



TxDOT Executive Director: Future I-27 Moving from Designation to Delivery

Williams outlines priorities for advancing Ports-to-Plains Corridor during annual conference in Del Rio



TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams addresses the 2026 Ports-to-Plains Alliance Annual Conference in Del Rio, Texas, Sept. 10. Photo by Josh Dansby.

Del Rio, Texas — Texas Department of Transportation Executive Director Marc Williams, the Thursday luncheon keynote speaker at the Ports-to-Plains Alliance Annual Conference, told transportation, trade and community leaders that Future Interstate 27 is moving into a new phase as TxDOT advances projects, develops future improvements and works to extend I-27 designation along the corridor.

“This corridor is beginning the process of moving from designation to actual delivery,” Williams said during his Sept. 10 address.

Williams said he has been involved with Ports-to-Plains Corridor for a significant portion of his career and praised the collaboration behind the effort. He described the corridor as more than a line on the map, calling it a working economic system connecting borders, West Texas, the Texas Panhandle, the Great Plains, Canada and Mexico.

Williams pointed to the integrated economies of Del Rio and Ciudad Acuña as an example of the connections the corridor supports. He emphasized the importance of moving trade safely, dependably and efficiently and said transportation corridors represent strategic connections that extend beyond individual jurisdictions.

He traced the development of Future I-27 from the establishment of the federal high-priority corridor system and the 1998 Ports-to-Plains designation through more recent planning efforts in Texas. Williams said a comprehensive interstate feasibility study directed by the Texas Legislature and completed in 2020 helped establish the path TxDOT is now following.

“In 2024, we developed the I-27 System Texas Implementation Plan, and that is essentially the roadmap we are following to make these incremental investments,” Williams said.

Williams said TxDOT is advancing work on the corridor through six TxDOT districts, moving individual projects from planning to design and construction while continuing efforts to extend I-27 designation along the corridor.

Looking ahead, Williams outlined four priorities for TxDOT’s continued work on the corridor: delivering projects that are already funded and included in the plan; developing the next generation of near-, mid- and long-term projects; continuing efforts to extend I-27 designation to

additional sections of the corridor; and preserving the corridor's future by making early decisions about routes and access that can help communities plan for future development.

"Each time we're able to put up and extend that highway shield along the I-27 corridor, that builds momentum and enthusiasm and support for continuing the effort," Williams said.

Williams also discussed the role technology will play in the development of Future I-27. He said the corridor will be built in a digital environment supporting planning, design, construction, operations and maintenance. He pointed to real-time information about crashes, work zones, severe weather and truck parking, as well as the continued development of connected vehicles, automated vehicles and automated freight systems.

"The Ports-to-Plains Corridor, I-27, needs to be a representation of what the future of transportation mobility is going to be," Williams said.

Williams discussed "Interstate 2.0," a concept he said recognizes that the next generation of interstate corridors must be more than pavement and bridges. He said those corridors will need technology systems, connected operations, interoperable technology, data and real-time information as transportation systems continue to change and evolve.

Delivering on those priorities will require stable and sustainable funding, Williams said. He noted that since 2021 the cost of building highways has increased sharply. Williams said a project that costs \$100 million around 2020 or 2021 could have become a \$160 million to \$170 million project within four to five years. While he said highway construction costs in Texas have since come down about 10 to 15 percent, much of the ground lost to inflation has not been recovered.

Williams also addressed the current federal surface transportation bill, noting that it expires at the end of September and that Congress has passed an extension.

"Congress has passed an extension, but it's just basically a Band-Aid," Williams said.

He said uncertainty surrounding federal transportation funding makes it more difficult for TxDOT districts and divisions to execute transportation plans as quickly as the department would like.

Earlier Thursday, Jennifer Shepard, Managing Director & Senior Policy Advisor with Hance Scarborough LLP, separately addressed federal funding for Congressionally Authorized Future Interstates. Shepard emphasized the opportunity she sees in the next federal transportation authorization.

"Leadership and support from the P2P Coalition and member organizations is critical to securing dedicated and predictable federal funding for development and construction of Congressionally Authorized Future Interstates (CAFI) in the next federal transportation authorization bill that Congress is developing," Shepard said. "This bill is the best opportunity in thirty years to re-establish dedicated federal funding to invest in the next generation of the nation's interstate system."

Williams emphasized the importance of partnerships among communities, counties, metropolitan planning organizations, TxDOT districts, the Texas Transportation Commission, state and federal officials, Canada, Mexico and industry in maintaining momentum for the corridor.

He concluded by looking back at the decision 70 years ago to build the nation's interstate highway system and the responsibility of today's transportation leaders to carry that long-term vision forward.

"Ports-to-Plains, the future I-27, is critical to that," Williams said. "I can tell you that the Texas Department of Transportation, the State of Texas, are committed to that work."

The Ports-to-Plains Alliance Annual Conference was held Sept. 8-10 in Del Rio, Texas, and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila.

About the Ports-to-Plains Alliance

The Ports-to-Plains Alliance is a grassroots nonprofit coalition of communities, businesses and advocates working to develop a modern, efficient and safe transportation corridor through America's heartland. The Alliance leads a multi-state effort to upgrade and expand a 2,300-mile corridor, designated in portions as Future Interstate 27, strengthening connections among Mexico, the United States and Canada.

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