

State of Texas Border Partnership E-Newsletter

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President Obama proposes \$50 billion for transportation infrastructure upgrades

Yesterday, President Obama announced a \$50 billion spending plan aimed at expanding and renewing the nation's transportation infrastructure, including railways, roads and airport runways.

The proposed plan — which President Obama aims to pair with the next surface transportation reauthorization bill — would build on investments already made under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and provide new allocations. The plan also would reform the way the nation currently invests in transportation, moving away from earmarks and formula debates and toward “enhancing competition, innovation, performance and real analysis that gets taxpayers the best bang for the buck,” President Obama said in a prepared statement.

The plan calls for providing a \$50 billion “upfront investment” to help build and maintain 4,000 miles of rail, rebuild 150,000 miles of roads, and rehabilitate or reconstruct 150 miles of runway.

The rail dollars target transit-rail systems that have “fallen into a state of ill-repair,” public transit system expansions and “significant” new funding for the federal New Starts program, according to President Obama. In addition, the plan would build on high-speed-rail investments and provide funding for a “long-overdue” overhaul of Amtrak’s rolling stock fleet, he said.

The plan also proposes to establish an “Infrastructure Bank” to leverage federal dollars and focus on investments of national and regional significance that “often fall through the cracks in the current siloed transportation programs,” said President Obama.

“This marks an important departure from the federal government’s traditional way of spending on infrastructure through earmarks and formula-based grants that are allocated more by geography and politics than demonstrated value,” he said. “Instead, the bank will base its investment decisions on clear analytical measures of performance, competing projects against each other to determine which will produce the greatest return for American taxpayers.”

Building America’s Future voiced support for the Administration’s proposed plan and pledged to help identify funding options. Founded in 2008 by California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the Building America’s Future coalition supports “smart” infrastructure investments and reforms to enhance communities’ quality of life and safety, create jobs and spur economic growth.

“A reformed, robust transportation infrastructure program will speed needed repairs for our crumbling assets, eliminate time Americans waste in traffic and establish a true high-speed passenger-rail network,” said Rendell in a prepared statement.

SOURCE: Progressive Railroading
AUTHOR: Larry Kaufman
DATE: 09/07/10
URL: <http://tinyurl.com/35tmqeb>



AAR reports weekly rail carload volume sets new 2010 record

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Association of American Railroads (AAR) today reported weekly rail carload volume set a new 2010 record for the second consecutive week. U.S. railroads originated 305,000 carloads during the week ending Sept. 4, 2010, up 6.9 percent compared with the same week in 2009, and at comparable levels to the same week in 2008. The 2008 comparison week included the Labor Day holiday while the corresponding weeks in both 2010 and 2009 did not. In order to offer a complete picture of the progress in rail traffic, AAR reports 2010 weekly rail traffic with comparison weeks in both 2009 and 2008.

Intermodal traffic totaled 237,006 trailers and containers, up 18 percent from the same week in 2009, and up 18 percent compared with 2008. Compared with the same week in 2009, container volume increased 19.4 percent and trailer volume rose 10.7 percent. Compared with the same week in 2008, container volume increased 27.1 percent and trailer volume declined 16.9 percent.

Thirteen of the 19 carload commodity groups increased from the comparable week in 2009 with metallic ores and metals and metal products continuing to post significant increases, up 57.1 percent and 32.4 percent respectively. Nine carload commodity groups, led by farm products excluding grain, posted an increase over the 2008 comparison week.

Carload volume on Eastern railroads was up 4.7 percent from the same week last year, but down 1.5 percent from 2008. In the West, carload volume was up 8.4 percent from the same week last year and up .9 percent from two years ago.

For the first 35 weeks of 2010, U.S. railroads reported cumulative volume of 9,945,718 carloads, up 7.1 percent from 2009, but down 12.6 percent from 2008, and 7,494,424 trailers or containers, up 14.4 percent from 2009, but down 4.7 percent from 2008.

Canadian railroads reported volume of 76,064 cars for the week, up 16.5 percent from last year, and 53,747 trailers or containers, up 24.4 percent from 2009. For the first 34 weeks of 2010, Canadian railroads reported cumulative volume of 2,458,747 carloads, up 20.6 percent from last year, and 1,585,669 trailers or containers, up 15.7 percent from last year.

Canadian railroads reported volume of 76,823 cars for the week, up 19.6 percent from last year, and 50,700 trailers or containers, up 13.8 percent from 2009. For the first 35 weeks of 2010, Canadian railroads reported cumulative volume of 2,535,570 carloads, up 20.6 percent from last year, and 1,636,369 trailers or containers, up 15.7 percent from last year.

Mexican railroads reported originated volume of 13,572 cars, up 24.7 percent from the same week last year, and 7,532 trailers or containers, up 14.1 percent. Cumulative volume on Mexican railroads for the first 35 weeks of 2010 was reported as 480,632 carloads, up 20.7 percent from last year; and 229,596 trailers or containers, up 30.2 percent.

Combined North American rail volume for the first 35 weeks of 2010 on 13 reporting U.S., Canadian and Mexican railroads totaled 12,961,920 carloads, up 10 percent from last year, and 9,360,389 trailers and containers, up 15 percent from last year.

SOURCE: AAR

DATE: 09/09/10

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/3a9trez>

TxDOT updates State's 100 most congested roadways list

AUSTIN - Using more accurate technology, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) unveiled an updated list of Texas' 100 most congested roadway segments Wednesday.

In developing the update, the state used actual traffic speed data to calculate delay, rather than estimations based on traffic volume used in the previous list. Parameters for roadway segment length were also adjusted to better capture congested points in the transportation system. The results of this heightened accuracy have state engineers a little excited and encouraged.

So what's so different?

As a result of the increased accuracy of the data and methodology behind the list, several roadway segments have shifted rankings on the list.

The top 100 list includes the state highway system, and many city, county or toll road segments. Additionally, it now considers both weekday and weekend congestion levels to provide a congestion ranking based on delay experienced all days of the week. Nationally recognized congestion experts with the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) at Texas A&M University collaborated with TxDOT to develop the new list and improved methodology.

"Texans have known for some time that traffic is bad – but this new list accurately pinpoints the traffic hotspots in the state, and will help make sure transportation planners consider these roadways when prioritizing roadway and transit projects," said Dr. Tim Lomax, Research Engineer with TTI, who coordinated with TxDOT staff to develop the list. "TTI has long distributed reports on congestion levels throughout the United States, including those levels in Texas, but the new methods used in this analysis are on the cutting edge of traffic congestion measurement."

How is data collected?

To gather actual travel speed data, TTI contracted with INRIX, a private firm that collects real time travel information nationwide and provides that information to a variety of companies for use by the public through GPS units and smart phone applications. Through the contract, TTI received actual speed data for roadways across the state for 2009 to use with traffic volume data to assess total delay.

Previously, the congestion levels were based on traffic volume and used information about operational characteristics to estimate travel speeds. This analysis showed where large volumes of traffic were likely to move at a slow pace, but did not identify where other problems, such as bottlenecks caused by intersecting roadways or poor roadway geometry, are found.

TxDOT first launched a 100 most congested roadways list in 2009 at the direction of the Texas Legislature.

The updated 100 most congested roadways list, additional information about methodology and plans for congestion mitigation are available by visiting txdot.gov.

SOURCE: TxDOT Media Affairs

DATE: 09/01/10

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/37xksqq>

Highway deaths fall to lowest level since 1950

WASHINGTON – Traffic deaths have plummeted across the United States to levels not seen in more than a half century, spurred by technology, more safety-conscious drivers and tougher enforcement of drunken driving laws.

The Transportation Department said Thursday that traffic deaths fell 9.7 percent in 2009 to 33,808, the lowest number since 1950. In 2008, an estimated 37,423 people died on the highways. Government and auto safety experts attributed the improvement to more people buckling up, side air bags and anti-rollover technology in more vehicles and a focus in many states on curbing drinking and driving. Economic conditions were also a factor.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood called the new data "a landmark achievement for public health and safety" but cautioned that too many people are killed on the road each year. "While we've come a long way," he said, "we have a long distance yet to travel."

Forty-one states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico saw reductions in highway fatalities, led by Florida with 422 fewer deaths and Texas, down 405.

The rate of deaths per 100 million miles traveled also dropped to a record low. It fell to 1.13 deaths per 100 million miles in 2009, compared with 1.26 the year before.

Year-to-year declines in highway deaths have occurred in previous economic downturns, when fewer people are out on the road. Traffic deaths decreased in the early 1980s and early 1990s when difficult economic conditions led many drivers to cut back on discretionary travel.

Last year's reduction in fatalities came even as the estimated number of miles traveled by motorists in 2009 increased 0.2 percent over 2008 levels. Barbara Harsha, executive director for the Governors Highway Safety Association said the new

data was "particularly encouraging given that estimated vehicle miles traveled actually increased slightly in 2009, thus exposing the public to greater risk on our roadways."

LaHood said the weak economy was a contributing factor as many Americans chose not to go out to bars and restaurants after work or on the weekend. But he said many motorists are more safety conscious behind the wheel. About 85 percent of Americans wear seat belts while benefiting from safety advances found in today's cars and trucks. Side air bags that protect the head and midsection are becoming standard equipment on many new vehicles.

Electronic stability control, which helps motorists avoid rollover crashes, is more common on new cars and trucks, while some luxury models have lane departure warnings and other safety features. LaHood, a former Illinois congressman, has also sought to crack down on distracted driving, urging states to adopt stringent laws against sending text messages from behind the wheel, as well as other distractions.

The annual highway safety report also found:

- Motorcycle fatalities broke a string of 11 years of annual increases, falling by 16 percent, from 5,312 in 2008 to 4,462 in 2009.
- The number of people injured in motor vehicle crashes fell for a 10th consecutive year. An estimated 2.2 million people were injured in 2009, a 5.5 percent decline from 2.3 million in 2008.
- Alcohol-impaired driving deaths declined 7.4 percent in 2009 to 10,839 deaths, compared with 11,711 in 2008. Alcohol-impaired fatalities fell in 33 states and Puerto Rico.

SOURCE: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Ken Thomas

DATE: 09/09/10

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/29btkx7>



U.S. port traffic to spike 16% in September

NEW YORK (TheStreet) -- The nation's major retail ports should see import volume spike 16% in September, but the high point of the year has likely already passed.

According to the National Retail Federation's monthly global Port Tracker report, U.S. ports handled 1.4 million containers in July, up 5% from June and 25% over volumes reported in July 2009. It was also the eighth consecutive month of year-over-year improvements.

"Retailers have stocked up early on much of their holiday merchandise in order to avoid some of the supply-chain disruptions seen earlier in the year," said Jonathan Gold, NRF vice president for supply chain and customs policy.

"Cargo is still coming in, but the key question for sales will be what happens with employment and other factors that affect consumer confidence this fall. Retailers are hoping they've hit the right balance of supply and demand."

October has traditionally been the peak month for cargo traffic as retailers build up inventory for the crucial holiday season. However, this year concerns over potential log jams at major ports spurred retailers to push orders up. As a result, NRF believes July's volume will likely stand as the peak month for this year.

For the full year, container volume is expected to come in at 14.5 million containers, representing a 15% improvement over the 12.7 million containers handled in 2009. Despite the gains, 2010 volumes will still be well off the 15.2 million containers handled in 2008 and the peak volume of 16.5 million containers reported in 2007.

"There is sufficient evidence to suggest that importers anticipated the peak season and bought early, partly as a result of a fear of lack of capacity and containers but also as a means to avoid the hefty peak season surcharges announced by

all the carriers," said Ben Hackett, founder of Hackett Associates, which produces the report for NRF. "We remain cautious about growth over the next 12 months. The good news is that the influx of new capacity will continue to put downward pressure on freight rates."

SOURCE: TheStreet

AUTHOR: Ross Tucker

DATE: 09/07/10 - 05:33 PM EDT

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/2a4whjq>

FHWA publishes new “Livability in Transportation Guidebook”

On Thursday, September 9th the FHWA HQ’s Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty released a new publication entitled “Livability in Transportation Guidebook: Planning Approaches that Promote Livability” (FHWA-HEP-10-028).

The *Livability in Transportation Guidebook*’s primary purpose is to illustrate how livability principles have been incorporated into transportation planning, programming, and project design, using examples from State, regional, and local sponsors. It is intended to be useful to a diverse audience of transportation agency staff, partners, decision-makers, and the general public, and is applicable in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

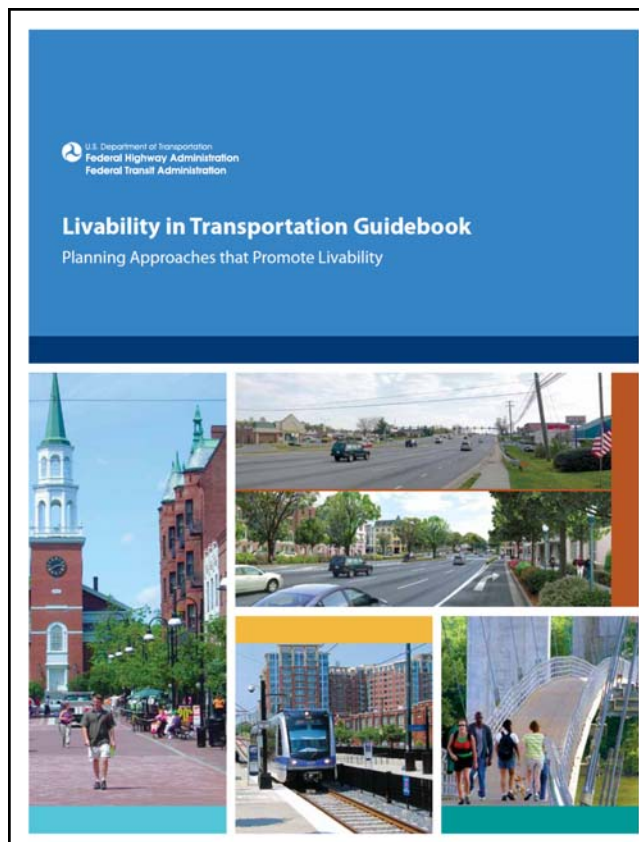
While several of the example projects address capacity and operational issues on major roadways, the Guidebook primarily explores how transportation planning and programs can improve community quality of life, enhance environmental performance, increase transportation and housing choice while lowering costs, and support economic vitality. Many of the case studies resolve capacity and operational issues through a multimodal network and systems approach, reflecting better integration of land use with transportation.

The Guidebook provides examples of communities and agencies across the country that have approached today’s new livability in transportation context with innovative and practical strategies, using the transportation planning process to guide successful project implementation.

Fostering livability in transportation projects and programs will result in improved quality of life; will create a more efficient and accessible transportation network; and will serve the mobility needs of communities, families, and businesses.

The Guidebook includes the executive summary, introduction, six “planning approach” chapters, and a conclusion. A separate appendix provides details about each of the case studies.

- Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the 15 primary case studies, organized by project types, to help readers quickly identify cases that are most applicable to their interests.



- **Planning Approaches.** Chapters 2 to 7 discuss common challenges experienced in transportation planning and implementation, and approaches used to overcome barriers. Each chapter represents a phase of the transportation planning and project development process.
- **Conclusion.** Chapter 8 provides ideas and practical strategies for next steps in implementing livability in transportation planning and projects.
- **Appendix: Case Studies.** The case studies represent a variety of project types, at different scales, community context, and application of the livability principles. They were chosen so that a broad range of users could select from different examples, depending on a given challenge, to overcome.

For additional information, please see the FHWA livability website at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/>

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Famous Quote of the Day:

The miracle, or the power, that elevates the few is to be found in their industry, application, and perseverance under the prompting of a brave, determined spirit.
 Mark Twain
 1835-1910, American Humorist, Writer

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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 Talking Freight web seminar on Sept 15th

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

are undertaking efforts to reduce their carbon emissions and lower their carbon footprint. These efforts to enhance sustainability not only provide environmental benefits, but in many cases are providing economic benefits to the companies pursuing them, due to more efficient fossil fuel use and resulting lower fuel costs. It is likely sustainability initiatives will continue to become more important for many freight transportation companies in the coming years.

The next FHWA "Talking Freight" webinar is on "Freight and Carbon Footprint: Efforts to Enhance Supply Chain Sustainability." Due to rising fossil fuel costs and a greater number of regulations designed to improve air quality and protect the public good, many freight transportation companies

For additional information on registering for this web seminar, please see the following URL web-link: <http://tinyurl.com/ycsvqjz>

SOURCE: FHWA Office of Freight Management & Operations (HOFM)

TxDOT seeks TIGER II grant for Tower 55 project

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recently applied for \$38 million in federal funding through a TIGER II discretionary grant for the \$93 million Tower 55 multi-modal improvement project.

BNSF and UP have committed a combined \$51.2 million for the project, while the city of Fort Worth has pledged \$1 million and North Central Texas Council of Governments and Fort Worth Transportation Authority jointly plan to provide \$2.5 million.

Located near downtown Fort Worth, Texas, Tower 55 is one of the busiest at-grade rail intersections in the nation where about 100 freight and passenger trains cross daily, including those operated by BNSF Railway Co. and Union Pacific Railroad. The project is designed to increase rail capacity at intersection; improve safety via closed grade crossings, new pedestrian underpasses and better emergency vehicle access to local neighborhoods; and help expand commuter-rail service in Fort Worth.

The Tower 55 project is "strongly supported" by multiple stakeholders, according to TxDOT, which considers the project its highest priority for TIGER II funding. The U.S. Department of Transportation plans to announce TIGER II grant recipients in mid-September.

SOURCE: Progressive Railroading
 DATE: 09/01/2010
 URL: <http://tinyurl.com/347kolv>

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The FHWA "Talking Freight" monthly webinar series is now eligible for AICP certification maintenance (CM) credits for AICP members through the American Planning Association. Credits can be claimed at: <http://www.planning.org/cm/search/provider.htm?ProviderCompanyID=246167>

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