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## TOLL 49 – EAST TEXAS HOURGLASS PROJECT MOVING FORWARD

**Tyler, Texas – May 22, 2009** – The North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA) Toll 49 – East Texas Hourglass (ETHG) Committee hosted a meeting on May 20, 2009 to discuss the future of the project and garner support from the area's key stakeholders. The meeting was held prior to the NET RMA Board Meeting, at which the Board of Directors voted to submit a financial assistance request to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for \$2.8 million, which will cover conceptual corridor studies for the project.

The Toll 49 – ETHG is a proposed extension of Toll 49 that includes Toll 49 Segments 6, 6A, 7, 8 and 8A. The approximately 80-mile road will 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.) The Toll 49 – ETHG Committee has been studying the project since 2005, when the group formed to assist TxDOT in planning for the project.

In 2006, studies by the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) Texas Turnpike Authority (TTA) determined that the road will be toll viable, and several alternative alignment corridors were being explored. TxDOT was in the midst of hiring a consultant to complete an overall corridor study when the project was halted due to lack of funding in late 2006.

Executive Director of the Tyler Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Barbara Holly said the Toll 49 – ETHG is the MPO's highest priority.

"The East Texas Hourglass will provide a better travel experience for East Texans wishing to travel between Tyler, Longview and Marshall," she said. "A specific alignment must be chosen, and funding secured to move the project forward."

During the meeting, the Toll 49 – ETHG Committee received a report on the history of the project, discussed the current status, and updated the study area. The Committee discussed financial options for proceeding with the preliminary corridor study and recommended that the NET RMA submit the financial assistance agreement to TxDOT.

If approved, the \$2.8-million financial assistance package will be used to complete conceptual corridor studies for the entire length of the project. The NET RMA General Engineering Consultant, PBS&J, estimated that the preliminary corridor study project will take approximately 270 days; with a desired start in Summer 2009 and completion by the following Summer, 2010.

Toll 49 – ETHG Committee Chairman and Gregg County Board Member Dave Spurrier said that the project will bring connectivity and economic activity to the entire region, including areas of rapid growth in south Tyler and north Longview.

“Our region is continuing to experience significant growth. Both Tyler and Longview must plan for this continued development and Toll 49 – East Texas Hourglass will provide vital transportation access to these areas and support the businesses and citizens that have a presence there,” Spurrier said.

NET RMA Chairman Jeff Austin, III said the Toll 49 – ETHG is a project that has been under consideration since the 1970s, and that he would like to see the NET RMA and its partners play a large role in getting the project back on track.

“We were disappointed to see the funding pulled back in 2006, because we know the road will bring significant benefit to northeast Texas,” Austin said. “Now we’d like to see things moving forward again.”

#### **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.

