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### NET RMA BOARD TO REQUEST EAST TEXAS HOURGLASS FUNDING

**Tyler, Texas – May 20, 2009** – The North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA) discussed the future of the Toll 49 – East Texas Hourglass (ETHG) project during its board meeting Wednesday, passing a resolution to seek funding for corridor studies. In other action, the NET RMA Board of Directors continued to progress toward completion of the entire Toll 49 project, voting to secure the services of a bond underwriting firm and begin Plans, Specifications and Estimates (PS&E) for Toll 49 Segment 3B. The Board also passed a revised Interlocal Agreement with Rusk County.

The East Texas Hourglass (ETHG) is a proposed extension of Toll 49 and includes Toll 49 Segments 6, 6A, 7, 8 and 8A. The approximately 80-mile road would extend east from SH 110 to IH 20 at the Gregg County Line, then north and east around Longview to US 259, and easterly to US 59 above Marshall. (See map on page three of this document.) In 2006, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) was studying potential alignment corridors and was in the midst of hiring a consultant to complete an overall corridor study when the project was halted due to lack of funding.

The NET RMA Toll 49 ETHG Subcommittee, chaired by Gregg County Board Member Dave Spurrier, is leading an effort to revive the project. On Wednesday the NET RMA Board of Directors affirmed a motion to submit a financial assistance request to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for \$2.8 million, which would cover conceptual corridor studies for the entire length of the project.

"This is an important project that would improve the lives of many East Texans," Spurrier said. "This financial assistance request is the first step in getting the project back on track."

In other business, the Board of Directors voted to secure a pool of bond underwriting service firms by selecting ten financial firms, led by Merrill Lynch with Estrada Hinojosa as co-lead. These firms will be asked to provide underwriting services as the NET RMA seeks financing options for their priority projects. One of these priority projects is Toll 49 Segment 3B, which received approval to move forward into PS&E on Wednesday. The move paves the way for engineers to draft plans for the approximately 9.7-mile project, which stretches from SH 31 north to I-20.

"Our ultimate goal has always been for Toll 49 to reach I-20, and these votes take us one step closer to that goal," said NET RMA Chairman Jeff Austin, III.

In January 2009 the NET RMA voted to enter into an Interlocal Agreement with Rusk County for the continued development of Loop 571 around Henderson. Since that time the agreement has undergone several revisions, including the stated desire by TxDOT for the NET RMA to be responsible for Right of Way acquisition and preparation of environmental studies and permits. On Wednesday the NET RMA Board of Directors affirmed the agreement, which is contingent on the acceptance of Rusk County's Commissioner's Court.

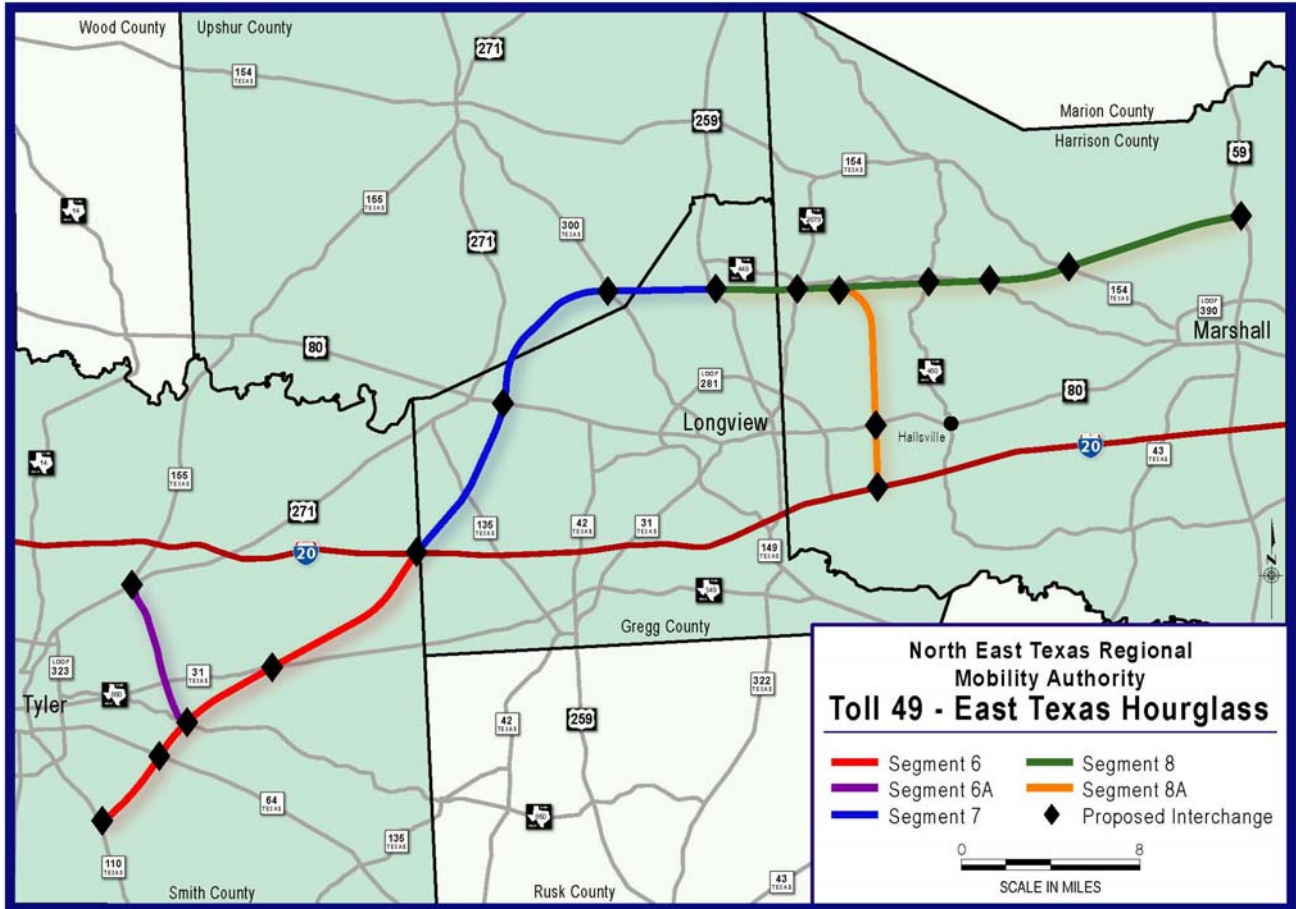
Other action items and presentations during the meeting included:

- Legal Counsel Brian Cassidy updated the Board on the 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislative session.
- TxDOT District Engineer Randy Hopmann spoke about the I-20 express lane application.
- The Board of Directors discussed the possibility of participating in the Rural Transit Committee Activities with the East Texas Council of Governments.
- A discussion about future NET RMA projects included:
  - An update on the status of design for Toll 49 Segments 3A and 5.

#### **About the NET RMA**

The NET RMA is an independent government agency created to accelerate the development of transportation projects in North East Texas. Our mission is to implement transportation solutions that will enhance the quality of life and the economic environment in our area. The NET RMA is governed by a 19-member board of directors that represent each of the member counties: Bowie, Cass, Cherokee, Gregg, Harrison, Panola, Rusk, Smith, Titus, Upshur, Wood, and Van Zandt. Texas RMAs were made possible through an initiative passed by state legislature in 2001. The NET RMA was established in October 2004.

# Toll 49 - East Texas Hourglass Map



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