



THE ROADRUNNER



April 2023

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Save the Date:

October 23-26, 2023 are the dates for the 2023 Annual TACERA Conference.

Do you have a presentation you would like to make at our upcoming Conference? Please contact us.

Do you have an article you would like to put in our newsletter? Send them to us at TACERA or bryan.neaves@bellcounty.texas.gov

LET'S GO TO THE ROADEO!

By Jaime Mendoza, Road Administrator

Reeves County Road and Bridge is once again hosting its annual Employee Expo and Truck Roadeo event this year on May 30th and 31st in Pecos Tx. This will be the event's 3rd year and seems to be growing every year. With Reeves County hosting the event, this gives the opportunity for surrounding counties to be part of an event that is held in the west Texas area.

During the event, employees will get the opportunity to get first-hand training with heavy equipment demonstrations by heavy equipment companies that will provide complete safety walkarounds. Employees will have the opportunity to get some classroom time as well with training in fall protection by *Odessa College*, Dot Compliance By *TAC*, fire safety by *Reeves County Fire and Rescue*, distributor and chip spreader training by a representative from *Etnyre* to name a few. Finally, CDL drivers will have the opportunity to show their skills in the outdoor Truck Roadeo that will take place in the parking lot. Truck Roadeo consists of a series of events that include from complete pre-trip to backing and parallel parking with each accumulating points with a chance to have the highest score at the end of the event.

The event is free of charge to all who attend. Breakfast and lunch will be provided on both days of the event. All in attendance will have the chance to win door prizes that are provided by the vendors of the Expo and Rodeo.

For anyone interested in being a part of the Expo and Truck Rodeo feel Free to contact Jaime Mendoza at jmendoza@reevescounty.org or Anthony Lopez at tlopez@reevescounty.org. The event is always looking for presenters with topics suitable for the actual employees of Local Government entities. Last for the Truck Roadeo we are looking for judges to volunteer with the event, open to commissioners, supervisors, retired employees, or the general public who just want to volunteer some time.



Sometimes I get unusual requests.



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NACE FLY-IN

By Joe Trammel, P.E.

First, I want to thank the members of The Texas Association of County Engineers and Road Administrators (TACERA) for funding this trip and the TACERA Board for allowing me to participate in my 2nd Legislative Fly-In representing the great state of Texas! It is such an honor and I'm so happy as I met different people, departments, associations.

I flew in late Monday, February 6, after work as I had previously requested a White House tour through my Texas Representative, Roger Williams. You have to pre-schedule and be available the entire day, pass the Secret Service background check and only then will they provide you with the time to attend.

Unfortunately, my White House tour was scheduled for 9:30 a.m., which required me to fly in a day early.



This increased my personal spending allowance, but it was well worth it! It also provided me with time to visit the Ford Theatre (where Abraham Lincoln was shot) and the Peterson House where he passed away. Later that evening while I was arriving at Shelly's Back Room Cigar Bar for dinner, I ran across an old friend from college whom I hadn't seen in 25+ years! We had dinner, smoked a cigar and enjoyed some fine spirits before the day ended.

Tuesday was a workday as I had a couple of meetings and some business items to attend at my hotel before meeting with the National Association of County Engineers (NACE) Executive Board Members and other Board of Directors traveling to Kevan Stones home. Mr. Stone serves as the National Association of County Engineers

Executive Director. His role was to organize the chaos we County Engineers from across the United States brought and focus it for the three scheduled meetings which he had planned for the next day. His home is in Bethesda, MD, approximately 30 minutes from the hotel where we were staying.

After arriving at Mr. Stone's home, we enjoyed a delicious meal that was catered for us by the Stones and the business portion of the evening began. The NACE Federal Priorities Quick Fact Sheet was available, but our focus was on the three following points within that document:

- 1) The Resource Levels outlined in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for the Bi- Partisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funded grant programs
- 2) Crafting policies for a level playing field during the grant application process
- 3) Continual streamlining of the federal permit process.

One might ask, what exactly does all this mean? Let me back up and put this in laymen's terms as to what we're trying to convey, why we're trying to convey it, and then how we conveyed it.

As one might anticipate, the funding for the IIJA is a phenomenal opportunity to improve existing roadways and/or bridges for cents on the dollar if not fully funding projects. The unforeseen costs are the resources needed to complete the application for any of the many great opportunities out there. Many of the larger agencies have the resources with either internal staff or funding to hire consultants to complete the application for themselves. Unfortunately, the smaller agencies aren't staffed with expertise nor have the funding. Many states control the



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funding from Federal programs and in Texas, this is accomplished through the MPOs established throughout the state. Unfortunately, in some cases these two issues reduce the opportunities for smaller agencies to apply for and/or receive funding.

Solutions to rectify this are twofold:

- a) Craft policies that guarantee a level playing field during the grant application process.
- b) Streamlining of the federal permit process.

In our presentation to the various agencies, solutions to crafting policies can be accomplished by providing various resource levels where smaller agencies are competing against each other or aligning similar projects to compete against each other.

An additional solution that will assist every agency is streamlining the federal permit process. Don't mistake the streamlining of the federal process as not complying with federal laws or executive orders. While there is certainly value in the federal laws or executive orders, in many cases there is a redundancy or duplicated effort in approval of a particular project for compliance across federal agencies, thus increasing the approval time and increasing the project costs as contract prices increase over time and/or additional issues arrive due to the delay of the completion of the project.

Perhaps a solution to this would be to combine differing requirements under one agency. Another solution would be to provide automatic approvals if no response was received within an allotted timeframe.

As mentioned earlier, we had now established what we are trying to accomplish (leveling the playing field), and the why (equality for all), the how to convey it was all that was left.

By conveying our message to the Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee (those who lead Congress in developing infrastructure policy), the White House (those who administratively oversee the various departments, and the US DOT (the agency responsible for reviewing and approving the grants), we can essentially establish a strong foundation to share our concerns. With politics involved, you must show equity to the White House (a strong belief with the current White House administration and staff), the issues and solutions (a strong belief with the T&I Committee), and encouragement of what's being done as a positive notion but offering NACE as a valuable resource to the USDOT.



By preparing for each of these departments with examples from several states as a nation-wide stance (not a state issue) we felt our objectives would be served. We also determined who would speak at which meeting to increase our efficiency for the overall NACE agenda.

The next morning, we had breakfast at the Capitol Hill Club. This is the location where various representatives meet for breakfast to discuss issues of the day. We met former Congressman John Mica, who Mr. Stone had previously worked for which was interesting as we heard how some politics are played out in real life on Capitol Hill.

Our first meeting was with the White House staff at the White house in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Just as we had rehearsed the previous evening, we shared our pros and cons of the IIJA and the White House



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staff seemed to appreciate our position and willingness to be a resource should any questions arise about this or other opportunities in the future.

Our second meeting was with the United States Department of Transportation where we conveyed much of the same message to the staff there at their office. They too were appreciative of our position and willingness to be a resource and because we've met with them before had them present at our National Conference, you could sense a relationship of trust and honesty being established over time.

Our third and final meeting was with the Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee's Majority staff. Again, the same message conveyed, but with the concerns of the IJJA being shared by that Committee as well, we were able to convey our message knowing it would be well received. After these meetings and a subway back to the hotel, we met at Sette Osteria for an incredible Italian meal, reflection of the last couple of days and we said our goodbyes.

As I flew home early the next morning, I realized the experience, the contacts, the work (both in preparation and actual discussions with staff members) was a lot to cram into a couple of days. But I also know it was well received by the agencies in Washington which respected NACE as we were respectful, yet direct in our message for the issues we were pressing. Of course, I was certainly proud to represent Texas and TACERA!

NEED SOME FREE TRAINING?

Several members of TACERA are aware that there are free training opportunities available from the University of Texas-Arlington and Texas LTAP. They have a variety of courses that are helpful for city and county public works departments. All subjects are focused on safety and construction operations common in our road and bridge departments.

Some of the traffic control courses are proper flagging, work zone safety, Texas MUTCD refresher course, and installation of signs. They have workshops on various heavy equipment used by operators. There are safety courses for confined space, fall prevention, excavation safety, tree trimming, and electrical safety. They even have a course for supervisors and how to deal with human relations issues. TACERA is planning to give a presentation during the annual conference on hiring and retaining employees.

These courses are free for city and county governments. You must provide a meeting room and the minimum number of employees. If you can get 15 people to attend, the instructor comes to your location. Most courses have a workbook for employees to keep as a reference.

More information can be found on the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) website. The Public Works Institute subsection has more details about the courses they offer. You can contact them at 1-866-906-9190 or by email at cedquestions@uta.edu

Members of the Newsletter Committee are:

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