

mobilitymatters@nctcog.org

## Calendar

### • Texas Transportation Commission

October 30 - 9 a.m.  
Martin Luther King Jr.  
Recreation Center gymnasium,  
2901 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Dallas

### • Regional Transportation Council

November 6 - 1 p.m.  
NCTCOG Transportation  
Council Room  
616 Six Flags Drive  
Arlington

### • Surface Transportation Technical Committee

December 5 - 1:30 p.m.  
NCTCOG Transportation  
Council Room  
616 Six Flags Drive  
Arlington

### • Public Meetings

December 8-9  
Locations TBD

**NOTE:** Dates, times and locations of meetings may change. Please confirm by calling 817-695-9240.

**Transportation Meetings,** visit [www.nctcog.org/trans/calendar.asp](http://www.nctcog.org/trans/calendar.asp).

**Public Meetings,** visit [www.nctcog.org/trans/outreach/meetings](http://www.nctcog.org/trans/outreach/meetings).



## NTTA will build State Highway 161 extension

Activity just to the east of the famously clogged State Highway 360 could help reduce travel time for 200,000 people who use the highway each day. And now the question of who will finish building the much-needed State Highway 161 has been answered. The North Texas Tollway Authority voted October 15 to construct the remaining 10 miles of State Highway 161 after months of negotiations with the Texas Department of Transportation.



SH 161 could give drivers who use SH 360 relief when it opens to traffic. The southbound lanes of SH 360 are often heavily congested during afternoon rush hour.

Work on the extension of SH 161 has been under way since April, when the two road-building agencies agreed the toll road would be worth more than \$1 billion. The project is important for the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth area because it will take pressure off SH 360. Construction is expected to continue as scheduled. The frontage road and some of the

main lanes to Interstate Highway 30 will be completed by 2009. The remaining segments will be finished by 2012.

TxDOT and NTTA negotiated for months in an attempt to deliver the project, working through details that threatened to stop the road's development as a toll road.

Building SH 161 primarily with gas taxes, which was contemplated until TxDOT and NTTA agreed on the road's value, would have only exacerbated the region's multibillion-dollar transportation shortfall by delaying other projects essential to the Dallas-Fort Worth area's mobility. And a region that has welcomed more than 1 million new residents this decade cannot afford more lengthy delays.

The North Texas economy is shaped by an intricate transportation network that moves people and goods on the ground and through the air. Conventional funding sources such as the gas tax are inadequate to meet the demands of the bustling region, requiring planners to turn to tolling and other alternative funding sources.

Fortunately, in North Texas, elected leaders are able to respond to the funding crisis, thanks in part to the State Highway 121 upfront payment. But this is just one innovative tool the region hopes to use over the next two decades to keep up with the demand for

better infrastructure. Managed lanes, similar to HOV lanes, will allow solo drivers to escape traffic in the main lanes for a price. They are considered a market-based solution because as traffic increases, the cost to use them increases.

The SH 121 agreement helped move along the SH 161 project by allowing the Regional Transportation Council to spend \$303.8 million for construction of the next two phases of SH 161. The money, which will come from the \$3.2 billion allotment the region received for SH 121, will be repaid with interest, minimizing the risk to other Dallas-Fort Worth area projects.

When complete, SH 161 will stretch 11.5 miles from Belt Line Road to Interstate Highway 20. And its benefit will not stop there. Transportation leaders expect SH 161 to follow SH 121's lead by bringing the region excess revenue. And that, too, will help meet the traffic needs of the region's burgeoning population.

NTTA also agreed October 15 to waive the market valuation of Chisholm Trail Parkway to expedite construction of it and Southwest Parkway. The market valuation process was established by Senate Bill 792, which froze private development of most toll roads for two years. NTTA was given first priority on toll-road construction and could decide after a value was attached to the project whether to develop it.



## A Message From Michael Morris

Transportation Director

# Turning Momentum into Action

The stratospheric rise in the cost of oil earlier this year is affecting transportation throughout the country and the region. It doesn't matter if your chief concern is driving to work in the morning or building the roads our residents use to get to their jobs; expensive oil has become life-altering. Things we once did without a second thought, such as commuting, are made more difficult by \$4-a-gallon gasoline.

Statistics suggest Americans have responded to the sky-high fuel costs by driving less. In April, we cut back on our driving for the sixth consecutive month, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. If fuel costs continue rising, this recent trend will persist well into the future. North Texans are responding to increasing transportation costs by finding alternatives to driving alone:

carpooling, vanpooling, transit, even bicycling.

The call for increased rail transit in the Dallas-Fort Worth area has grown substantially louder during the recent escalation in fuel prices.

When the Regional Transportation Council conducts public meetings, we typically receive several questions from well-informed mobility supporters. They want to know when service will be made available to their cities – or why development is taking so long.

High gas prices don't appear to be short-lived despite recent drops. We will have to continue to find ways to minimize their effects. The RTC has made a concerted effort, through Rail North Texas, to insulate residents from the roller-coaster changes of gas prices. For the past several months, the Transit Authority Partnership

Subcommittee has carefully considered the complicated issue of how to fund an expanded rail system to a region of 6.2 million people. As the past two legislative sessions have shown us, achieving our goal of building 251 additional miles of rail by 2030 will require cooperation of local and state officials.

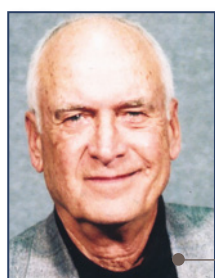
Despite two unsuccessful attempts to secure a funding mechanism, market forces may be bringing us closer to our goal. High gas prices, fuel shortages and other important factors have led the public to mobilize behind the concept of an expanded rail network. People are growing frustrated by all the talk. They want action. Perhaps this is the type of constituent dissatisfaction needed to spur action.

A look at ridership data indicates just how popular the region's existing passenger rail

network has become. In fiscal year 2007, the Trinity Railway Express welcomed more riders than the year before. And overall, transit ridership increased in 2007 by more than 1 million users. This was before \$4-a-gallon gas. In May, when prices across North Texas were near \$4, transit ridership increased once again.

The transit subcommittee has put forth a series of funding options, from vehicle registration fees that would pay for much of the rail expansion, to a combination of taxes and fees many believe would be more palatable to the Legislature. For two legislative sessions, North Texas rail advocates embraced a sales-tax increase as the best option for expanding the rail network. But when businesses objected this year, the subcommittee developed alternatives that would raise enough revenue

MORRIS continued on Back Page



## Regional Transportation Council Mayor has Big Hopes for McKinney's Future

### Member Profile

Bill Whitfield, Mayor, City of McKinney

McKinney Mayor Bill Whitfield has witnessed dramatic changes to his city since moving to the Collin County community 16 years ago. When Whitfield and his family arrived in the fast-growing northern suburb, McKinney's population was 23,000. Today, more than 118,000 people call McKinney home, according to recently released estimates from the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

"My first time to go to RTC, we didn't have any roads out here," Whitfield said. "[State Highway] 121 was not even on the horizon. [U.S. Highway 75] was not even on the horizon."

In 2000, SH 121 was only a two-lane road. It is now being transformed to a high-speed toll road with frontage lanes for those who don't want to pay the tolls.

"Our people here totally, totally endorsed this," he said of the idea of toll roads.

It's not that people are enthusiastic about paying tolls

on the region's highways. They are in favor of toll roads because historically these roads are built far sooner than gas-tax-funded roadways. For example, the Texas Department of Transportation estimated that SH 121's completion was accelerated 25 years by the decision to fund it with toll revenue.

The North Texas Tollway Authority is building SH 121

**"We want our people to be able to live, work, and play right here."**

*McKinney Mayor Bill Whitfield*

and provided the region excess revenue that can be used to expand U.S. 75 and other roadways. The state's transportation funding shortfall makes such agreements more attractive to regions such as North Texas.

Whitfield is a familiar face on the Regional Transportation Council, recently expanded from 40 to 43 members. He is not shy about speaking up about the interests of his city and county during RTC meetings.

Whitfield also sees passenger rail service as an important part of McKinney's future, whether it's service to Plano in the next several years or a route to Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport by 2030.

"We can't build roads fast enough," he said. "We must have rail."

Currently, McKinney is not densely populated enough to justify the airport line, he said, but by the time the city is built out, its population could be more than 350,000.

A prelude to airport service might be express bus service, similar to the Denton County Transportation Authority's bus between Denton and downtown Dallas.

"If it works in Denton, it can work in Collin County. ... We can learn from those people," he said. "They've done a great job."

First elected to the McKinney City Council in 1998, Whitfield served two terms. Today, in addition to being a second-term mayor, he is involved in several regional and civic organizations. Whitfield and

his wife, Jo Ann, have two daughters and two grandchildren.

Whitfield also is a member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, a nonpartisan group that seeks to foster closer ties between the federal government and cities. He serves on the Transportation and Communications Committee and the Mayors Water Council.

With McKinney continuing to expand rapidly, Whitfield sees another issue with which it must deal in the years to come: water. The city and Texas A&M University are involved in a research project studying the viability of drought-resistant grass and other vegetation.

McKinney is well-positioned for the future, even with the economy encountering tough times, Whitfield said. While surrounding cities are heavily dependent on retail sales activity, 39 percent of McKinney's tax base is industrial (2006 figures), meaning many of its residents don't have to travel far to work.

And that's just fine with Whitfield.

"We want our people to be able to live, work, and play right here," he said.



# North Texas Loses Legendary Transportation Leader

Jack Hatchell helped shape transportation policy in North Texas as a member of the Regional Transportation Council for 17 years.

**C**ollin County Commissioner Jack Hatchell's contributions to transportation can be seen throughout the region. As a transportation engineer, Hatchell was involved in planning and designing numerous roadways. And as a long-time member of the Regional Transportation Council, he used his expertise to help craft policies for a region forced by staggering population gains to grapple with traffic-related issues.

Hatchell died June 28 following a battle with cancer. He was 70.

On June 13, Hatchell received the 2008 William J. Pitstick Regional Excellence Award from NCTCOG. A professional engineer, Hatchell served from 1990-2007 on the RTC, making a lasting impression on the region's transportation system. He was a member of the North Central Texas Council of Governments Executive Board

from 1999-2005, serving as president in 2003-04.

Hatchell helped design and push through some of North Texas' most traveled roads. Most recently, he was involved in the State Highway 121 extension, which brought the region \$3.2 billion for future transportation projects, and the President George Bush Turnpike, set to be extended to Interstate Highway 30 on the eastern side of the region.

Hatchell chaired the RTC, the region's transportation policymaking body, in 2004-05. He also served as secretary and vice chair of the RTC.

Before being elected Collin County Commissioner, Hatchell served on the Plano City Council for 10 years, including three terms as mayor pro tem. His career as a transportation engineer included stops at the Texas Department of Transportation, the city of Midland, the Texas

Transportation Institute, and time as a consultant.

"Jack played an integral part in designing and developing many of the roadways we all travel today," said Michael Morris, NCTCOG's director of transportation. "His passing leaves a void in the transportation community, especially for those of us who saw him as a mentor and friend. We will always be thankful for the progress made possible by his excellent work."

The Pitstick Award was one of three awards presented at the June 13 General Assembly. Participants

in the Joint Land Use Study around the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base earned the Regional Cooperation Award. Michelle Thames, assistant city manager for Richardson, was presented with the Linda Keithley Award for Women in Public Management.

**Hatchell helped design and push through some of North Texas' most traveled roads. Most recently, he was involved in the State Highway 121 extension, which brought the region \$3.2 billion for future transportation projects, and the President George Bush Turnpike.**

## Regional Transportation Council

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Chair, North Texas Tollway Authority
- Cynthia White**  
Commissioner, Denton County
- Bill Whitfield**  
Mayor, City of McKinney
- Kathryn Wilemon**  
Councilmember, City of Arlington

## New Vehicle Boosts Department Air Quality Outreach

**N**CTCOG Transportation Department recently acquired a Ford Escape Hybrid to assist with public outreach and public meetings, provide shuttle services to and from the Trinity Railway Express station, and aid with technology demonstrations.

The five-passenger Escape will make the NCTCOG offices in Arlington accessible by rail and help Transportation Department staff members get to meetings throughout the region in a fuel-efficient way. The hybrid runs on a combination of gas and electric power. The vehicle is powered by the electric motor at low speeds, and the battery is recharged every time the brakes are applied. When stopped or traveling at low speeds, the hybrid SUV uses no gasoline,

contributing to its high gas mileage. The vehicle has a fuel economy of 34 mpg in the city and 30 mpg on the highway.

Wrapped with air quality messages, the vehicle will be available to Transportation Department employees to go back and forth between NCTCOG's Arlington offices and the TRE's CentrePort/DFW Airport Station and will be used during the day for off-site meetings. At the end of the day, the vehicle will be used to transport employees back to the rail station. The TRE runs between Fort Worth and Dallas, joining with Dallas Area Rapid Transit at Dallas' Union Station. The Fort Worth Transportation Authority and DART jointly operate the commuter-rail system.



photo/NCTCOG

The Transportation Department recently acquired a hybrid SUV to give employees access to a nearby commuter rail station.

The new vehicle also allows public officials to ride the train to meetings since the SUV is available during the workday for trips to the CentrePort/DFW Station.

## NCTCOG Executive Board

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- Jerry Gilmore, General Counsel**
- R. Michael Eastland, Executive Director**

# Air Quality Prominent in Residents' Minds

**A**ir quality has garnered attention across the region in recent years, with leaders in business and government embracing the fight for cleaner air. The North Central Texas Council of Governments found in a recent survey that air quality occupies a prominent place on the minds of many residents. The nine-county metropolitan planning area has battled dirty air for years and is currently classified as moderately nonattainment for ozone.

The survey, conducted by the Transportation Department, asked readers of the fall/winter Mobility Matters newsletter to rank items of interest from least important to most important. Sixty-six percent of the respondents gave air quality the highest significance. Passenger rail and safety and security also received high marks.

The unscientific survey of 413 people will help NCTCOG and the Regional Transportation Council more effectively address the transportation concerns of residents throughout the Metroplex.

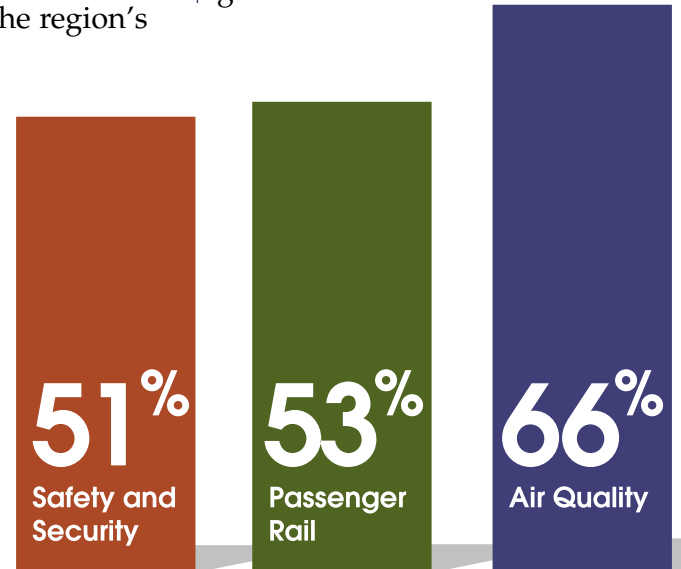
The region's surging population is expected to continue its robust expansion over the next two decades. The nine-county Dallas-Fort Worth area is forecast to grow from 6.2 million to 8.5 million by 2030. Such large growth will challenge North Texas' aging infrastructure greatly.

The importance of finding solutions to the transportation and air quality concerns of the residents could be magnified with the impending expansion of the metropolitan planning area. The MPA is expected to grow by three counties, increasing to 12 the number of counties eligible for regional

transportation planning funds. This expansion will not necessarily result in additional construction funding. But as the population grows, perimeter counties will become more and more important to the region's vitality. Bringing them into the long-term transportation planning process now will put the area in a good position for the future.

NCTCOG is working on several fronts to improve traffic and density in the region's urban areas. Planned passenger rail development and expansion by

the region's three mass transit providers will improve traffic and air quality. And the benefits will not be short-lived. They will last for generations.



The survey asked readers of the fall/winter Mobility Matters newsletter to rank items of interest from least important to most important.

## Q&A What They're Saying

The following are examples from recent public meetings of questions and answers about regional transportation issues:

**Q:** With more new residents, why isn't transportation revenue increasing?

**A:** With more people moving into the region, there will be more revenue collected, but with a 10 percent annual cost of inflation and increased construction costs, this will not be adequate to sustain the transportation needs of the region. And fuel-efficiency improvements significantly affect fuel consumption.

**Q:** Do you work with local governments to change land use before the rail is laid?

**A:** We regularly have discussions and debate with our regional partners and local governments. Some communities are more receptive to passenger rail than others. Cities are recognizing high density isn't all bad; high-density building around rail stations can equate to a nice quality of life and open new economic opportunities.

**Q:** What would happen if DART cities end up getting "double-taxed" for the regional rail system, since these

communities currently pay a one-cent tax for rail?

**A:** We will suggest that if a funding option is too difficult to implement selectively around the DART cities, we will place 100 percent of that revenue into a transportation infrastructure fund. We would need to develop the mechanisms to manage such a fund, but these dollars could be used to advance rail, build infrastructure, build roadway projects, and perform maintenance projects in DART communities.

**Q:** Are the number of free lanes on the section of

Loop 820 and Interstate Highway 35W when you get to SH 183 dwindling to one?

**A:** No, there will be three free lanes in each direction and two managed lanes in each direction for a total of five lanes each way. You will actually be gaining one additional free lane.

At SH 183 the three lanes will be reconstructed and three managed lanes added. Frontage roads will be reconstructed, ramps will be reconstructed, and there will be auxiliary lanes between ramps. So there will be increased free capacity on IH 820 and SH 183. But the toll element helps us fund the reconstruction efforts.

### MORRIS: Turning Momentum into Action (continued from Page 2)

to fund the planned expansion. The subcommittee should be commended for its flexibility.

An interactive tool available at [www.nctcog.org/rnt](http://www.nctcog.org/rnt) allows residents to put together their own funding proposals using options discussed by the

subcommittee. Developed by NCTCOG Transportation Department staff members, this tool has helped educate lawmakers and their constituents about the complexity of the planned rail expansion.

When North Texas legislators

return to Austin next year for the 81st session, they will be armed with a well developed plan that would integrate land use and transportation decisions, and aid in air quality compliance, giving us a more reliable transportation system. After all ... mobility matters.

### CORRECTION

State Highway 121 in Denton and Collin counties will not have managed lanes. An item in the Q&A section of the spring newsletter incorrectly said it would have them.

Summer/Fall 2008

# mobilitymatters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area

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