

# HOT CHAPTER NEWSLETTER



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## President's Letter

We have come to the end of another wonderful year in the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter. And, this month marks the end of my term as your chapter president. It has been my privilege to serve the Heart of Texas Chapter for the past two years and work with the board, committee members, volunteers, Corporate and Agency Partners, Agency Affiliates, and members to bring you the chapter

programming this year. With your support, we have been able to fulfill the WTS mission to advance women and advance transportation for our community. Thank you.

Every month in 2024, the chapter has provided varied opportunities for us to engage with one another, with the experts in our transportation community, and with students and leaders to discuss the issues and initiatives that drive transportation in the region and beyond. Recently, we closed our year of luncheon programs with a presentation in October from Austin City Councilmember Paige Ellis (who also served as our Gala MC earlier this year) and in November we received an update on the progress of the IH 35 CapEx Stormwater Tunnel and Pump Station from the TxDOT program manager and hydraulics engineer. We have a slate of new and interesting programs planned for 2025, so stay tuned and join us for more in the coming year.

The Membership Committee hosted the final quarterly membership networking event on December 18 at the Brewtorium, featuring the Ugly Sweater Contest and great fellowship during the holiday season. Check out the article in the newsletter for fun photos of the event. The committee is busy working on more networking events in the new year.

Thank you to so many of you who submitted some great nominations for our annual chapter recognition awards, to be presented at the April 26, 2025, awards and scholarship gala. (Mark your calendars!) Be on the lookout in your inboxes for the opportunity for members to vote on the award winners and help us recognize excellence in the HOT Chapter and in our transportation community.

Please congratulate our newly-elected executive committee for 2025-2026: President Laura Friello, Vice President Adeliza Ramirez, Secretary Seles Johnson, and Treasurer Sruthi Ashraf. We look forward to continuing to benefit from their leadership in the new term.

Right after we turn the calendar to the New Year, you will see an invitation to register for the Annual Business Meeting on Wednesday, January 15, 2025. The outgoing chapter leaders will review the achievements of 2024, and we will recognize the volunteers who helped make 2023-2024 a success. We will also introduce and turn over the reins for the chapter to the incoming 2025-2026 Executive Committee and new members of the HOT Chapter Board of Directors, who will preview the offerings for 2025. We want you to be there to hear these reports and provide us with your input to help ensure that we are meeting your needs as members and regular participants in HOT Chapter activities.

Finally, as you prepare to identify and schedule your volunteer activities in 2025, I ask that you include volunteering for one (or more) of the WTS HOT Chapter committees in your plans. We cannot do any of the activities that the chapter offers each year without lots of volunteers, and we need and want fresh faces, new energy, and innovative ideas to propel our mission. Please contact me at [president@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:president@wtshotchapter.org) to volunteer, and we will get you matched up with a chapter committee that fits your interests, skills, and schedule.

I wish you a happy and safe holiday season and a prosperous new year. May 2025 bring blessings of peace, community, understanding, and progress for us all.

Tonia Norman



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Transportation Engineer  
Kimley-Horn

October Luncheon



Paige Ellis, District 8 Council Member, Mobility Committee Chair City of Austin

Councilmember Paige Ellis kicked off our October luncheon by sharing a bit about her professional background in environmental consulting and public involvement, before moving into a discussion on her first city council run. The crowd enjoyed her sense of humor in discussing her early work in the framing center at Michaels, but also appreciated how her experience working in Austin at minimum wage influences her understanding of the needs of working Austinites.

Ellis shared details about the priorities of her first term on city council, with major wins including multi-family composting, the Living Streets program, the Clean Creeks Crew, and a \$460M Mobility Bond. To audience cheers, she described her efforts to spearhead an initiative that brought diaper changing tables to men’s restrooms throughout the city.

In her second term, Ellis shared that her major accomplishments included her status as the youngest woman to serve as Mayor Pro Tem, the City Leap and Living Streets program, her work on the “missing middle” housing issue, and allocation of \$2M+ for parks employees and equipment.

In addition to all the initiatives above, Ellis has been incredibly busy in her second term, serving on nine committees and boards, including working as the chair of the mobility committee. Her work as the chair of this critical committee makes her perspectives particularly relevant to the WTS Heart of Texas chapter.

Ellis closed out her presentation with a discussion on what’s ahead for her, focusing on topics of interest to WTS luncheon attendees. Initiatives of focus include the I-35 expansion, Project Connect, Amtrak Passenger Rail, the City of Austin Climate Bond, and Site Plan Lite Utilities.

Ellis left time for a brief question-and-answer session at the end of her presentation, and many audience members were interested in asking her follow-up questions. One audience member asked her thoughts on city council salaries, to which she responded that she believes it’s important for city council members to make a living wage to allow regular, working Austinites to serve. She also discussed her path to politics in response to a question about where to start when considering a city council run.

It was an informative presentation that allowed WTS Heart of Texas members and guests a unique insight into the priorities and perspectives of the city council’s mobility chair and committee. Thank you, Councilmember Ellis!

November Luncheon



Capital Express/Downtown Drainage Tunnel

The WTS Heart of Texas Chapter was delighted to host Tommy Abrego, P.E., and Joe Goessling, P.E., from the TxDOT Austin District for a discussion regarding the Capital Express hydraulic tunnel, a critical step in the successful design and construction of the below-grade IH-35 Capital Express project. Their presentation was both enlightening and engaging, offering a high-level overview with captivating technical depth.

Tommy walked us through the more than 25-year journey of the 8-mile IH-35 widening and improvement project, a monumental undertaking with an estimated cost of \$4.5 billion. Spanning from US 290 East as the northern limit to SH 71/Ben White Boulevard as the southern limit, this stretch of IH-35 is among the most congested highways in Texas and falls short of federal and state design standards. The Capital Express project aims to address these challenges by adding two managed lanes in each direction, reconstructing bridges and intersections, improving frontage roads, and enhancing multi-modal routes. The project will lower general purpose and bypass lanes below grade while keeping frontage roads and intersections at grade, with the potential for greenspace caps downtown.

Given the proximity to Waller Creek, Boggy Creek, and the Colorado River, one of the first design challenges to address is hydraulic management. Joe provided an excellent overview of the research and development efforts undertaken to manage the stormwater. The proposed design solution is a gravity drainage tunnel, measuring 7.5 miles in length and

22 feet in diameter. This tunnel will traverse downtown within the Austin Chalk limestone formation at depths ranging from 70 to 200 feet below grade. Running in an L-shape, it will follow IH-35 from Airport Boulevard south to Cesar Chavez Street, before turning east to the planned pump station facility at US 183 and Levander Loop. Construction will utilize two rock tunnel boring machines (TBMs) to excavate and install precast concrete segmental liners. With an estimated cost of \$628 million, the project letting is scheduled for early 2025, with construction anticipated to begin in mid-2025.

Joe also outlined the plans for the new Pump Station Facility, a collaborative project between TxDOT and the City of Austin. Extensive research went into the design phase of the project, including site visits to similar facilities in San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, and Phoenix, as well as the creation of physical models to thoroughly evaluate the computational fluid dynamic modeling, vortex formation, and aeration considerations. The facility will measure approximately 14,500 square feet, with wells extending approximately 113 feet below grade, and concrete volute pumps with a combined capacity of 262,000 gallons per minute.

A big thanks to Tommy and Joe for breaking down this complex information into such a clear and engaging presentation!



# Holiday Party

With the holidays approaching quickly around the corner, WTS chapter members gathered at The Brewtorium on December 18th for the annual WTS Heart of Texas Holiday Party, hosted by our dedicated Membership Committee. Members kept warm in the ugly holiday sweaters while sipping on Bavarian brews and enjoying delicious bites and networking over another successful year filled with inspiring seminars, luncheons, and professional development events. Attendees entered in a few door prize drawings for a chance to win one of three amazing \$50 gifts cards (Southwest Airlines, Lyft, and Nordstrom) and those in their most festive sweaters also competed for a \$50 gift card. Congratulations to our holiday winners – Maria Bassil, Michelle Ramage-Chambers, and Tonya Sonsteng, who also won for her festively ugly sweater!

As we wrap up 2024, we'd like to share a tremendous thank you to all our members and partners that have made this year one for the books and hope to continue the opportunity to engage with each of you to aid in the continued growth of services for the chapter and offerings to our membership.

Wishing you all the happiest of holidays and a happy new year!



# Mentoring Program

The WTS HOT 2024 Mentoring Program wrapped up with outstanding success, pairing 13 dedicated mentors and mentees to foster growth, learning, and connection. This year's participants shared powerful feedback, with one mentee saying, "I'm grateful to be part of a network of supportive colleagues across various fields." A mentor added, "I learned so much about the goals and challenges of the next generation, which will help me connect more with my team."

Participants engaged in valuable sessions on negotiation skills, bridging the gap between public and private sectors, and emotional intelligence—key topics that enriched their professional development and inspired meaningful conversations. Many mentees appreciated the structure, which balanced virtual and in-person meetings. One participant highlighted the "opportunity for real-time advice to solve concerns and plan for future goals."

A huge thank you to the volunteer speakers, mentors, mentees, and the Mentoring Committee who made this program a success! Together, we continue to build a strong network of transportation professionals dedicated to supporting each other's growth and success.



Mentoring Committee  
left to right, Lynn Isaak,  
Priyanka Tirumalaraju and  
Marwa Ayad



October 2024 Graduation Ceremony



# Call for Volunteers



call for  
**VOLUNTEERS**


**Ann Richards School for  
Young Women Leaders**  
10th Grade Cornerstone Engineering Project

The WTS HOT Chapter is looking for volunteers to help advise students on their Cornerstone Engineering Project. Volunteers will provide additional support to the engineering teacher and advise the students with general engineering questions.

[Click here to volunteer.](#)





  
UT STEM Girl Day 2025  
call for  
**VOLUNTEERS**

Support over 10,000 students on campus  
February 22, 2025  
11am-4pm

Contact our TransportationYOU Co-Chairs to get involved:  
[transportationyou@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:transportationyou@wtshotchapter.org)

Email [transportationyou@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:transportationyou@wtshotchapter.org)

# Upcoming Events

## 2025 Upcoming events

Jan	1/15	Annual Business Meeting Luncheon
Feb	2/19	Monthly Luncheon: Commissioner Michelle Cohen (Hays Co.) & Mayor Travis Mitchell (City of Kyle) - Hays Co. Growth
	2/22	UT STEM Girl Day
Mar	3/13	Monthly Luncheon: Genest Landry, Laurie Thering, Paulinda Lanham - City of Austin Bridge Construction
Apr	4/16	Monthly Luncheon: Mike Arellano (TxDOT AUS Deputy Engineer), Rebekah Dobrasko (TxDOT ENV Cultural Resources Section Director), Tracy White (TxDOT AUS) - IH-35 Expansion Hidden Impacts
	4/26	21st Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala
May	5/14	Monthly Luncheon: Jordan McGee (CapMetro), Heather Bishop (Red Line Parkway Initiative), Others TBD - Red Line Trail Project Panel
Jun	6/18	Monthly Luncheon: Michael Chamberlain & David Carr (CapMetro), Others TBD - Electrification of Transportation Panel

# Corporate Sponsor Spotlight



**Foresight**  
As the 2023 Employer of the Year and a Platinum Corporate Partner of the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter, Foresight Planning & Engineering Services, LLC is proud to celebrate the incredibly talented team of nearly 40 individuals it has built over the past nine years since its founding in 2015. Foresight regularly has multiple staff representing at WTS HOT Chapter events and serving on various chapter committees and initiatives. Two of the firm’s newest WTS members include:



**Tonya Sonsteng**  
*Senior Geotechnical Engineer*

Tonya Sonsteng, PE, joined Foresight in August 2024 and brings 13 years of engineering experience to Foresight’s Geotechnical team. Tonya has a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from Missouri University of Science & Technology. Her specialties include geologic formations within Central Texas, foundation construction, asphalt and concrete pavement design, site development, soil stabilization, and construction inspections. Tonya has been a member of WTS since 2011. Tonya was a mentee in the 2024 WTS HOT Chapter Mentoring Program and currently serves on the Programs Committee. Tonya is also an active member of ASCE, serving on the Student Outreach Committee, and participates in numerous other industry organizations.



**Meredith Normand**  
*Geotechnical Engineer-In-Training*

Meredith Normand, EIT, joined Foresight in November 2022. She has both an M.S. and B.S. in Civil Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin. Meredith supports a variety of projects at Foresight, with a current focus on inspection, analysis, and design of retaining walls. Upon joining WTS in 2024, Meredith became a mentee in the WTS HOT Chapter Mentoring Program.

# SAVE THE DATE!

JOIN US FOR THE 21ST HEART OF TEXAS FOUNDATION GALA

Saturday, April 26, 2025  
Hyatt Regency Austin  
208 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78704

## VOLUNTEER!

We’re looking for passionate individuals to join our **Gala Committee** and help bring this incredible event to life!

Whether you’re a pro at event planning, a creative thinker, or just love being part of a great cause, we’d love to have you on board.

Interested? Reach out to our Gala Chair, Antionette Roberts at [gala@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:gala@wtshotchapter.org) by January 15, 2025 to learn more and get involved.  
Together, we’ll make this a night to remember!



PLATINUM

AECOM

AtkinsRéalis



GOLD



SILVER



BRONZE



DBE



AGENCY PARTNERS



AGENCY AFFILIATES

