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Texas Lawmakers Made It Possible to Fund $70 Billion in Transportation Projects

AUSTIN – The results of a sustained effort by Texas lawmakers to address a major transportation funding shortfall came into full view Thursday with the approval of a 10-year funding program that is twice as large as last year's 10-year plan.

The Texas Transportation Commission approved the 2017 Unified Transportation Program (UTP) with $70 billion worth of projects over the next 10 years. That compares to the $33 billion in projects that were in last year's version of the 10-year plan.

The leadership of the Transportation Advocates of Texas praised members of the Texas Legislature for taking the initiative to develop additional transportation funding sources and for ending the practice of appropriating state highway funds to other agencies.

"Governor Gregg Abbott made transportation issues a major part of his campaign and since his election he has made transportation funding a priority. That was essential to the effort that produced the historic investment represented by the UTP," said Dennis Kearns, TAoT Chairman.

"Without the commitment and political courage shown by senators and house members over the past few years we would still be struggling with funding levels that could pay for little more than maintaining the state's large road system. It is especially important to recognize the leadership provided by Senator Robert Nichols and Representative Joe Pickett who chair the transportation committees in the legislature. Their determination and innovative initiatives in Proposition 1 and Proposition 7 give us this opportunity to improve serious congestion problems and to enhance the safety and free flow of traffic on highways connecting our communities," Kearns said.

Additional funding for projects in the UTP will come from voter-approved measures that will allocate portions of the state oil and natural gas production taxes, general sales taxes and vehicle sales taxes to transportation. The five-year federal transportation bill passed in 2015 will add about $600 million a year in new funding.

The 2017 UTP allocates the largest share of additional funding to addressing gridlock and congestion in the state's urban centers and on the connector highways leading in and out of those cities.

The Transportation Advocates of Texas is a statewide coalition that brings together cities, counties, established community and regional organizations and business interests to support additional funding to help meet the challenging transportation demands facing Texas.

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Contacts: 
Dennis Kearns, 512-415-5607
Vic Boyer, 210-688-4407
Jennifer Newton, 512-468-9698