Gov. Rick Perry’s Remarks Concerning the Development Agreement for Trans Texas Corridor

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Friday, March 11, 2005

Today my vision for a private-public partnership to build a better, safer and more reliable transportation system is becoming a reality as the state signs a comprehensive development agreement with the Cintra-Zachry consortium to build segments of the Trans Texas Corridor stretching from Oklahoma to San Antonio. This development agreement is a significant step toward a better, more reliable transportation system that will move commuters and cargo faster and more safely, and create greater economic opportunities for our families and employers.

The Trans Texas Corridor will remove hazardous cargo from the congested freeways our friends and loved ones drive on today. The Trans Texas Corridor will remove sources of pollution from city centers, and connect cities and towns all across Texas to important resources and commodities. But more than providing a new method to move people and goods faster, the Trans Texas Corridor is a huge jobs program that will put 140,000 Texans to work as we build the first six segments. And the Trans Texas Corridor will allow needed roads to be built faster and ultimately, cheaper, without any tax dollars being expended up front for construction. In Texas, we’re not waiting on others to lead or innovate, we’re not afraid to ask how we can do things better, even if it’s different than how we have always done them, and we’re not going to accept a future marred by gridlock and growing pollution problems.

The agreement signed today establishes a cost-effective partnership with proven private sector entities. At the same time, much is left to be decided, and the public will have a thorough opportunity to continue giving their input. The route has not been designated, the environmental review is ongoing, the price for driving on the corridor has not yet been determined and negotiations with landowners have yet to begin. But I think it is important to be clear on one important point: this state is committed to making all the necessary improvements to I-35 and that is non-negotiable. At the same time, everyone would be wise to realize that we can’t expand I-35 fast enough or wide enough to keep up with growth and traffic. The only solution is a new corridor with room for future growth and that involves much lower acquisition costs than expensive real estate that is adjacent to I-35 today.

For my fellow farmers and ranchers and other landowners on the eventual route: there will be fair compensation, and even a unique chance to participate in corridor proceeds, much like royalty payments paid to landowners who have oil and gas wells on their property. When you consider the alternatives, the Trans Texas Corridor is truly the best choice for Texas. The state would have to raise the gas tax by about a dollar to keep up with the needs of growth and the gas tax hits all Texans the same even though some Texans, especially rural Texans, don’t receive the same benefit in terms of new roads. Second, Texas receives only 86 cents back for every dollar we send to Washington. And while
we hope to get more federal funding in the future, we can't base our future on it. The third option, doing nothing differently, will simply lead to more accidents, more pollution and more congestion headaches as millions more Texans fill our roads in the years to come.

We have no better choice than public-private partnerships. They are the wave of the future because they are faster, cheaper and fairer, charging a cost only to those who use toll roads. If you don't want to pay a toll in Texas, you will always be able to drive the same free roads you're driving today. Just as the interstate highway system was an essential element to the growth and prosperity of our economy over the last 50 years, the Trans Texas Corridor will greatly expand the economy of the next fifty years. It is truly vital to creating jobs, wealth, and opportunity, because it will better connect Texas to trading partners and ensure the reliable movement of people and products in our time-sensitive economy.

Those who said it couldn't be done just didn't realize that we Texans are used to doing things bigger, better and first. And with $7.2 billion on the table from Cintra-Zachry to build the first six segments, Texas is taking the lead in partnering with the private sector to achieve the public good.