

# A Celebration of Regionalism

Leaders from across the public and private sectors joined together in August to celebrate the accomplishments of the Regional Transportation Council over the past 50 years.

The North Central Texas Council of Governments was designated as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Dallas-Fort Worth area in 1974. Since then, the region has grown from less than 3 million to nearly 8.5 million people. And the transportation system has matured along with the region.

Cedar Hill Mayor Stephen Mason highlighted Cedar Hill's relationship with its neighbors through the Best Southwest Partnership, which allows the cities to collaborate on economic development, tourism, public infrastructure and other issues of common interest.

"What the Best Southwest Partnership has done for Cedar Hill the RTC has done for the entire region," he said. "I got involved in city government because I have a heart to serve people in Cedar Hill – my hometown. The great thing about the RTC is we can take that servant's heart we have for our own communities and be able to serve all communities."

Deirdre Delisi, former Texas Transportation Commission chair, provided the Perspective of the Texas Transportation Commission, Delisi said she enjoyed working with the RTC during her tenure as chair of the Texas Transportation Commission because its members brought big, complicated projects as well as the desire to see them through to completion.

She highlighted three projects: the DFW Connector, LBJ Express and North Tarrant Express. The projects happened simultaneously, meaning "you didn't have to wait years or decades for the projects to be delivered," she said.

"Those three projects all serve as models nationally on how to deliver these massive, critical, complicated infrastructure projects in fast-growing urban areas," Delisi said. "I was always so proud to say that I played a very small part in helping deliver those projects."

These projects also were important to the state, as they led to reduced congestion and an improved quality of life for a crucial region of the state, she said.

Former Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr spoke on behalf of elected officials across the region. Barr, who also served as chair of the North Texas Tollway Authority, said that over the years, he discovered he could approach NCTCOG with challenging issues and be received with a solution-oriented attitude.

"I've always been welcomed by the staff, by the RTC with what I'd call a listening ear and a positive response," he said. "... and a commitment to address whatever I was working on and figure out a good strategy for it."

The RTC is a diverse board that reflects the challenges faced by the region, but it has been easier to work with than planning organizations in other parts of the nation, he said.

Rob Matwick, executive vice president of the Texas Rangers, discussed the RTC's role in special events.

Matwick said in the events business, it is often said that the guest experience begins even before the fans leave home. In Dallas-Fort Worth, which has routinely hosted some of the biggest events on the college and professional sports calendars, fans are coming from all over the nation – and in some cases, the world.

“However, in the case of these megaevents that we tend to do in North Texas, that journey might originate in another state, another country or another continent,” he said. “Our region has been blessed to have some of the finest facilities in the world for sports, entertainment and hospitality.”

The facilities built over the past several years have landed Dallas-Fort Worth some of the nation’s premier events, but what is on the horizon is expected to be even bigger.

“As we turn our attention to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, this event is going to require the biggest transportation-planning process we’ve ever faced from a special events standpoint.”

AT&T Stadium will host nine matches, and World Cup activities will be spread across the entire region for several weeks.

The World Cup presents a tremendous economic opportunity, and it requires significant collaboration as planners work to identify where work is required to prepare for eyes of the world, he said.

Several transportation improvements to the Arlington Entertainment District – new dynamic message signs, street signs and sidewalks among them – have already been made, with more to come.

“The Regional Transportation Council has been and will continue to be the leadership group to work across North Texas to put this transportation network in place to keep us all moving as we prepare to welcome the world once again,” Matwick said.

Mike Berry, president of Hillwood, represented the private sector.

Berry said the nation’s eyes are fixed on Dallas-Fort Worth and the RTC’s ability to accomplish big things.

“The RTC is an illustrious advocate for innovation and infrastructure development,” Berry said. “As I travel around the country and the world, people are amazed at the expansion of North Texas’ transportation infrastructure during these past five decades, coupled with the strength of our regional leadership.”

The RTC has helped by bringing business and government together to leverage available resources to create public-private partnerships such as the region’s TEXpress Lanes, he said.

“We’re truly a model that the rest of the country is trying to emulate,” Berry said. “Our regional success in economic development and business expansion and relocations can be traced by the blueprint created and executed by the RTC. And that legacy is evident in the incredible quality of life we’ve all happened to create and we all get to enjoy.”