

HOT CHAPTER NEWSLETTER



WTS HOT Chapter Newsletter 2025 | Volume 1

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President's Letter



I'm excited to start my term as 2025-2026 Chapter President, along with the amazing slate of leaders on the left! I'm really excited about what we have planned for this year and what we are continuing to build on from the previous chapter leaders and WTS International. We've already hit the ground running with multiple events and activities focused on learning, networking, community service, and so much more. We've re-worked our [website](#) and have a new [LinkedIn](#) page, so please bookmark and follow these to stay updated with all the events the Chapter is doing.

Our January Annual Business meeting luncheon marked the transition from the 2023-2024 board to the 2025-2026 board. Not only did we cover what the chapter accomplished in 2024, but we also had a sneak peek of the 2025 events and, most importantly, celebrated the leadership from the past two years.

The February luncheon brought multiple jurisdictional leaders within Hays County to discuss how the growth in the County has impacted the way each community approaches local and area projects, including the overall message of partnership being key. In March, multiple TxDOT leaders presented how the IH-35 Capital Express expansion project has approached some of the typically unseen environmental challenges, historic preservation, and vulnerable populations.

We are looking forward to our luncheon on April 16, 2025, which will focus on the upcoming women-led bridge construction projects within the City of Austin. Registration is open now. We'll also have our May and June luncheons, focusing on the Redline Trail and Electrification of Transportation.

In addition to professional programs, we've been focused on community service events and co-hosting events with other amazing organizations that share the WTS mission and vision.

Transportation YOU partnered with UT Austin's Girl Day on February 22nd to host a booth where our group led about 250 students in a toy car racing activity that helped bring transportation to life.

Additionally, on March 12th, the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter was one of eight organizations that participated in the Central Texas Food Bank Engineering Day of Service, where together we helped provide almost 12,000 meals for Central Texans in need.

On March 5th, we celebrated Women's History Month and International Women's Day with a happy hour co-hosted by the local WTS, SWE, CasITE, and SHPE chapters. This event allowed over 50 members from multiple organizations to network and have great cross-organizational conversations.

Also, due to the fantastic interest in our Transportation YOU activities, our GirlStart Girls in STEM event will be on April 5th. We already have volunteers confirmed so thank you to those of you who plan to help at this event.

Please watch for more upcoming events, including the WTS & CasITE Bike-n-Brunch on May 17th. Our programming is ramping up for our mentoring program, which has already completed matching mentors and mentees and will have the official program kickoff on April 4th. The program is a mix of virtual and in-person monthly lunches and customized development focused on leadership and career development. This is one of the many benefits of being a local Corporate Partner and Chapter member.



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Transportation Engineer
Kimley-Horn

President’s Letter Continued

At the end of April, we will hold our 21st Annual Scholarship and Awards Gala, scheduled for April 26th at the Hyatt Regency Austin. The theme is Moonlight Masquerade, and the tickets are sold out! We will recognize the 2024 Chapter Award Recipients and present several scholarships to deserving young women pursuing coursework in transportation-related fields. We look forward to seeing you all there to celebrate the current and future leaders of transportation in Central Texas and help us raise funds for the chapter’s scholarship and Transportation YOU programs.

Lastly, we’ll see everyone at the First WTS International conference hosted outside the U.S. as this year’s conference will be from May 7-9th in Toronto, Canada, and registration is still open. This year’s conference theme, The WTS Mosaic: Mobility + Momentum, highlights the culturally rich fabric of Toronto while also addressing our industry’s critical work to advance mobility, improve transportation access, and build collective momentum for the future. Join various transportation professionals worldwide to learn, celebrate, and discuss through technical tours and sessions, leadership development, and WTS International’s Gala. More information can be found on the website here: <https://www.wtsinternational.org/2025-WTSAC>.

While we continue to evolve our programming for 2025 and 2026, please reach out with any questions or ways you’d like to get involved in the chapter using the email addresses for any of our committee chairs on the left.

Thanks,


Laura Friello, PE

Engineering Day of Service

As we welcomed the spring season, the WTS HOT Chapter teamed up with TSPE Travis Chapter and several engineering professional organizations for the first ever Engineering Day of Service at the Central Texas Food Bank. Nearly 40 dedicated volunteers gathered not only to serve our local communities, but also to foster connections across various engineering fields at the food bank warehouse. These enthusiastic volunteers undertook key roles in assembling, expediting, packaging, and inspecting over 460 boxes, collectively weighing 14,000 pounds, and providing nearly 12,000 meals for our neighbors in need! A heartfelt thank you to everyone who participated in this remarkable event. It's always inspiring to see the engineering community coming together to make a positive impact in the communities we work in, and we look forward to making this an annual tradition of success!



February Luncheon

Hays County Growth: A Panel Discussion

The WTS HOT Chapter February Luncheon program featured a panel discussion on the continued growth of Hays County, leading to and resulting from major area infrastructure programs, including the CapEx South expansion, the Hays County bond program, and other municipal bond and capital improvement programs. Panelists included Dr. Michelle Cohen, Hays County Commissioner; LaVonía Horne-Williams, City of Buda Councilmember; and Travis Mitchell, Mayor of the City of Kyle, and the panel was moderated by Angela Kennedy, City of Buda Director of Development Services and City Engineer.



The panel kicked off with a discussion on the explosive growth the region is experiencing and acknowledgment that the area’s smaller cities depend on a network of county roads. In light of this, Dr. Cohen shared that she was happy to see things improving, as evidenced by the recent Hays County Bond passage.

- ◆ The discussion highlighted specific projects planned or underway in the Hays County area.
- ◆ The cities of Buda and San Marcos are partnering to deliver the Alliance Regional Water Project.
- ◆ The City of Kyle is building and planning to expand complete streets, trails, and roundabouts; the city is also reconstructing county roads and considering expanding loop projects to connect Kyle to Austin.

The City of Buda is working with TxDOT to extend SH 45SW, partnering with the City of Kyle to improve RM 1626 near the intersection of FM 967, and improving transportation infrastructure around the Amazon facility at Main and I-35. Due to area development, the city is also reconstructing the rural Old San Antonio Road and West Goforth Road.

Hays County is expanding I-35 connective facilities and, in partnership with the City of Kyle, building a loop around the city. The county is also building new east-west facilities with underpasses to provide options around I-35.

The panel conversation wrapped up with a discussion of the relationships between cities, counties and developers, with Dr. Cohen remarking that the county has less control over developers than the cities. Mr. Mitchell and Ms. Horne-Williams each described efforts to work with and build relationships with developers to ensure that the citizens’ best interests are protected.

Save the Date

March Luncheon



Date:
Saturday, May 17, 2025
(Weather permitting)

Time & Location:
TBD

Cost:
This is a free event

Joint Happy Hour

In celebration of International Women's Day, women from the local chapters of WTS, CASITE, SHPE, and SWE, along with our supportive male counterparts, gathered at Dogwood Domain to honor the women leaders in engineering and infrastructure. The event featured abundant food and drinks and the opportunity for members from all organizations to network and share their career experiences, discuss innovative projects, and capture memories at the photo booth. Inspiring the crowd were the all-female presidents, Laura Friello (WTS), Claire McKinney (CASITE), Susana Samayoa (SHPE), and Gaby Vasquez (SWE), who shared their remarkable journeys to success and highlighted their influential roles in paving the way for future leaders in their organizations and the industry at large.



IH-35 Expansion: Hidden Impacts on Austin's Community

The IH-35 Capital Express expansion project is reshaping one of the city's busiest corridors, but its effects extend far beyond traffic and infrastructure. While the project aims to improve transportation and urban connectivity, it also brings unseen challenges to the environment, historic preservation, and vulnerable populations. Experts from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recently shed light on these impacts, highlighting innovative solutions to mitigate the consequences of construction. From protecting Austin's beloved bat colonies to addressing the displacement of the homeless population and preserving the city's historic character, the project reveals a complex balance of progress and responsibility.

Dr. Tracy White, an Environmental Specialist with TxDOT, discussed the project's environmental impacts, particularly concerning the bat habitats along the CapEx North segment. The I-Beam bridge structures at Howard Lane and Wells Branch Parkway are home to an estimated 100,000 Mexican free-tailed bats, which thrive in Austin's urban environment. Recognizing the community's commitment to protecting these creatures, TxDOT has implemented educational programs for construction contractors and installed 36 bat boxes at the Walnut Creek Bridge to provide alternative roosting habitats. Moreover, bat exclusion operations are carefully planned to minimize disruption during the bats' migration periods.'



The project also poses a challenge to Austin's rich historical landscape, particularly in the CapEx Central segment. Rebekah Dobrasko, TxDOT's Cultural Resources Management Section Director noted that the expansion required compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act involves surveying 13 historic districts and 53 independent historic properties. Although most structures were not impacted, four notable structures—the Elgin-Butler Brick Company Building, Haster House, Dura Tune Service Station, and Roberts House were demolished to accommodate the future construction. To offset these losses, TxDOT documented each property extensively, archiving site plans, floor plans, and photographs with the Texas Historical Commission and local preservation offices. Additionally, the Historic Protection Plan, including vibration and settlement monitoring as part of the CapEx construction and tunnel installation, aims to safeguard remaining historic sites as construction progresses.

Perhaps the most human-centered impact of the IH-35 expansion is its effect on Austin's homeless population. Lori Wagner and Mike Arrellano from TxDOT's Austin District revealed that construction will remove elevated structures, which previously provided shelter for an estimated 300 to 500 people. In response, TxDOT has partnered with The Other Ones Foundation (TOOF) to support the Esperanza Community, a state-sanctioned transitional shelter on TxDOT-owned land, recently bolstered by a \$56 million federal grant. Initiatives like "Be Safe, Be Seen" and mental health training for TxDOT employees and contractors further demonstrate a commitment to addressing this issue. The agency also integrates homelessness mitigation into construction documents, ensuring it remains a priority throughout the project.

As Austin navigates the challenges posed by the IH-35 Capital Express expansion, the project is a critical case study in balancing urban development with community needs and environmental stewardship. The collaborative efforts of TxDOT and local stakeholders aim to create a more connected, inclusive, and sustainable urban landscape while addressing the hidden impacts of this significant infrastructure project.

UT STEM Girl Day

Speed Racers! Girl Day 2025

WTS Heart of Texas partnered with UT Austin’s national award-winning STEM Girl Day recruitment program to give K-8th graders a chance to explore STEM through grade-appropriate, hands-on activities hosted by scientists, engineers, astronomers, mathematicians, and other STEM enthusiasts.

At the WTS HOT booth at Girl Day, about 250 students raced toy cars down a friction ramp and then designed, created, and built cars using craft tubes, bottle caps, and balloons to learn about friction and propulsion. WTS Transportation YOU was among 161 organizations sponsoring activities in the STEM fields.

2024 STATISTICS:

- 12,597 K-8th Grade Registrants:
 - ◆ 80% Girls
 - ◆ 29% Latina/Latino
 - ◆ 10% African American
 - ◆ 27% Asian
 - ◆ 77% from Central Texas
 - ◆ 5% from Greater San Antonio
 - ◆ 11% from Greater Houston
 - ◆ 6% from Dallas / Fort Worth
 - ◆ 2,156 (17%) Girl Scouts
- 178 companies, non-profits, colleges, student organizations, research groups and community partners
- 161 hands-on activities, shows, demonstrations, and information areas
- 2,200 volunteers from student organizations, community organizations, research centers, government agencies, and corporate partners
- Since 2001, over 19,500 volunteers have contributed over 89,000 hours to excite over 100,000 elementary and middle school girls about STEM!

Of the students who participated in UT Girl Day 2025:

- 85% said they gained an increased understanding of STEM
- 93% said they experienced a welcoming and inspiring STEM community
- 88% felt an increased sense of belonging on the UT Austin campus



Upcoming April Luncheon

Date:
Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Time:
11:30 am - 1:00 pm

Location:
Maggiano’s Little Italy
10910 Domain Dr, Suite 100
Austin, TX 78758



[Click here to register now!](#)

City of Austin Bridge Construction

Join us for a series of presentations on upcoming women-led bridge construction in the City of Austin, including the Red Bud Trail and Barton Springs Road bridges and the Longhorn Dam Multimodal Improvements Projects. This is a fantastic opportunity to learn more about the City's ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure and improve community connectivity. We look forward to seeing you there!



Paulinda Lanham, PMP
Program Consultant (Project Manager Supervisor)
City of Austin, Capital Delivery Services, Civil Project Management Division



Laurie Thering
Project Manager
City of Austin, Capital Delivery Services

Annual Awards & Scholarship Gala

Date:
Saturday, April 26, 2025

Time:
5:30 pm - 11:00 pm

Location:
Hyatt Regency Austin
208 Barton Springs
Austin, TX 78704



Upcoming Events

2025 Upcoming

events

- | | | |
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| Apr | 4/5 | Girlstart Girls In STEM Event |
| | 4/16 | Monthly Luncheon: COA Bridge Construction: Laurie Thering and Paulinda Lanham |
| | 4/26 | 21st Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala |
| May | 5/7-9 | 2025 WTS International Annual Conference: The WTS Mosaic Mobility + Momentum in Toronto |
| | 5/14 | Monthly Luncheon: Jordan McGee (CapMetro), Tom Wald (Red Line Parkway Initiative), Others TBD - Red Line Trail Project Panel |

Corporate Sponsor Spotlight



CDM Smith
Ybette Ochoa, PE, PTOE
Associate Senior Transportation Engineer

Ybette Ochoa brings critical expertise in traffic engineering and transportation planning with over 16 years of experience across the United States. Her portfolio spans complex freeway, tollway, and arterial projects, enhancing safety, reducing congestion, and supporting long-range mobility strategies. Recently, Ybette served as Project Technical Lead on TxDOT's US 377 Texas Corridor Study, the RM 1826 Feasibility Study, and the FM 1314 Access Management Study. Fluent in Spanish and a graduate of CDM Smith's Elevate Leadership Academy, Ybette brings proven leadership to public involvement, stakeholder coordination, and innovative design solutions. A WTS member since 2019, she volunteers on the Gala and Finance Committees, remaining dedicated to empowering women in the industry.

CDM Smith actively participates in WTS events at both the national and local levels, sponsoring initiatives and scholarships and offering employees opportunities to network, mentor, and develop their leadership skills. This commitment aligns with the firm's core values of inclusion and collaboration while also driving fresh ideas and innovation in the transportation sector. By championing women and supporting diverse talent, CDM Smith helps shape a more equitable and forward-thinking future.



Halff
Nicole Debevoise, PE
Team Leader

Nicole Debevoise is a public works Team Leader at Halff's South Austin office. With over a decade of experience in public infrastructure, Nicole has contributed to the planning and designing of roadways, interchanges, intersection safety improvements, pedestrian and bicyclist accessibility, and shared-use paths. Nicole is passionate about adopting a multi-modal approach to transportation projects, ensuring they enhance the safety and well-being of the communities they serve while leading her team with a people-first mindset focused on sustainable career growth and value-driven decision-making. Most recently, Nicole has collaborated with the City of Austin's Vision Zero team to develop strategies for high-risk intersections, aiming to enhance mobility and safety.

Celebrating a 75-year legacy, Halff has remained committed to improving the lives and communities of its clients and employees. This dedication to employee growth has paved the way for women to excel in leadership roles. Notably, Jessica Baker Daily began her career as an intern at Halff in 2003 and became the firm's sixth President and CEO in 2024. Halff actively encourages its employees to engage in organizations such as WTS to support their professional development and leadership growth.



WSP
Daniela Gomez
Staff Consultant

Daniela Gomez is a staff consultant on the civil transportation team in WSP's Austin, Texas, office. Originally from Colombia, Daniela graduated from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2019. While at UTSA, she interned with WSP's San Antonio civil group, making an immediate impact on civil transportation projects both locally and statewide. After graduating, Daniela joined the WSP Austin team full-time. Here at WSP, Daniela performs engineering calculations and technical design for civil roadway transportation projects, including geometric layouts, corridor modeling, plan set production, cost estimation, and other related tasks. She has served as a roadway lead on multiple TxDOT schematic projects. Additionally, Daniela has served as the Austin Development and Professional Networking Lead for the young professionals, organizing social events such as happy hours and sand volleyball tournaments. She has also assisted with the summer intern program, college recruiting, brown bag lunches, and headshot opportunities. Outside of work, Daniela is a talented and gifted visual artist, with her work displayed and featured in numerous art shows throughout Austin, Texas, and New York. At WSP, we pride ourselves on providing opportunities and career advancement from within, and Daniela has proven to be a pivotal member of our team and office. We are very grateful for her contributions and look forward to seeing her career reach the next level.

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