



IN THIS ISSUE

September 2011

**MY 35 WINS NATIONAL AWARD
THE LINES ARE OPEN: TXDOT'S
FIRST BUSINESS OWNERS
MEETING A SUCCESS
YOUR MUSSELS AND YOU:
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS
AND I-35**



MY 35 WINS NATIONAL AWARD

TxDOT's MY 35 public involvement effort has won the 2011 National Transportation Public Affairs Workshop (NTPAW) award for best public involvement approach. The award, sponsored by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), was presented at the 34th annual conference held last month.

AASHTO's Subcommittee on Transportation Communications comprises public affairs professionals from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, who meet annually at the workshop. According to its web page, the subcommittee "promotes excellence in communications through the exchange of ideas and educational programming, presents annual skills awards and advises other committees on communications issues."

"Receipt of this award confirms the value of public input in the transportation planning process. Citizen participation at the grassroots level capitalizes on the unique insights of the users and stakeholders in the system," says Tim Brown, chair of the I-35 Advisory Committee and Bell County Commissioner.

[Read More.](#)

THE LINES ARE OPEN: TXDOT'S FIRST BUSINESS OWNERS MEETING A SUCCESS

TxDOT conducted its very first business community meeting on Aug. 24 in West.

About two dozen people from West and Abbott, most of them owners of businesses along I-35, met with TxDOT engineers and got acquainted with project 5B: the expansion of I-35 from Abbott through West.

District Engineer Richard Skopik and Hillsboro Area Engineer Tony

CALENDAR

Sept. 26

Business Community Meeting
Waco Chamber of Commerce
(Cooper Room)
101 S. Third Street
Waco, Texas 76701
254/757-5600
info@wacochamber.com

Oct. 4

Final Public Hearing
Temple I-35 Expansion Project
Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
Frank W. Mayborn Civic &
Convention Center
3303 N. 3rd St.
Temple, Texas 76501

Oct. 6

Open bids for Section 3A-2 -
Bruceville-Eddy (N. Troy city limit to
Woodlawn Rd.)

Oct. 2011 - Jan. 2012

Future Business Community
Meetings (details closer to the dates)
Oct. — McLennan County
Nov. — Bell County
Dec./Jan. — Hill County

LINKS

[Scuba Team Searches for
Threatened Species in Brazos River](#)
[My35.org](#)
[TxDOT](#)

Moran explained the new configuration of the highway and the expected length of time it will take to complete the project. They introduced attendees to new features, like improved intersections, repositioned ramps and one-way access roads, as well as detailed planned methods for maintaining access to the businesses along I-35.

"We want to thank all the business owners, city officials and concerned citizens who attended the meeting," says Jodi Wheatley, I-35 information specialist for TxDOT's Waco District. "They asked some really good questions, and we did our best to provide them with really good answers."

Monthly business community meetings are planned, rotating through the three counties containing the majority of the I-35 expansion project: Hill, McLennan and Bell. September's meeting is scheduled for Monday, Sept. 26, at 3 p.m. at the Waco Chamber of Commerce building in the Cooper Room, 101 S. Third Street. Anyone interested in the I-35 reconstruction effort is invited to attend.

YOUR MUSSELS AND YOU: ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AND I-35

Road building was simpler a few decades ago. The state planned for years, rounded up funding, and then went about the construction task. Now, TxDOT has a lot more to consider.

In 1993, TxDOT created a separate Environmental Affairs Division — hiring its own archeologists, biologists, historians, water quality experts and even traffic noise specialists — to better address environmental concerns associated with roadway construction.

The added manpower was necessary to satisfy state and federal laws, but caring for the environment has also made the road construction process a bit more cautious and costly.

Recently, TxDOT environmental specialists had a unique dilemma on the I-35 reconstruction project. Plans require the construction of mainlane and frontage road bridges over significant streams like Salado Creek in Bell County and the Brazos River in Waco. However, 15 species of freshwater mussels are on the state's threatened species list, and very little information is known about their distribution near planned construction projects in the Waco District.

Could those threatened mussels inhabit the waterways along I-35, or other upcoming projects? TxDOT Environmental Coordinator Mike Rhodes was in charge of finding out.

Enter a team of biologists from the Texas A&M University Institute of Renewable Natural Resources. Extension Program Specialist Julie Groce led the team, which included mussel ecologists, to search for three threatened mollusks known to have been found in the Central Texas area: smooth pimplebacks, false spike and Texas fawnsfoot. At some locations, the biologists had to use scuba gear. Waco's Brazos crossing

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was unique in requiring the whole search to be done via scuba diving, which became unexpectedly difficult when they found the water so full of soft silt that the biologists had to search with one hand while holding onto a gridline with the other. The cost to survey about two dozen locations was \$100,024.

"I'm asked all the time why these mussels are important," Groce reports. "First, they are bio-indicators, meaning if their populations decline, it could be an indication of a bigger problem — similar to the 'canary in the coal mine' test. Also, they filter the water and are a food source for other animals."

Groce and her team completed their presence/absence surveys in August and are preparing a report for TxDOT. Although some of the threatened species were found on the Leon River, none were found at the I-35 crossings of the Brazos River or Salado Creek.

"These surveys were done so that we could comply with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code that forbids the 'taking' of state-listed species. Had any of these state-threatened mussels been found at our construction sites, we would have had to relocate them and take special steps to protect their habitat," Rhodes explains. "Also, had the mussels been on the federal endangered species list, the cost would have increased ten-fold because the search for them would have been a lot more extensive and the steps to protect them would have been a lot more painstaking."

LANE CLOSURES

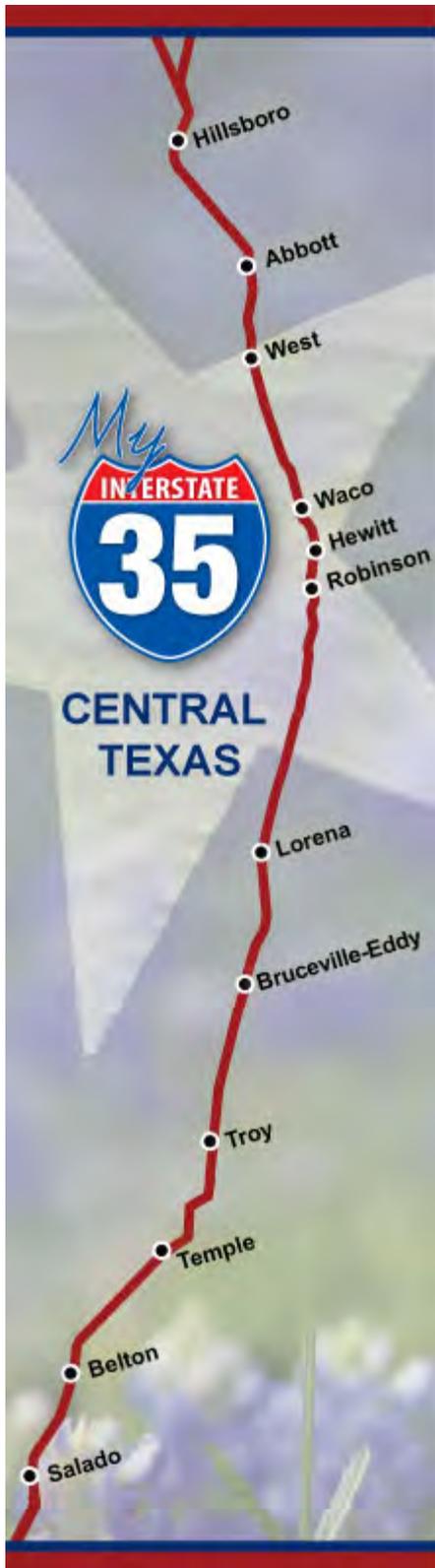
SECTION 1C: SALADO TO BELTON (FM 2484 TO US 190 IN BELTON)

- 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.
- Sept. 1–9: various lanes of the eastbound US 190 frontage road from Connell St. to the southbound I-35 frontage road will be closed 7 a.m.–5 p.m., Monday–Friday, to allow the contractor to add caps to the support columns for the new flyover.

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 6 to 12 months as work progresses at the US 77/I-35 interchange. Exit 342A (Crest Drive/FM 2417) will be open.



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 crossstreet 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)

- Began constructing caps for US 190 westbound flyover support columns.
- Barrier walls were set on Loop 121 at I-35 southbound frontage road.

Access this section's project map (schematic).

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

- Completed northbound bridge deck at Crossover Rd. near Waco Memorial Park cemetery.
- Completed pouring concrete pavement for northbound mainlanes (except for small sections that must wait until traffic is moved).

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

- Completed pouring the bridge deck for BUS 77.
- Completed prepping the right of way between Tours Rd. and FM 1858.

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

- Opened Chatt Rd. crossing under I-35.
- Opened the second lane of the new northbound frontage road.

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.
- Start work 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 (S. LOOP 363 TO N. LOOP 363)

- The final public hearing for the Temple I-35 Expansion Project is scheduled for Tuesday, October 4, at 6:30 p.m., at the **Frank W. Mayborn Civic & Convention Center**.

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

- Finish setting the metal rails on flyover.
- Move 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 the north of Loop 340 to the north end of the Central Texas Marketplace.
- Finish the last small pieces of the northbound concrete roadway.
- Continue construction of the large sign structures.
- Begin landscaping.

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

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

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

- Open FM 1304 and FM 310 intersections.
- Finish the southbound frontage road between FM 1304 and FM

- 1242 and open both lanes in that area.
- Rebuild the existing retaining wall on the southeast end of the FM 310 overpass.
 - Pave the northbound mainlane shoulder and ramps.
 - Begin placing asphalt on the frontage roads (expect daily frontage road lane closures during this work).
 - Continue widening the I-35 mainlane Cobb Creek bridge (both northbound and southbound).

HILL COUNTY SAFETY REST AREAS

- Construction starts Monday, Sept. 12, and completion is anticipated in approximately 18 months.



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.