

## Texas Department of Transportation

*Providing safe, effective, and efficient movement of people and goods.*

**Contact:** Media Relations

**Phone:** (512) 463-8700

### TxDOT 'getting out ahead' of Panama Canal expansion

May 21, 2012

AUSTIN - With the upcoming expansion of the Panama Canal, Texas is in a unique position and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will play a defining role in ensuring Texas is well-positioned to capitalize on this economic opportunity.

To prepare for the expansion, TxDOT is creating a Panama Canal Stakeholder Working Group comprised of a wide variety of entities with an interest in the expansion of the canal and is seeking input from them on promoting port activities in state transportation planning, tackling highway bottlenecks - bridges and links to terminals, and supporting rail investment, especially for exports.

A 2011 Cambridge Systematics study concluded the expansion will allow demand for import and export shipments via Western U.S. Coast ports to remain substantial in coming years, though those ports face physical and other limited constraints to expansion.

This means constraints on West Coast ports could result in more cargo being shipped through Texas ports.

"Preparing the state's infrastructure for such an expansion, in terms of sea and land-based infrastructure, is crucial to accommodating this increased freight traffic," said State Representative Larry Phillips.

The group will produce a report by year's end assessing the state's readiness to maximize any opportunities the Canal's expansion might bring.

The group will be led by Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, a former state representative, and former member of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Before becoming County Judge, Emmett was a recognized expert on freight transportation issues and logistics.

"This collaboration presents us with an opportunity to fully understand the impact of the Panama Canal expansion on Texas' imports and exports and to prepare for that impact." said Judge Ed Emmett.

TxDOT has invited entities from the port, agriculture, trucking, manufacturing, government, oil and gas, and rail industries to be a part of the group. Those confirmed include representatives from: Texas Association of Manufacturers, Texas Port Association, Texas Motor Transportation Association, Texas Farm Bureau, Economic Development and Tourism Division of the Governor's Office, Port of Houston Authority, Texas Economic Development Council, BNSF, and Judge Ed Emmett.

"Bringing together a broad group of experts involved in freight movement in Texas will allow us to develop a comprehensive master plan that addresses connectivity with our ports and potential expansion of export opportunities," said Bill Meadows, Texas Transportation Commissioner. "This Stakeholder Group will focus on enhancing and facilitating the flow of goods through and on our system, which does not stop at our ports but continues through our major corridors such as I-35 and I-69. "

Plans are for the group to meet approximately once monthly for the next six months.

"The vast amount of experience Judge Emmett brings to this effort ensures the tasks put before this group will be completed at a quality level," Meadows added.

**Printer-Friendly Page:** <http://www.txdot.gov/news/022-2012.htm>

Generated on: May 22, 2012 at 1:17PM CST