

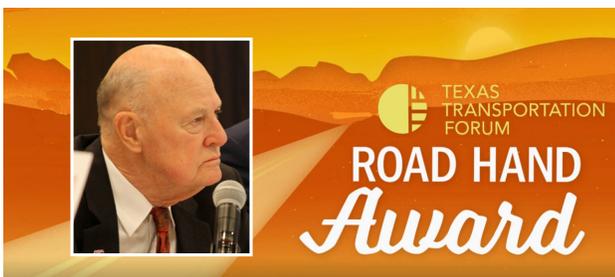
March 8, 2021

❑ **LEGISLATIVE PACE QUICKENING** - Bills are being referred and committees are starting to have regular hearings as the Texas Legislature rebounds from a Covid-related slow start and February's Big Freeze shutdown. Friday is the deadline for unrestricted filing of bills and resolutions other than local bills, emergency appropriations and emergency matters submitted by the governor. That begins an 80 day sprint to take care of the state's business in the regular session ending May 31st. Fallout from the Big Freeze has been an overriding focus as lawmakers investigate and search for a path to reduce the likelihood of a similar future event. Senate testimony indicated that one of many contributing factors was that icy road conditions prevented maintenance teams from getting to natural gas wells.

❑ **HOUSE TRANSPORTATION** - TxDOT Executive Director **James Bass** testified during the first meeting of the House Transportation Committee last week. Bass stressed that while fuel tax revenues and vehicle registration fees have increased over the past 30 years with population growth, the actual construction buying power of that higher revenue is less than it was in 1992. He also said that pavement damage from the Big Freeze is likely to be very significant statewide.

❑ **FUNDING OUTLOOK** - Highway funding in Texas will likely take a small dip in each of the next two years because of Covid impacts on revenues. That could change depending on how much extra federal money TxDOT may receive. In a special commission meeting in February, TxDOT staff indicated that contract lettings this year will be a total of \$5.6 billion and next year may go down to \$5 billion. That compared to just over \$6 billion a year in 2019 and 2020.

❑ **TRANSPORTATION FORUM** - This year's Forum opened with a video tribute to the late Gary Bushell's efforts on behalf of I-69 and transportation in Texas. TxDOT honored his two decades of work for the Alliance with a 2021 Road Hand Award. Also during the Forum, Alliance Chairman **Sydney Murphy** and Board Member **Gerry Schwebel** appeared on a panel with Commissioner Alvin New that showcased I-69 statewide as part of a discussion of inter-regional connectivity.



Chairman  
Bruce Bugg



Commissioner  
Alvin New

❑ **LEADERSHIP REAPPOINTED** - Transportation Commission Chairman **Bruce Bugg** of San Antonio and Commissioner **Alvin New** of San Angelo have been reappointed to six-year terms. I-69 Alliance members have worked hard in recent years to ensure that both Bugg and New are keenly aware of the importance of I-69 to the State and during that time we have seen a steady increase in TxDOT support for I-69 projects.

❑ **I-69 AUSTIN DAYS** - The Big Freeze took over and we had to cancel I-69 Austin Days virtual meetings scheduled with about 30 legislative offices. We are in the process of rescheduling regional meetings spread over the next couple of weeks.



❑ **FEDERAL ACTION** - We are working to get two Alliance provisions in the FAST Act renewal that will start with action by the House T&I Committee. Larry Meyers reports the Committee staff has been very open to our request to expand eligibility for formula freight dollars to include I-69 and Congressman **Henry Cuellar** (Laredo) continues to be willing to request the amendment.

Work is underway in the House on a second provision that would remove restrictions which reduce the likelihood that some completed I-69 miles will be quickly added to the Interstate Highway System and signed. There is optimism this can be done as part of the base bill rather than as an amendment. Work on both of provisions is underway in the Senate.

It is likely that House T&I will use last year's bill as the base bill and that members will be allowed to request that certain specific projects in their district be included. It is possible the bill will be ready for House action by early in May.

Transportation Secretary **Pete Buttigieg** has been speaking forcefully about moving forward with a very broad infrastructure bill of perhaps \$2 trillion that will include many infrastructure elements in addition to highways.

As always, the difficulty will be paying for the legislation. House and Senate committees have not yet had discussions about how to come up with more revenue.

The Alliance team is very optimistic about a bill moving this year but it will have to happen in the face of severe budget constraints.

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