

Community Profile | Chair of the Texas Transportation Commission

Interview by Kyle W. Fake

What is your role as chair of the Texas Transportation Commission? How do you rate the priority given to the Hwy. 290 expansion relative to other needed Houston-area highway improvements?

Formally, I am the leader of the five-person commission. I set the agenda for deliberations and set policy for the agency. I also serve as the spokeswoman for transportation and infrastructure needs of the state.

There is no question the Hwy. 290 expansion is vitally important. Hwy. 290 is one of the corridors I hear a lot about from people who live there and their elected representatives. It is one of the roads most asked about.

What were some of the most significant comments shared at the Hwy. 290 Draft Environmental Impact Statement public hearing held in July 2007?

The majority of the concerns were typical for a congested urban route; residents want to be sure that noise mitigation, air quality and drainage design are appropriately accounted for in design and implementation. There was also an overwhelming demand for the expansion of transit opportunities and a push for commuter rail sooner, rather than later.

Our program design takes these comments into account. What we are doing with the Hwy. 290 program is creating a multimodal corridor comprised of highway improvements, managed lanes, high-capacity transit and bike trails. In addition, we will hold noise workshops to identify areas in need of noise mitigation measures and include noise walls in our construction scope, and we will improve drainage throughout the corridor.

Which potential impacts to the social and natural environments, identified in the Hwy. 290 EIS, most concern you and the commission?

We are most concerned with the consequences of doing nothing.

The Environmental Impact Statement identifies various alternatives for the Hwy. 290 corridor, one of which is the "No Action" alternative. This option examines population and traffic trends and outlines the social and environmental impacts of not improving the Hwy. 290 corridor. The negative impacts are staggering.

The positive aspects of population growth—development, economic opportunity—would be mitigated by excessive traffic conditions. People's quality of life would decline.

This is what most concerns the commission, and that is why we are doing

what we can to advance this program. We are also looking at advancing multiple modes together with our other public agency partners for a multimodal corridor because one mode is not adequate.

Given that funding is an ongoing issue, what are the commission's fallback plans for the Hwy. 290 program?

Transportation funding continues to be a challenge at both the state and federal level. At this time we do not have funding identified for right-of-way acquisition or construction on the Hwy. 290 program. Without any significant changes to transportation funding in the next few years, we face the possibility of having to delay the program.

Despite these challenges, the Texas Department of Transportation is continuing to be proactive and is using funding made available through bonds to advance program design. Alleviating the traffic congestion on Hwy. 290 is one of the region's top priorities. Advancing program design will put us in a better position to use possible future funding that may be made available from the Federal Highway Trust Fund or a future transportation bill.

For full interview, visit more.impactnews.com/5605



Deirdre Delisi

Chair of the Texas Transportation Commission

Oversees the agency's statewide activities, including the multiphase expansion of the Hwy. 290 corridor.

As spokeswoman for the state's transportation and infrastructure needs, Delisi also communicates with the public to ensure a common understanding of current projects and how they will affect the community.

Education: Bachelor's degree in political science from Duke University and a master's degree in international policy studies from Stanford University

Political background: Served as chief of staff and deputy chief of staff to Gov. Rick Perry and acted as a policy adviser to George W. Bush during his presidential campaign

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