

Cherokeean Herald

February 18, 2009

Linden, Texas – February 18, 2009 – The North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA) continued to focus on funding at its Board Meeting on Wednesday, voting on an Interlocal Agreement with a member county, supporting a resolution to seek stimulus funding, and asking that Toll 49 toll revenue be redirected toward the NET RMA.

During the meeting, the Board of Directors voted to enter into an Interlocal Agreement with Rusk County to further develop Loop 571 around Henderson (see Feb. 18, 2009 press release: NET RMA and Rusk County Partner on Interlocal Agreement).

The Board also considered a resolution to seek Federal stimulus funding for transportation projects in northeast Texas. The \$787 billion stimulus bill, which was signed by President Barack Obama on Tuesday, is expected to provide the state of Texas with up to \$2.2 billion in funding for highway projects and \$2.5 billion in overall transportation funding. The NET RMA affirmed the resolution, and said it would support the projects that have been submitted for consideration by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Tyler and Atlanta districts.

“We look forward to learning more about what will be in the stimulus package,” said NET RMA Chairman Jeff Austin, III. “We have projects that are essential to the economic growth and quality of life of our region’s citizens, so we would like to be considered.”

In other action, the NET RMA Board moved to request that toll revenue generated by open segments of Toll 49 be redirected from TxDOT to the NET RMA. The NET RMA asked TxDOT to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that, in addition to transferring funds, would also lead to the eventual transfer of project ownership to the NET RMA, and repayment of maintenance and operation costs.

“The NET RMA will use the money generated from Toll 49 to help fund other segments of the road,” Austin said. “That’s the beauty of this structure. Unlike gas tax, which is collected and then disbursed throughout the country and state, the toll revenue that East Texans have invested will be used to build projects locally that East Texans will benefit from.”

In October 2008 the NET RMA considered action to become the lead agency for the East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Planning Steering Committee, a state-mandated organization that coordinates and plans regional transportation. Wednesday the Board decided to continue discussions with the Steering Committee to develop an implementation plan for the future.

Other action items and presentations during the meeting included:

Legal Counsel Brian Cassidy updated the Board on the 81st Texas Legislative session.

The Board of Directors discussed the I-20 managed lane study.

A discussion about future NET RMA projects included:

- An update on the status of design for Toll 49 Segments 3A and 5.
- East Texas Hourglass: A summary of the NET RMA East Texas Hourglass Committee was given, and a discussion was held regarding the next steps for the project.
- Angelina Neches River Authority, Lake Columbia Projects: A summary of the January 20, 2009 meeting was presented.