



FEDERAL HIGHWAY  
ADMINISTRATION  
TEXAS DIVISION

# State of Texas Border Partnership E-Newsletter

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## Freight Rail Improvements Could Make Way for Austin-San Antonio Commuter Rail Service

AUSTIN – The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recently released two long-awaited studies containing a visionary plan to reroute Union Pacific's (UP) non-local freight trains in the Austin – San Antonio corridor.

The studies identify potential rail and roadway improvements including new grade overpasses in conjunction with crossing closures, improvements to the rail infrastructure in San Antonio as well as proposed bypass routes outside the metropolitan area for UP non-local freight. These improvements total up to \$3.8 billion worth of projects.

Any of the proposed new routes between Austin and San Antonio would allow for the implementation of commuter rail service in the I-35 corridor between San Antonio and Round Rock on the existing rail lines. TxDOT unveiled these study results at a San Antonio Mobility Coalition (SAMCo) rail luncheon in early August 2008.

The two studies, the "Central Texas Rail Relocation Study" and the "San Antonio Region Freight Study" provide an analysis of the existing rail network in the central Texas region. The studies used that analysis to identify improvements to the existing system as well as alternative bypass routes that would reroute most UP freight trains between Austin and San Antonio that do not serve local customers. The reports quantify both the public and pri-

vate benefits for the improvements. "A commuter rail line along the San Antonio-Austin corridor would connect the two most dynamic cities in the state of Texas and allow the two regions to play off the strengths of each other," Bexar County Judge Nelson W. Wolff said. "Such a connection would strengthen the economic opportunities for central and south Texas."

The reports will be provided to the Austin-San Antonio Inter-municipal Commuter Rail District (ASA-ICRD) and other local and regional stakeholders and planning entities to assist them in developing plans for improving freight services and implementing commuter rail services in the corridor as desired by the ASA-ICRD. The studies were developed with data and input from UP, and they support further study of the bypass routes.

While the re-routing of trains is further studied, TxDOT has partnered with Amtrak to study the feasibility of providing additional intercity passenger rail service between Round Rock and San Antonio along the existing tracks in the same manner Amtrak travels now. This could include upgrades to the existing infrastructure providing public benefits such as improving safety and air quality and alleviating congestion. Copies of these studies are now available at the TxDOT's website at [http://www.txdot.gov/services/transportation\\_planning\\_and\\_programming/](http://www.txdot.gov/services/transportation_planning_and_programming/)

## Call for Freight Planning & Research Topics for FY 2009 STEP Program

The FHWA Freight Planning Team needs your input regarding potential freight planning research funding priorities for FY 2009 Surface Transportation Environment and Planning Cooperative Research Program (STEP) research! STEP is the primary source of funds to conduct all FHWA research on planning and environmental issues, including freight planning.

The FY 2009 STEP Federal Register notice was published on Monday June 23, 2008.

The Federal Register notice is available at:

Text version: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/E8-14135.htm>

PDF version: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/step/fr23jun08121.htm>

Remember, stakeholder input will take priority. This is your opportunity.

### What is STEP?

Surface Transportation Environment and Planning Cooperative Research Program (STEP). STEP is an FHWA-administered source of funding for research related to planning, environment and realty for FY2006-FY2009. Stakeholder input is required to identify the research topics that should receive priority consideration. Therefore, we are seeking input from all of our partners on the FY 2009 STEP Research Program.

### What will STEP fund?

STEP will fund research, field demonstrations, technology transfer, conferences, and workshops, as well as portions of various pooled fund research efforts. Grants and cooperative agreements are possible with a 50% match. Research contracts will not require a match.

What past Freight research has STEP funded? [“Developing a Guidebook for Engaging the Private Sector in Freight Transportation Planning.”](#) The project proposes to develop a “best-practice”

guidebook that supplements the FHWA Resource Center’s Engaging the Private Sector in Freight Planning Workshop. It is a 12-month long \$75,000 effort (October 2007- October 2008);

[“Building Capacity between Public and Private Sectors in the Freight Community.”](#) The project proposes to host peer-exchanges and a freight summit meeting, develop a resource manual, and identify possible performance measures in involving the private sector in freight planning. It is a 12-month long \$100,000 effort (October 2007- October 2008); and

[“Integrating the Evaluation of Freight Corridor Projects into the Congestion Management Process \(CMP\), and Long Range Transportation Planning.”](#) This project proposes to collect truck data in the Puget Sound Region, develop freight performance measures, incorporate them into the CMP and Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) using simulation tools and other congestion management strategies, and document the effort so that it is replicable in other regions. It is a 24-month long \$60,000 effort (October 2007 – October 2009).

### Take these three easy steps:

Only one page and about five minutes of your time should help us all!

- STEP #1: Visit <http://knowledge.fhwa.dot.gov/cops/step.nsf>.
- STEP #2: Under Feedback Topics, choose “Freight Planning”
- STEP #3: Fill out the one-page form with your ideas and submit

Final deadline: September 22, 2008 but please do not wait. Submit today.

Your FHWA Freight Planning Team thanks you, for more information please contact:

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## TSA wants help with hazmat screening

The Transportation Security Administration wants a contractor who can collect and process fingerprints and other personal information for individuals seeking to transport hazardous materials in 37 states. TSA published a [presolicitation notice](#) in the Federal Register recently for the Hazardous Materials Endorsement Threat Assessment Program.

Under the program, applicants who seek a hazardous materials endorsement on their driver's license must undergo a security threat assessment that includes a criminal background check, immigration status check and international database checks for links to terrorism. The notice requests contractor support for an information management system and Web-based tool that would enable applicants to submit biographical

information and fingerprints, would collect fees, and would provide applicants with information on services and enrollment locations. The system operates on established fees. TSA handles applications for drivers in 37 states and the District of Columbia, while 15 states perform those functions on their own.

The contractor must be able to meet TSA and Homeland Security Department information technology system requirements and perform enrollment, fingerprint collection, help-desk support, Web site operation, and fee collection and reconciliation. For additional information, please see: [http://www.washingtontechnology.com/online/1\\_1/33389-1.html](http://www.washingtontechnology.com/online/1_1/33389-1.html)

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## Security tightened along U.S.-Mexican border because of 'credible threat'

Tighter security means that truckers who cross the U.S.-Mexican border may be in for longer waits.

In late August 2008 *The Associated Press* reported that security is being tightened at border crossings after law enforcement officials received what they called a "credible threat" that members of Mexican drug cartels intended to kill as many as 20 people in Texas and New Mexico. Officials didn't say who the targets are.

Drug cartel violence has claimed thousands of lives in Mexico this year, including nearly 800 people who were murdered in Ciudad Juarez – just across the border from El Paso, TX. In Mexico more than 4,000 people have died in drug-related violence.

In related news, a recent *Los Angeles Times* article quoted U.S. and Mexican officials as saying that high-powered automatic weapons and am-

munition are flowing virtually unchecked from U.S. border states into Mexico, fueling a war among drug traffickers, the army and police.

The *Times* reported that more than 6,700 licensed gun dealers are within a short drive of the 2,000-mile border, from the Gulf Coast of Texas to San Diego – which amounts to more than three dealers for every mile of border territory.

For additional information on this story, please see: [http://www.landlinemag.com/todays\\_news/Daily/2008/Aug08/082508/082608-01.htm](http://www.landlinemag.com/todays_news/Daily/2008/Aug08/082508/082608-01.htm)

## First mass U.S. crossing for hydrogen cars completed

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Hydrogen fuel cell cars from nine automakers completed a 13-day cross-country trip in late August 2008, in the first such mass U.S. crossing for vehicles powered by a zero-emission technology still in its infancy.

As firsts go, the event, which ran from Portland, Maine, to the Los Angeles Coliseum, probably would not qualify for the record books. There were stretches without hydrogen fueling stations when the vehicles were carried on flatbed trucks, the longest from Rolla, Missouri, to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

But then one of the goals of the "Hydrogen Road Tour '08" was to demonstrate the need to build more fueling stations if the nascent technology is to develop, said Paul Brubaker, administrator for research and innovative technology for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

There are about 60 hydrogen stations in the United States, and only two are open to the public without prior arrangement. The industry- and taxpayer-sponsored tour stopped in 31 cities in 18 states. Backers included two hydrogen producers, Air Products and Linde, which hope to become household names if hydrogen becomes a key to transportation.

Catherine Dunwoody, executive director of major tour supporter California Fuel Cell Partnership, said fueling stations will develop first in big cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Washington, D.C. "There's a lot of curiosity about these vehicles," Dunwoody said near the finish line in Los Angeles on Saturday. "As we got to Allentown, Pennsylvania, people lined up and cheered."

The partnership she heads is based near California's capital, Sacramento, and funded by public and private funds. "There's a hunger out there for clean, safe vehicles," Brubaker said. "The common refrain everywhere we went was 'Where do we get these cars.'" For most people, the answer is nowhere soon. Honda Motor Co has begun leasing about 200 FXC Clarity fuel-cell autos in Southern California and General Motors Corp is testing

about 100 fuel-cell Chevy Equinox SUVs on the road. But those deployments, as well as the autos in the road tour, are experimental, since the technology is not ready for showrooms. Carmakers have spent billions on their development in hopes of capitalizing on a public desire to buy cleaner cars and a U.S. push to reduce its dependence on foreign oil.

The United States consumes about a quarter of the world's oil, and imports 70 percent of its crude. Cars and trucks consume 44 percent of oil used in the country and contribute about a fifth of the carbon dioxide emissions. CO2 makes up nearly 90 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

Even in a best-case scenario, automakers will only sell about 2 million electric vehicles powered by hydrogen fuel cells by 2020, a study by the National Research Council found. Cars on the tour came from Honda, GM, Toyota Motor Corp, Ford Motor Co, BMW AG, Daimler AG, Hyundai Motor Co, Nissan Motor Co, and Volkswagen AG.

Linde and Air Products showed off their hydrogen-making machines to the public and at times refueled the autos. The idea for the tour originated with Brubaker when he watched a Ken Burns documentary, "Horatio's Drive," at the same time that he was reading a biography of Dwight Eisenhower.

The Eisenhower biography mentioned the future president's cross-country trip as a young man, when he noticed long stretches without paved roads. When he was president in the 1950s, Eisenhower started the U.S. interstate highway system.

Burns documented the 1903 drive of Horatio Nelson Jackson who, on a bet, crossed the country in a 20-horsepower Winton car hoping to be the first to make the trip in an automobile. His journey from San Francisco to New York took 64 days.

For additional information, please see: <http://www.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idUSN2431321220080824>

## The State of U.S. Railroads: A Review of Capacity and Performance Data

U.S. freight volumes are expected to double in the next 30 years. Increased use of rail freight is seen as a way to accommodate increased volumes while minimizing congestion on the highway system. However, the U.S. railroad network consists of many fewer track miles than it did several decades ago, and there is concern that it has become congested and incapable of handling additional volume.

Concern about the ability of the U.S. railroad system to accommodate a significant increase in rail freight volume without degrading the speed and reliability of railroad service has motivated several recent studies of railroad infrastructure. Many of these studies were commissioned by trade associations or organizations representing interested parties, and it is challenging to disentangle facts about the current capacity and performance of railroads from advocacy positions of carriers or shippers. This 2008 report, “The State of U.S. Railroads” draws from publicly available data on the U.S. railroad industry to provide observations about rail infrastructure capacity and performance in transporting freight.

Railroad capacity is determined by many factors, including the amount of railroad track and rolling stock, the number and power of locomotives, maintenance, staffing levels, and a wide variety of operating strategies. Increases in railroad productivity over the past quarter century indicate that more freight (as measured in ton-miles) is being transported today than ever before. Data suggest that this has been made possible by increasing the utilization of railroad infrastructure through technological innovation and improved operations. However, analyzing trends using the single metric of capacity fails to capture the complexity of rail performance.

Speed and reliability are the most salient metrics of the performance of rail service. Long-term trends show improvements in both of these measures. However, publicly available data suggest that these decade-long trends may be slowing or reversing. Some shippers suggest that this is the case and that, in certain markets or regions, they are experiencing significantly higher costs or poorer performance from freight rail service. However, data are not shared publicly at the temporal, geographic, and commodity levels to assess these claims. Thus, it is not apparent whether performance is now stable, significantly declining, or improving. One reason to examine the impacts of railroads performance on freight markets is that these

markets are determined by the collective decisions of carriers from multiple modes and shippers of multiple types of freight. In addition to the rates charged by a trucking or railroad company to transport its freight, the shipper must consider the amount of time it will take for its goods to arrive at the correct destinations; the risk that its freight might get damaged, lost, or delayed; and other costs, such as paperwork, warehousing, and drayage. Railroads and trucking companies take actions that influence the overall cost of shipping freight, and shippers respond to these signals. Thus, when a railroad or trucking firm improves performance, shippers may respond by shifting the transportation of freight—even extremely time-sensitive shipments—from one mode to the other.

As an illustrative example of this issue, this report describes how slower and less reliable shipments led one firm to shift traffic from rail to truck to fulfill its customers’ orders in a timely manner and maintain its supply chains at the lowest overall cost. This example illustrates the larger, public consequences of private decisions to shift freight transportation among modes. Shippers make transportation decisions based on what modes of transportation best satisfy their firm’s logistics supply chain. Their decisions, however, have consequences that affect other users of the transportation system, communities through which the infrastructure passes, and the environment, because different modes of freight differ in their safety concerns, levels of pollution, and energy consumption. These interactions justify an expanded public sector role for freight transportation planning. The following recommendations are made:

- Improved reporting and public dissemination of railroad system and performance statistics are needed to support transportation policy.
- The public and private cost trade-offs between shipping freight by truck and by rail need to be better understood.
- A national freight strategy should balance the private interests of the shippers and railroads with the public interest associated with the public costs of different modes of transportation.

For additional information, please see: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/2008/RAND\\_TR603.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2008/RAND_TR603.pdf)

## High gas prices drive down traffic fatalities

WASHINGTON (AP) — Roll back the clock to 1961: John F. Kennedy was inaugurated president. The Peace Corps was founded. The Dow Jones industrials hit 734. Gasoline reached 31 cents a gallon. And the number of people killed in U.S. traffic accidents that year topped 36,200.

This year, gasoline climbed over \$4 a gallon, and the traffic death toll — according to one study — appears headed to the lowest levels since Kennedy moved into the White House.

The number is being pulled down by a change in Americans' driving habits, which is fueled largely by record high gasoline prices, according to the Transportation Research Institute at the University of Michigan. The institute's study — which covers 12 months ending in April — found that as

gas prices rose, driving and fatalities declined. The surprise, said Professor Michael Sivak, author of the study, was the huge decline in fatalities in March and April as gasoline prices surged above \$3.20 a gallon.

Over the previous 10 months, monthly fatalities declined an average of 4.2 percent compared to the previous year. Then, Sivak's data shows, fatalities dropped 22.1 percent in March and 17.9 percent in April of this year — numbers that did not show up in a recent federal report that tracked a drop in traffic deaths through the end of 2007. For additional information, please see: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26389156/>

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## U.S. grain exports limited by infrastructure bottlenecks

Across the country, wheat and corn are piled in towering mounds exposed to wind, rain and rats, waiting for a rail car to haul them to market. It's the dark side of the booming global demand for U.S. corn, wheat and soybeans. The surge in exports is revealing inefficiencies in the country's railways, highways and rivers that carry the grain that helps feed the world. And those bottlenecks are costing farmers, shippers and ultimately consumers millions of dollars a year.

Mark Hodges, the executive director of the Oklahoma Wheat Commission, has seen it firsthand. Earlier this summer, when consumers around the world hungered more than ever for American wheat and corn, he hopped into his pickup and toured grain elevators. Piles of grain sat like giant anthills, waiting to be shipped. Frantic managers couldn't find enough rail cars to haul these products.

A surprisingly large harvest this fall is expected to test the system even further. The U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts farmers will produce the second-largest corn crop and fourth-largest soybean crop in history. Some agribusiness groups worry the bottlenecks could hurt the United States' standing as a global

food provider as other nations, such as Brazil and Argentina, compete for a lucrative share of the market. In years past, bountiful harvests meant millions of bushels were stored outside overstuffed grain silos, waiting for shipment. The barge delays alone added an average \$72.6 million annually to the cost of shipping goods down the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, according to a new Army Corps of Engineers analysis.

Rail delays are costly as well. In 2006, an estimated 1 billion bushels of Midwest grain was stored outside or in improvised shelters, adding an estimated \$107 million to \$160 million to the cost of transporting it, according to USDA figures. That's about 1 percent of the combined \$13.8 billion value of corn and soybean exports in 2006.

"We're way, way behind in our infrastructure investment, both in the private sector and publicly," said Peter Friedmann, executive director of the Agriculture Transportation Coalition, a trade group representing grain exporters. For additional information, please see: [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2008136169\\_bottleneck25.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2008136169_bottleneck25.html)

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## Famous Quote of the Day:

"Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them."  
- Dalai Lama

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Information provided is a compilation from other news and on-line media sources, any information relayed is based upon the accuracy of the information provided by other news gathering organizations and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Federal Highway Administration or the State of Texas Border Partnership Working Group.

## Next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Web Seminar (September 17th)

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Freight Management and Operations and the Office of Planning host the "Talking Freight" seminars.

The web seminars are part of a broader Freight Professional Development Program aimed at providing technical assistance, training, tools, and information to help the freight and planning workforce meet the transportation challenges of tomorrow. The web seminars are held on a monthly basis throughout the year and are open at no cost to all interested parties in both the public and private sectors.

The next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Seminar will be held on September 17th (12-1:30 PM-CDT) will cover the topic of "Commercial Vehicle Truck Size & Weight." Significant growth in domestic and international commerce, coupled with in-

creasing traffic congestion and delay on surface transportation networks, challenges the ability of industry to move freight economically without the use of larger and heavier loads.

In 2006 FHWA completed an international scan tour to learn about emerging vehicle size and weight enforcement technologies. Learn about the results of this scan tour and hear about best practices and case studies in Commercial Vehicle Truck Size and Weight enforcement.

For additional on freight-related courses and training opportunities including how to register for this webinar event, please see the following FHWA web-site: [http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/fpd/talking\\_freight.htm](http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/fpd/talking_freight.htm)

## Our Nation's Highways: 2008 Publication Released

"In large measure, America's history is a history of her transportation." So said President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966, during the signing ceremony for the legislation creating the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Since the introduction of the interstate system to Congress in 1939, the Nation has devoted significant resources to the creation of a roadway system that connects every population center. With the interstate system acting as the system's backbone, we have enjoyed freedom of travel and efficiency of commerce as never before.

The FHWA has recently published an on-line report showing current travel trends and statistics related to our Nation's highway system. System condition levels and performance, driver registration, fuel consumption, bridge conditions, and vehicle miles traveled are shown within this new publication. For additional information, please see this report on-line at the following FHWA website: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/pubs/pl08021/index.cfm>

