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For information: Mike Heiligenstein, (512) 695-8422, or
Don Martin or Paul Saldana, (512) 328-4055

**ASSAULT ON AUSTIN AREA TRAFFIC CONGESTION
PROPOSED BY REGIONAL MOBILITY AUTHORITY AND TXDOT**

**Toll road program to speed traffic and improve safety
launched in special RMA meeting today**

AUSTIN, April 12, 2004 – The year-old Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA) and the Austin District of the Texas Department of Transportation today unveiled a proposal to begin building more than \$2.2 billion of tolled road improvements in the Austin area in phases that would start later this year and continue starting over the next three years.

“Congestion is a cancer on the traffic arteries of our rapidly growing metropolitan area,” said CTRMA Executive Director Mike Heiligenstein. “As a result of new legislative authority and monies available from the Texas Mobility Fund, however, we have a one-time opportunity to begin addressing this critical threat to our safety, economy and quality of life.”

Heiligenstein told his board members that the toll strategy was developed with TxDOT executive Bob Daigh, who has been the state transportation agency’s Austin District Engineer since September 1 of last year.

“The dramatic shortfall in traditional highway construction funding is obvious for all to see, and the alternative of paying a two-to-three-dollar per-gallon gas tax would never be accepted,” said Daigh in joining Heiligenstein in the presentation.

“We are left with the idea of a convenience fee paid by those drivers who actually choose to use new capacity over the non-tolled alternatives that will always be available. The strategy presented today is not the complete answer, but it’s a next big step in solving this area’s severe congestion problem and thereby improving our quality of life.”

Under the program outlined by Heiligenstein and Daigh, several of Austin’s best-known roadways would gain new capacity that motorists would pay a toll to use. Some of this new capacity already is under construction by TxDOT. Included are SH 71 from IH 35 east toward Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, and Loop 1 from SH 71 near Sunset Valley southwest to William Cannon Blvd.

Added capacity that would be tolled also is proposed for US 183 from IH 35 in north Austin to SH 71 in southeast Austin near the airport, new toll-way lanes through the “Y” at Oak Hill, improvements to Loop 360 starting in as early as three years, and initiation of planning for added toll lanes on Loop 1 that would be constructed as funding becomes available (and as the issue regarding the Union Pacific assignment is resolved).

The CTMRA/TxDOT proposal would require major support from several sources, including TxDOT itself, the new Texas Mobility Fund created by the Texas Legislature and proceeds from bonds sold to investors that would be repaid from toll revenues. Private road building consortia also might be allowed to develop some of the added capacity in return for the right to collect tolls for a period of years.

The wide-ranging plan was presented Monday morning during a specially called meeting of the CTRMA board of directors at the University of Texas Thompson Conference Center. The proposal will be unveiled in the same location tonight for members of the governing board of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO).

Daigh said the area’s first major step in reducing congestion and improving mobility was to begin construction of the Central Texas Turnpike Project last year. He said a future step likely would involve transit. He and Heiligenstein cited Mopac Expressway (Loop 1) as an example of a particularly important future improvement opportunity that would require joint efforts by their agencies and Capital Metro, which is responsible for transit operations in the Austin area.

Heiligenstein told the CTRMA board that it would take “30 years or longer” using traditional funding sources to provide the same roadway improvements as he and Daigh proposed Monday. He also emphasized other key points:

- All toll revenues collected will remain in the local area after bonds issued for a particular road are re-paid
- The program does not propose the conversion into toll roads of any highway capacity that has already opened to traffic

- A non-tolled alternative will always be available to motorists
- Electronic toll tags will be employed so that motorists need not stop and toss change into baskets at toll booths, although this alternative also will be available
- Nationwide, tolls average about 12-cents per mile
- Proposed tolled facilities might be operated by CTRMA, TxDOT or even private companies who agree to build roads that ultimately become the property of the RMA or the state

Following presentation of the toll strategy, the CTRMA board unanimously approved a resolution recommending the tolling program to CAMPO for approval. Heiligenstein said that State Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos will be asked to schedule an early public hearing on the proposal by CAMPO, which he chairs. Ultimately, the Texas Transportation Commission also must approve the program.

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**CANDIDATE TOLL PROJECTS ANNOUNCED MONDAY
BY THE CENTRAL TEXAS RMA AND TXDOT**

The list of candidate projects includes previously announced toll-ways and other roads that are gaining or would gain new lanes in the future.

Under the proposal, CTRMA Executive Director Mike Heiligenstein and TxDOT Austin District Director Bob Daigh assume that two components are already underway:

- 1) US 183-A, the long-planned bypass around Cedar Park in west Williamson County, which is the CTRMA's planned first toll project (cost: \$220 million; detailed price proposals are due from construction firms this summer)
- 2) SH 45 SE, completing the connection from IH 35 east to the new SH130, a section that TxDOT is committed to financial markets to get built (cost: \$200 million)

Construction would start within 18 months on the following components of the new plan:

- 3) "Y" in Oak Hill, SH 71 Phase (cost: \$65 million)
- 4) US 183, from IH 35 in north Austin to SH 71 in southeast Austin
- 5) SH 71, from IH 35 in South Austin to Presidential Blvd. at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport

(combined cost of items #4 and #5: \$590 million)
- 6) Loop 1 (MoPac), from SH 71 near Sunset Valley to William Cannon Blvd. in south Austin (cost: \$30 million, including the cost of item #11 below)
- 7) SH 45, from Loop 1 (MoPac) east to FM 1626 in far south Austin (cost: \$40 million)

Construction would start within 36 months on these components of the plan:

- 8) "Y" in Oak Hill, US290 Phase, running from the "Y" west to FM 1826 (cost: \$120 million)
- 9) Loop 360, from Bee Cave Road southeast to Walsh-Tarleton Lane (cost: \$100 million)

- 10) US 290, from US 183 in northeast Austin out to SH 130 in eastern Travis County (cost: \$400 million)
- 11) Two ramps providing direct connections between Loop 1 (MoPac) and SH 71 near Sunset Valley (cost is included in item #6 above)

Additionally, planning would start now on the additional components, with construction following when financing becomes available:

- 12) Added capacity on US 183 between Loop 1 (MoPac) northwest to the intersection with new SH 45 North (cost not identified at this time)
- 13) Added capacity on Loop 360 on the south from Walsh-Tarleton Lane east to Loop 1 (MoPac) and from Bee Cave Road north to the intersection with Loop 1 (cost: \$450 million)
- 14) Loop 1 (Mopac) from Loop 360 on the south to Loop 360 in north Austin (cost not identified at this time)

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