Thank you, Zack (Burkett, Associated General Contractors president). I am honored to be here with the men and women who have helped put the national spotlight on Texas transportation. I especially want to thank TxDOT, the Associated General Contractors, the Transportation Institute and the Good Roads Transportation Association for giving us a forum to look back on how far we have come, and to plan where we go from here.

Whether you’re talking about growing local mom-and-pop businesses, expanding international trade, or just getting the kids to school on time, transportation is an issue that impacts every aspect of our lives, and every aspect of Texas’ future. And one of the biggest reasons Texans are looking at a bright future ahead is because of the work you all are doing to make sure we have a world-class transportation system.

You can take pride in the fact that Texas is the economic hub for the western hemisphere, that we are the number one exporting state in America, that our business climate is one of the nation’s best, and that employment is at an all-time high. Those things wouldn’t be possible if you hadn’t helped make Texas a national leader in transportation solutions.

And if you still need proof that Texas is paving the way when it comes to transportation, just ask Secretary Mineta. He joined me earlier today to announce that the Central Texas Turnpike will be completed a year ahead of schedule, and $400 million under budget.

When President Eisenhower proposed a massive, nationwide expansion of highways, few Americans fully understood how this new vision would revolutionize their way of life. There were a lot of critics who said it would cost too much build, take up too much land, and offer too few benefits in exchange.

But because those early highwaymen had the courage to innovate, because they weren’t afraid to look for a better way, even if it was a different way, and because they never listened to the Luddites who only see the world for what it is rather than what it can be, today it is nearly impossible to imagine life without the Interstate highway system. Time has vindicated their belief that for the health of the American economy, and for the good
of American families, cities should be connected by quality transportation systems that move people and goods safely and efficiently.

At an event dedicated to celebrating and building upon that vision, I can’t help but point out how little the debate on transportation has changed. As there were 50 years ago, there are some who adhere to the NIMBY philosophy, which says roads are great as long as they are “not in my backyard.” At the extreme are the BANANA folks – the ones who think we should “build absolutely nothing, anywhere, near anything.” Their motto is this: If you do not build it, they will not come. But that’s only true if “they” means jobs. And there are others, myself included, who believe that we should build what we need, when we need it, and always look for a faster and cheaper way to do it.

The fact is, in Texas, the demand for transportation infrastructure has never been higher. Over the last five years alone our population has increased nearly 10 percent, meaning we have more than 2 million new Texans traveling our already congested highways. And while they may not all be on the road next to you on your morning commute, sometimes it sure seems that way.

That is why Texas is pouring concrete faster than any other state in America, and why we have developed the financing tools that will keep Texas ahead of the pack for the foreseeable future.

We passed toll equity to accelerate construction and complement our traditional method of transportation financing. We expanded on the models of Houston and Dallas by creating the concept of regional mobility authorities, and we created a second constitutionally dedicated account for transportation called the Texas Mobility Fund. And voters approved these new tools at the ballot box because they want to get Texas moving. As a result, we are leveraging the resources of the private sector to build roads, railways and pipelines faster and cheaper, using less overall land than traditional methods of expansion.

That’s how we are building the Trans Texas Corridor. In fact, private investors are not only paying $7.2 billion to build corridor segments from San Antonio to Dallas, but yesterday the state began accepting bids to build the long-awaited TTC-69.

For more than a decade, the concept of connecting the Rio Grande Valley and Northeast Texas with an Interstate quality road seemed little more than a pipe dream. Today it is going to become a reality because of public-private partnerships that do not depend on the federal funding fairy to give us our fair share.

As an old farmer and rancher, I am a big proponent of protecting private property rights. And as governor, I believe a leader has to listen to the concerns of the people, and address them when possible. That’s why I signed a law last year that adds greater protections for private property owners and ensures that roads that are toll-free today will remain toll-free in the future while keeping the Trans Texas Corridor concept on track.

We have also become the first state in America to work with privately owned railroads to begin the process of moving freight rail out of our urban areas. And six Regional Mobility Authorities are now established across the state. One has a road under construction and another has already expanded by adding neighboring counties who didn’t want to be left out.

Texas is accomplishing all of these things while still maintaining our existing roads. This year TxDOT will let...
over $5 billion in construction contracts, which is more than any other state by far. Texas has made transportation a priority not just because we like to biggest and best in everything, but because President Eisenhower and his supporters were right: good roads mean a stronger economy, safer citizens, and a bright future ahead.

There are only a few options before us:

First, the state would have to raise the gas tax by about a dollar to keep up with the needs of growth, and that tax hits all Texans the same even though some – especially rural Texans – don't receive the same benefit in terms of new roads.

Second, we can hope for more federal funding, but the fact is Texas receives only 86 cents back for every dollar we send to Washington.

Third, we could do nothing different, and the 22 million Texans on our roadways today will be joined by another 20 million or so Texans, which will cause more accidents, more pollution and more congestion headaches.

That leaves only one alternative…and that is the building of private toll roads that are completed faster, sooner and cheaper…that are only financed when the market determines they are needed…and that costs only its users. That's simply more fair. If you don't want to pay a toll, you can drive the free roads you're driving today. At the same time, if you want an alternative to the mixmaster in Dallas, or the long back-ups in downtown Austin or San Antonio, help is on the way.

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 sustain 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 ensures 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.

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who say it can't be done, and those who are busy getting it done. The people in this room are getting it done. And for that you have my deepest appreciation.

Thank you, and may God bless you.