOT**

Enter the world of social media — an innovative communication form that many folks still don't understand. But, that's changing and rapidly.

Strange though it is, countless businesses and organizations have embraced social media to reach audiences that no longer seek



## CALENDAR

**Oct. 24, 2011**

### **Bell County Business Community Meeting**

3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

CTCOG Building

2180 North Main St.

Belton, Texas 76513

**Oct. 25, 2011**

### **Public Groundbreaking for Section 5B (West-to-Abbott)**

10 a.m. near West

Featured Speaker: State Rep. Jim Pitts

Location TBD

Call Jodi Wheatley for details.

**Dec./Jan. 2012**

### **Future Business Community Meetings**

(details closer to the dates)

Dec./Jan. — Hill County

## LINKS

[My35.org](http://My35.org)

[TxDOT](http://TxDOT)

## CONTACT

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information in a traditional manner. TxDOT is one state agency that sees the benefits of bringing social media into the communications mix.

"It's the future of communications," explains Kelli Petras, TxDOT social media coordinator. "If the last few years have taught us anything, it's that social media is an effective way to reach thousands of Texans."

Motorists needing information on I-35 construction projects can go to [@I35Travel](#), a Twitter feed established to communicate traffic conditions and travel information along the corridor. TxDOT also uses Twitter feeds to share information on a number of the agency's outreach campaigns — Don't Drink and Drive, Click It or Ticket and Work Zone Awareness.

Each of the 25 TxDOT districts have Twitter feeds and share local information like traffic updates, lane closures, emergency information, public meetings and much more. They also re-tweet many of the messages that show up on TxDOT's statewide accounts, including [@TxDOT](#) and [@TxDOTAlert](#). **Facebook** and **YouTube** postings complement the department's tweets so audiences can access the information from several different venues.

"It's quick, it's instant," says Petras. "Travelers don't have to wait to get the information." Petras adds a note of caution, however — driving and social media don't mix. So, if you need I-35 or any travel information, practice the "know before you go" policy. Don't surf and drive.

Traditional media still plays a big role. The way we communicate may be changing, but traditional media is still needed for in-depth reporting and for complicated issues that can't be adequately explained in 140 characters or less. And both types of media — traditional and social — are enhanced by person-to-person communication through venues like TxDOT's monthly business meetings within the Waco District.

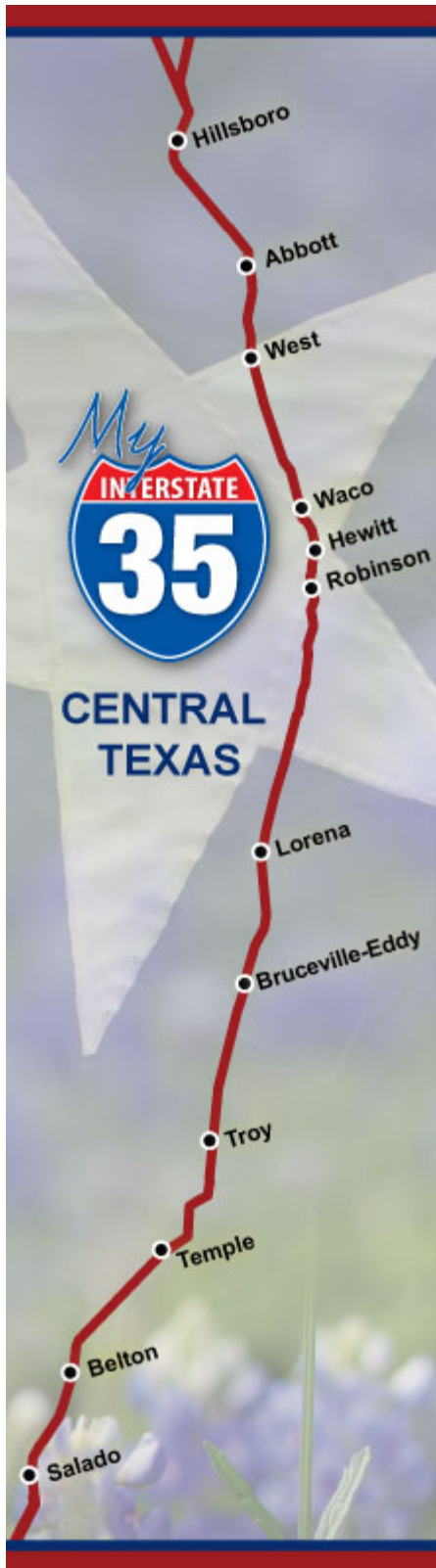
"TxDOT is certainly not giving up the traditional sources because there are still a lot of folks that read a newspaper. But, we want to cover our bases — include all venues — to reach all types of audiences," Petras says.

Social media is here to stay, and its role as an information source will continue to grow. It's new media, but it's also a perfect complement to traditional media.

## **PROTECTING OUR PAST A TXDOT PRIORITY**

President Harry Truman is credited with saying, "there is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know." Until they got involved in the I-35 expansion project, TxDOT Environmental Coordinator Mike Rhodes and Engineer Alisa Polansky weren't aware of all the eye-opening, historic riches along I-35.

Along the widening project, whether it's a plantation home built by a Texas pioneer, a newly discovered campsite made by Native Americans



when bison freely roamed the state, or a building designed by a famous architect, TxDOT is charged with preserving all things deemed historically significant. For some TxDOT employees like Rhodes, it's been a life-changing experience.

"I guess the way we think about it, we are required by law to make every effort to avoid impacts to our historic resources, but it's also the right thing to do," Rhodes says. "I personally have learned a great deal about the early days of Texas colonization, and it's been extremely gratifying finding out about the people and the way they lived years ago."

### Locating Properties with Historic Significance

In 1999, years before construction began on the I-35 widening project in the Waco District, cultural preservation efforts became a priority, thanks in part to federal legislation that was passed three decades earlier.

"The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] is the federal law that guides us," says Polansky. "The National Historic Preservation Act falls under the NEPA umbrella, and it is designed to protect historically significant buildings, ranches, archeological sites, individual homes and even entire neighborhoods and business districts."

In order to determine if the expansion project could possibly impact historic properties, TxDOT first needed to find them.

Locating the I-35 properties listed on the National Historic Register (and there are numerous sites in the Waco District that are on the list) was the easy part. However, if a property is not on the list but could be eligible based on its historical significance, it too will be afforded the same protection. Those properties were much harder to locate.

Among the criteria for listing, the property must be at least 50 years old and represent a specific event or pattern of events in history, be associated with a famous person, or have a significant design or artistic merit.

### Waco District Is Rich with History

In order to find those properties that could qualify, TxDOT conducted numerous public meetings during the design stage of the project and recruited local historians who had a wealth of information about their own communities. With their help in identifying potentially significant properties, information was presented to the Texas Historical Commission for final determination.

Waco District properties near I-35 either listed or deemed eligible for protection include:

- An entire city block of Troy's Main Street consisting of seven businesses.
- White-Aiken House north of Salado.

- Fowler House north of Salado.
- Robertson Plantation and Ranch (see the related story on this site in this issue).
- Earle-Napier-Kinnard House in Waco.
- First Street Cemetery of Waco.

Ironically, also deemed eligible for protection is the Waco TxDOT District Office complex, which was built in 1952 and is considered to be an early example of an industrial complex.

"In Troy's case, the commercial district was considered eligible because it reflects the feel of an early 20th century railroad town," Rhodes explains. "As a result, because the historic site is so close to the highway on the east side and the existing TxDOT right of way was so narrow through the town, we did have to remove two homes and two churches on the other side of the highway to make room for the project."

Another structure that was eligible for registry but had to be removed was a 1930 frontage road bridge over the Lampasas River north of Salado. There simply was no other option. However, TxDOT chronicled the bridge with archival quality photographs and original engineering drawings.

### **Painstaking Process**

It took years to first inventory all the properties along I-35 more than 50 years old, then investigate their historic value. It was a process that took longer as TxDOT employees actively sought individuals who possessed information about each of the candidates.

"With help from the public, we were able to validate the research that TxDOT historians uncovered," Rhodes explains. "Citizen input validated a lot of what we were finding, and we were able to uncover a lot more details about properties than we knew otherwise."

Personally, Rhodes says the process gave him a greater sense of connection to his community. "To put it mildly, the I-35 job has renewed my interest in Texas history."

## **HISTORY AND PROGRESS: THE ROBERTSON PLANTATION AND THE I-35 PROJECT**

Not long after beginning the extensive research required to plan the I-35 expansion through Bell County, TxDOT engineer Alisa Polansky read a historical marker along a property in Salado. Polansky started digging into the history of this hidden Texas treasure, known as the Robertson Plantation and Ranch. She soon found it "fascinating." After working closely with one of the last family members to live on the property, Mrs. Lucile Ambrose, Polansky and other TxDOT representatives were given a tour of the house.

"The property has features you just don't expect," Polansky says. She remembers an indoor well, and a huge dining room used by the original ancestral owner to have meetings with large groups of Native-American tribal leaders. "They preferred to stand along the walls of a room when they conferred with the landowner," she says. "They didn't like to sit in chairs."

Eventually, Polansky's research was turned over to TxDOT Environmental Coordinator Mike Rhodes, who also became intrigued by the property's history. Part of Rhodes' job was to work with TxDOT engineers to expand the highway while leaving the land and all that it means to the state intact. (As environmental coordinator, Rhodes is not only concerned with the department's impact on wildlife and natural resources, but also with protecting the state's historical assets.)

### **More Than a Historic Ranch**

Many Texans are already familiar with the Stagecoach Inn, a famous eatery and hotel along I-35 in Salado. Built decades ago on the site of a stagecoach stop along the Chisholm Trail, the Inn's roots go back to 1860. But just across the highway, and much less-known is the Robertson Plantation and Ranch: 850 acres brimming with historical significance. Without the ranch, or the family that owned it, Salado — and perhaps Texas itself — would be much different.

"It's true that the Robertson family is one of the main reasons why a big part of Texas was settled, and why Salado is what it is today," confirms Jim Bienski of the Salado Historical Society.

"I don't know of any other plantation in Texas that is still intact and owned by the same family," proudly says Sterling Ambrose, the great-great-grandson of Sterling Clack Robertson, who, among many other accomplishments, was one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence.

As an empresario whose land grant with Mexico covered a sixth of the state stretching from Austin to Dallas — 200 miles long and 100 miles wide — Robertson helped colonize Texas with 600 families. The Robertson Colony, as it was called, was second in size only to Stephen F. Austin's colony. Robertson was a vital figure in Texas history, commanding a company of Texas Rangers in 1836 and participating in the Battle of San Jacinto. He was also a member of the senate in the first Congress of the Republic of Texas.

It was Robertson's son, Elijah Sterling Clack Robertson, known as Colonel Robertson, who bought the property in the 1850s. He later donated 100 acres of land to the village of Salado.

"Colonel Robertson wanted his 12 children, both sons and daughters, to receive an education," says Cile Cowan, another Robertson descendent who has spent years diving into her family's rich history. "He made sure the proceeds from the sale of land he donated would be used to build

Salado College, the first non-denominational co-ed college in Texas." The college opened its doors in 1860.

Attracted by the rare opportunity of an education, pioneering families came from all over, and Salado flourished. "Many people are simply not aware of the Robertson Plantation and Ranch just across the highway and its connection to the town's beginnings," Cowan says.

The colonel spent years building the Robertson home. Consisting of 22 rooms and 11 fireplaces, with galleries and cabinet rooms, the plantation was constructed with slave quarters, stables and a family cemetery. The plantation became a Texas Historic Landmark in 1967 and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

### **Preserving History While Making Way for the Future**

Knowing the full history of the Robertsons and the plantation, TxDOT still had to make way for progress. The I-35 expansion calls for adding one lane in each direction, plus reconstructing frontage roads and ramps. It would be a very tight squeeze.

"The easiest way to accomplish the expansion would be to shave a piece of the Robertson Plantation — but, of course that was not going to happen," Rhodes says. "We had to look east and make it work."

Being an historic property, the Robertson Plantation is protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. In short, if there was any option other than impacting the ranch, TxDOT was required to take it. But remember — across the highway from the ranch sits the Stagecoach Inn, a well-known landmark.

"It was a dilemma. We didn't have room for the expansion and we didn't want to impact either side of I-35," Rhodes says. "Although a tight fit, we were able to make it work by minimizing the impact to the Stagecoach Inn property." The long-time business will have to reconfigure its parking area as a result of the expansion project and will be compensated by TxDOT.

With those issues in TxDOT's rear-view mirror, construction on I-35 through Salado begins in a few months.

"We do open the ranch to the public on special occasions," Sterling Ambrose says. "But I hope there will be a time in the future when it becomes a regular stop along I-35 so we can share its history with everyone."

## **NEWS FROM THE NORTH**

Beginning with this issue of *My 35 Main Street Texas News*, as information becomes available, we'll be letting you know what's going on construction-wise along the north and south I-35 corridors. In this issue,



we'll introduce you to current and planned efforts to expand I-35 in TxDOT's Dallas, Fort Worth, and Wichita Falls districts.

### **Dallas District — Reconstruction and Expansion of I-35E in Dallas and Denton Counties**

This \$4.7 billion project could begin in 2013, but that date is contingent upon the completion of the procurement process to deliver the project as a comprehensive development agreement (CDA) project.

The project has three segments:

- Segment 1 – south end, I-635 to Bush Turnpike, 5.5 miles.
- Segment 2 – middle portion, Bush Turnpike to FM 2181, 12.1 miles.
- Segment 3 – north end, FM 2181 to US 380, 10.5 miles.

The middle segment has received environmental clearance; the north and south segments should receive environmental clearance by late 2011 or early 2012. If construction begins in 2013 on all or a portion of the project, that work could be complete by 2017. Precise timelines for portions that will be reconstructed with new managed lanes are contingent upon funding and future proposals from developer teams.

### **Dallas District — LBJ Express**

This \$3.2 billion project began earlier this year and is scheduled for completion in 2016. It includes the addition of managed lanes to I-35E south of LBJ Freeway as part of the LBJ Express CDA. Portions of the project will open in 2013 and 2015, but the I-35E managed lanes will be the last portion of the project to open to traffic. Major closures along I-635 occur regularly; however, most work along I-35E is outside of the travel lanes. | [Latest information](#)

### **Dallas District — DFW Connector**

This \$1.02 billion project began last year and is scheduled for completion in 2014. Design plans include the construction of 4.4 miles of non-tolled lanes and 4 miles of managed lanes. The project is a design-build CDA, with TxDOT funding the entire project amount. TxDOT is providing \$667 million, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is providing \$250 million, and \$107 million comes from Proposition 14 bonds. Major lane closures occur nightly. | [Latest information](#)

### **Fort Worth District — North Tarrant Express**

This \$2.5 billion project began in 2010 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2015. Plans include the reconstruction and addition of managed lanes on I-820 and SH 121/183, and the addition of managed lane connections from I-35W. The work is part of the North Tarrant Express CDA. On I-35W, the CDA project will provide managed lane direct-connect ramps from northbound and southbound I-35W into the

eastbound managed lanes. Lane closures occur regularly. | [Latest information](#)

### **Fort Worth District — Expansion of I-35W**

Construction could begin in 2013 for this \$200 million project. Project scope includes expanding 3.3 miles of I-35W from north of I-820 to US 287 with the addition of general purpose lanes and managed lanes. The TxDOT design-bid-build project is in the planning stage. It's scheduled for completion in 2017.

### **Fort Worth District — North Tarrant Express**

TxDOT is negotiating with North Tarrant Express Mobility Partners (NTEMP) on an agreement to build Segment 3A of the I-35W corridor, from I-30 near downtown Fort Worth up to and including the interchange at I-830. The project will feature additional general purpose lanes and two managed lanes in each direction. The 6.5-mile project is expected to cost approximately \$1 billion. Negotiations with NTEMP continue, with a conditional agreement expected in late 2011. A final agreement will be approved after all environmental approvals for Segment 3A have been acquired.

### **Wichita Falls District — At I-35 and US 82 in Gainesville**

This project is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2013. The \$14 million project includes widening the US 82 bridge over I-35, installing turnarounds and rebuilding the I-35 frontage roads in Cooke County. Also included are lighting upgrades, landscaping, and new signals. Design plans include converting the frontage roads to one way. Other updates include the following:

- Construction is about 50 percent complete on rebuilding the frontage roads. The outside lanes should open in November.
- Once the outside lanes of the frontage roads are complete, workers will begin rebuilding the inside lanes.
- The contractor is finishing up some driveway work between US 82 and FM 51 in Gainesville.
- High-mast lighting has been installed and is in the testing phase.

## **LANE CLOSURES**

### **SECTION 1C: SALADO TO BELTON (FM 2484 TO US 190 IN BELTON)**

- The Connell Street exit ramp from US 190 W (first exit after entering US 190 from southbound I-35) has been permanently closed to allow construction of the new flyover connecting I-35 northbound to US 190 W.
- The inside lane of the US 190 W access road from I-35 to



Connell Street is closed to allow construction of flyover support columns.

[Access this section's project map \(schematic\).](#)

## **SECTION 5A: WACO TO WEST (N. LOOP 340 TO FM 1858)**

- I-35 northbound Exit 342B will be closed for **3 to 6** months as work progresses at the US 77/I-35 interchange. Exit 342A (Crest Drive/FM 2417) will be open.
- Southbound entrance ramp from BU 77 onto I-35 is closed for approximately two months.

## **SECTION 5C: ABBOTT TO SOUTH OF HILLSBORO (FM 1304 TO FM 310)**

- FM 310 is partially closed (one lane in each direction) under the I-35 overpass while the cross-street is rebuilt and turnarounds added.
- Exit 362 to Chatt Rd. is closed until new exit and entrance ramps are constructed. Traffic will use Exit 359 (FM 1304) northbound and Exit 364 (FM 310) southbound to access Chatt Rd. during the closure.

## **MILESTONES**

### **SECTION 1C: SALADO TO BELTON (FM 2484 TO US 190/FM 436)**

- Work started on the center support columns at the crossover overpasses.
- Work started on drill shafts for the I-35 northbound frontage-road bridge over the Lampasas River.

[Access this section's project map \(schematic\).](#)

### **SECTION 2B: TEMPLE**

- Funding approved by the Texas Transportation Commission for the expansion of I-35 through Temple.
- The final public hearing for the Temple leg of the I-35 Expansion Project took place Tuesday, October 4, at 6:30 p.m., at the Frank W. Mayborn Civic & Convention Center in Temple. More than 260 people attended.

## **SECTION 3A-2: TROY TO BRUCEVILLE-EDDY (N. TROY CITY LIMIT TO WOODLAWN ROAD)**

- James Construction Group won the contract for this section with a low bid of \$120,722,98. Construction is expected to begin in early 2012.

## **SECTION 3C: HEWITT TO WACO (FM 2063/SUN VALLEY BOULEVARD TO S. LOOP 340)**

- Moved northbound I-35 mainlane traffic onto new mainlane pavement from Sun Valley Blvd/FM 2063 to Corporation Pkwy (near Tractor Supply Distribution Center), and from north of Loop 340 to the north end of the Central Texas Marketplace.
- Began landscaping.

## **SECTION 5A: WACO TO WEST (N. LOOP 340 TO FM 1858/TOKIO ROAD)**

- Switched northbound traffic to new BUS 77 overpass.
- Started the UPRR bridge.
- Began construction of the eastside frontage road from Tours Rd. to FM 1858/Tokio Rd.

## **SECTION 5C: ABBOTT TO HILLSBORO (FM 1304 TO FM 310)**

- FM 310 traffic has been moved onto the new pavement.
- The u-turn lane on the north side of FM 310 crossover is being built.
- FM 1304 crossing has been opened to traffic (u-turn lanes will remain closed until all the frontage roads have been opened).
- Existing retaining wall at FM 310 has been rebuilt.
- Approximately half of the northbound shoulder has been poured.

## **HILL COUNTY SAFETY REST AREAS**

- Construction started in September, with completion anticipated in approximately 18 months.

### **DOWN THE ROAD**

## **SECTION 1C: SALADO TO BELTON (FM 2484 TO US 190/FM 436)**

- Continue work on caps for the US 190 westbound flyover columns.

- Continue work on retaining walls at the crossover overpasses.
- Continue work on the new I-35 northbound frontage road from FM 2484 to LP 121.
- Start work on the center support columns at the crossover overpasses.
- Continue work on drill shafts for the I-35 northbound frontage-road bridge over the Lampasas River.
- Start work on southbound frontage road from US 190 to LP 121.
- Start work on abutments for the northbound frontage road bridge at the Lampasas River.
- Start work on intersection approaches at the crossover bridges.

**Access this section's project map (schematic).**

### **SECTION 3C: HEWITT TO WACO (FM 2063/SUN VALLEY BOULEVARD TO S. LOOP 340)**

- Finish setting the metal rails on the flyover.
- Finish the last small pieces of the northbound concrete roadway.
- Continue construction of the large sign structures.
- Continue landscaping and irrigation.
- Complete final sections of new pavement on northbound side.
- Switch northbound traffic to new pavement between Corporation Dr. and N. Loop 340.
- Begin placing the permanent centerline barrier wall and illumination poles.

### **SECTION 5A: WACO TO WEST (N. LOOP 340 TO FM 1858/TOKIO ROAD)**

- Continue construction of the frontage roads from LP 340 to Hilltop Rd.
- Continue construction of the northbound mainlanes at BUS 77.
- Continue construction of FM 1858/Tokio Rd. and Hilltop Rd. overpasses.
- Continue construction of the UPRR bridge.
- Continue construction of the northbound frontage road from Tours Rd. to FM 1858/Tokio Rd.
- Continue construction of ramps from N. Loop 340 to BUS 77.

### **SECTION 5C: ABBOTT TO HILLSBORO (FM 1304 TO FM 310)**

- Finish the southbound frontage road between FM 1304 and FM 1242 and open both lanes in that area.
- Finish paving the northbound mainlane shoulder and ramps.
- Continue widening the I-35 mainlane Cobb Creek bridge (both northbound and southbound).
- Finish the mainlane area near FM 310 and move traffic to the outside lanes.

- Remove the existing pavement near FM 310, rework base and repave.
- Finish the southbound frontage road.
- Complete the intersection at FM 310 and open.
- If the frontage roads are completed, all the intersections including the u-turn lanes will be open.
- Begin concrete pavement on the southbound outside shoulder and ramps.
- Open the new Chatt Rd. and FM 310 exit ramps.
- Close and remove old Chatt Rd. and FM 310 exit ramps, begin paving shoulders through those sections.

**For more information or to have your email address added to the I-35 information distribution list, please send your request to [Jodi.Wheatley@txdot.gov](mailto:Jodi.Wheatley@txdot.gov).**