

# TEXAS HIGHWAYS MAGAZINE PRESENTS

# THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

## A 100 YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH TIME WITH TxDOT

ILLUSTRATION BY LARRY GOODE



**1916** President Woodrow Wilson Signs Federal Road Act of 1916, requiring each state to create a highway agency and submit projects for federal matching funds. Construction of cross-country Bankhead Highway begins same year.

**1917** The Texas Highway Department is signed into law on April 4, 1917 by Gov. James E. "Pa" Ferguson.

**1918** Commission creates first districts in Dallas, Fort Worth, Amarillo, Houston, San Antonio, and San Angelo.

**1919** Hays County project; first stretch of what will eventually become Interstate 35.

**1920** First highway project begins; 20-mile road between Fallfurris and Encino will become US 281.

**1921** Number of districts increases to sixteen, each overseeing about 1000 miles of highway.

**1922** Survey records 148,000 miles of road in Texas—almost all of them unpaved dirt and clay tracks.

**1923** Legislature passes first gas tax of one cent per gallon; 75% to highways and 25% to schools.

**1924** Congress amends Federal Aid to Roads Act of 1916, requiring states to take over exclusive control of road design, construction, and maintenance after 1925.

**1925** Equipment division moves to Austin's Camp Mabry.

**1926** Texas cut off from federal matching funds due to poor road maintenance.

**1927** First "Transportation Short Course" at Texas A&M.

**1928** Department has 17,960 miles of highway and 6,900 employees.

**1929** Safety program initiated to reduce on-the-job accidents.

**1930** Vehicle registration fees lowered, now based on weight instead of horsepower.

**1931** Department begins center striping of highways for safety.

**1932** Texas blockades Oklahoma, Oklahoma invades Texas in "border war" over Red River toll bridge near Denison.

**1933** State Highway Building at 11th and Brazos (now the Greer Building) brings Art Deco to downtown Austin.

**1934** Number of districts increases to 25.

**1935** Department of Public Safety created; Highway Patrol reassigned to DPS.

**1936** Highway commission establishes "information houses" across the state to serve travelers.

**1937** Landscaping efforts to date including the planting of 300,000 trees and 500,000 shrubs.

**1938** First farm-to-market road constructed between Mount Enterprise and Shiloh in Rusk County.

**1939** Work begins to strengthen roads and bridges for Army maneuvers in East Texas; in the course of World War II, tanks and artillery cause damage to Texas roads.

**1940** Amelia Earhart disappears over Pacific Ocean.

**1941** Department vehicles debut updated look.

**1942** Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor; US enters World War II.

**1943** Texas voters approve "Good Roads Amendment," making the gas tax allotment of 75% to highways and 25% to schools part of the Texas Constitution.

**1944** Federal Aid Highway Act creates framework for interstate highway system; I-35 will start in this spot in Laredo and run to Duluth, MN.

**1945** World War II ends.

**1946** Agency forms Motor Vehicle Division, merging Registration Division and Office of Certificate of Title.

**1947** Speed limit lowered to save rubber and fuel.

**1948** Texas legislature approves full funding for farm-to-market and ranch-to-market roads.

**1949** Texas voters approve "Good Roads Amendment," making the gas tax allotment of 75% to highways and 25% to schools part of the Texas Constitution.

**1950** First paved farm-to-market road opens in Sabine and San Augustine counties; FM1 connects a sawmill with US 96, eliminates older ways of getting around (Such as the Pendleton Ferry, shown here).

**1951** First leg of the Gulf Freeway in Houston opens; Texas's first urban expressway is 50 miles long, cost \$28.5 million.

**1952** First farm-to-market road opens in Sabine and San Augustine counties; FM1 connects a sawmill with US 96, eliminates older ways of getting around (Such as the Pendleton Ferry, shown here).

**1953** Department vehicles debut updated look.

**1954** Capitol tourist bureau opens, serves 5,470 in first week.

**1955** Agency adds automation division.

**1956** Federal Highway Trust fund created to pay for interstate highway system.

**1957** Integrated circuit invented at Texas Instruments in Dallas ushers in the electronic age.

**1958** Texas Coastal Waterway Act authorizes Texas to manage its portion of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, assigns responsibility to Highway Department.

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**1960** Average cost of a gallon of gas - \$ .86.

**1961** Agency now has 14,419 employees.

**1962** NASA's Manned Spacelift Center opens in Houston.

**1963** Highway commission mandates red and white STOP signs, eliminating use of yellow and black.

**1964** Speed limit raised to 70 mph (day) and 65 mph (night).

**1965** Agency adds automation division.

**1966** After fifty years, department has 66,000 miles of highway and 17,000 employees.

**1967** First rest area with restrooms opens on I-35 between Round Rock and Georgetown.

**1968** Agency now has 20,272 employees.

**1969** Apollo 11 lands on the moon.

**1970** Finance division created (Shown: The Bergstrom sisters were accounting stalwarts).

**1971** Legislature creates Texas Mass Transportation Commission.

**1972** 20,500 employees is all-time high.

**1973** Texas Highways magazine, which began life in 1953 as in-house publication, becomes Texas state travel magazine.

**1974** Speed limit reduced to 55 mph in response to gas shortages.

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**1976** Agency renamed the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation.

**1977** Texas Coastal Waterway Act authorizes Texas to manage its portion of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, assigns responsibility to Highway Department.

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**1979** Agency now has 14,419 employees.

**1980** November 7 marks last non-fatality day on Texas roads.

**1981** Federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century authorizes a 90.5% return for Texas on federal motor fuel taxes paid by the state.

**1982** Headquarters building is renamed the Dewitt C. Greer State Highway.

**1983** September 11 attacks.

**1984** "Leanderthal Lady" skeleton discovered during expansion of FM 1431 in Williamson County; dated at over 10,000 years old, grave is one of the most significant archeological finds in North America.

**1985** US "Route 66" decommissioned and replaced in Texas by Interstate 40; original signs of "Mother Road" are sold at auction.

**1986** "Don't Mess with Texas" anti-littering campaign begins with Cotton Bowl ad featuring Stevie Ray Vaughn.

**1987** Oil bust hits peak in Texas.

**1988** Gas and diesel taxes raised to current rate of 20 cents per gallon.

**1989** Automobile Theft Prevention Authority established.

**1990** Federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act emphasizes high-priority travel corridors, high-speed rail, and trails for bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

**1991** Agency merged with Department of Aviation and Motor Vehicles Commission and renamed Texas Department of Transportation.

**1992** Six-mile segment of I-27 in Lubbock symbolizes completion of Texas' 3200 miles of the interstate highway system.

**1993** Maribel Jaso assumes management of Abilene District; first female to be named district engineer.

**1994** Texas raises speed limit on some West Texas highways to 80.

**1995** Katy Freeway Reconstruction Project complete; largest reconstruction project ever performed in Texas more than doubles capacity of Houston's most-used east-west freeway.

**1996** Texas receives \$5.6 million from U.S. DOT to plan high-speed passenger rail from Dallas-Fort Worth to Oklahoma City, providing an alternative to I-35.

**1997** Report demonstrates 11% drop in traffic fatalities due to TxDOT safety improvements.

**1998** Department of Motor Vehicles created; Vehicle Titles and Registration, Motor Vehicle and Automobile Theft and Burglary, and a portion of the Motor Carrier Division are reassigned to DMV.

**1999** TxDOT scheduled for "sunset" when legislature adjourns without reauthorizing agency; special legislative session extends agency life for two years and authorizes new non-toll highways.

**2000** Rail Division established to plan statewide passenger and freight network.

**2001** Hurricane Ike; 1100 TxDOT employees deployed to clear Galveston roadways and restore traffic.

**2002** TxDOT sets up emergency centers at Orange and Waxton, assisting over 100,000 Louisianians displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

**2003** In response to Hurricane Rita, TxDOT deploys reverse flow traffic lanes for the first time to evacuate 2.8 million people from Southeast Texas.

**2004** Largest roadway safety program in Texas history includes 614 projects to widen and straighten roads, install medians, add turn lanes, and build overpasses.

**2005** TxDOT reduces fleet from 16,000 to 10,000 to maximize equipment usage and realize savings.

**2006** Aviation Division allocates \$60 million in grants to plan, construct, and maintain Texas community airports.

**2007** Wildfires in Bastrop are the most destructive in Texas history.

**2008** Texas raises speed limit on some West Texas highways to 80.

**2009** Hurricane Ike; 1100 TxDOT employees deployed to clear Galveston roadways and restore traffic.

**2010** TxDOT sets up emergency centers at Orange and Waxton, assisting over 100,000 Louisianians displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

**2011** TxDOT reduces fleet from 16,000 to 10,000 to maximize equipment usage and realize savings.

**2012** 41 mile segment of roadway opens with 85 mph speed limit—the fastest in the nation.

**2013** TxDOT sets up emergency centers at Orange and Waxton, assisting over 100,000 Louisianians displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

**2014** Voters approve Prop. 1, requiring the state to direct a portion of the oil and gas revenue to the State Highway Fund.

**2015** Voters approve Prop. 7, dedicating a portion of sales tax and other tax revenue to the State Highway Fund; measure passes with over 80% of the vote.

**2016** Texas bridges are in better condition now than ever and bridge costs are among the lowest in the nation.

**2017** TxDOT oversees more than 197,000 miles of highways and rights of way and has an employee allocation of 11,907.