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President’s Letter



Greetings WTS Heart of Texas Chapter!

I’m excited to share all the incredible things our Chapter has accomplished this quarter. From engaging events to community outreach, we’ve been hard at work sharing how our region enhances infrastructure and connectivity.

As mentioned last quarter, we continue expanding how we connect with our community online. In addition to regular updates on our [website](#) and [LinkedIn](#), we’re thrilled to announce our new [Instagram](#) page! Be sure to follow us on all platforms to stay up-to-date with upcoming events and highlights.

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

April

- » We kicked off the month with our *Girlstart Girls in STEM event*, where chapter volunteers led an interactive bridge-building activity for 4th–8th grade students.
- » Our **April luncheon** featured inspiring presentations on women-led bridge construction in Austin, including the Red Bud Trail, Barton Springs Road bridges, and the Longhorn Dam Multimodal Improvements Project.
- » On April 26th, we hosted our **21st Annual Gala** at the Hyatt Regency Austin, recognizing our 2024 Chapter Award recipients and awarding scholarships to exceptional young women pursuing transportation-related studies. Thanks to your support, we raised a **record-breaking \$40,000** for our Scholarship and Transportation YOU programs!

May

- » A delegation of WTS HOT Chapter board and members attended the **WTS International Conference** in Toronto—the first held outside the U.S.! We connected with over 1,200 attendees and were proud to again earn **Gold Chapter status**, the highest level of recognition.
 - + Mark your calendars: the 2026 International Conference will be held the first week of May in Los Angeles!
- » We celebrated Bike Month with several events:
 - + Our **May luncheon** featured panelists from CapMetro, the City of Austin, and Red Line Parkway Initiative discussing the Red Line Trail Project.
 - + We co-hosted our annual **Bike & Brunch** with the Capital Area Section of ITE, exploring Round Rock’s new Heritage Trail West and networking with CASITE members.
- » We also held our first **Lattes and Leadership** session of the year with 2025 **Honorary Member Tracy Thompson**, Chief Business and External Affairs Officer at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

June

- » Our **June luncheon** brought together representatives from TxDOT, CapMetro, and Austin Energy to discuss the electrification of Central Texas transportation. Topics included infrastructure reliability, the e-Bike Incentive Program, and electric vehicle deployment.





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President's Letter Continued

Check out the full newsletter for event photos, spotlights on our 2025 Honorary Member, and profiles of our scholarship and award winners.

If you have questions or want to get more involved, don't hesitate to reach out.

Stay safe and hydrated this summer—we look forward to seeing you at an upcoming event!

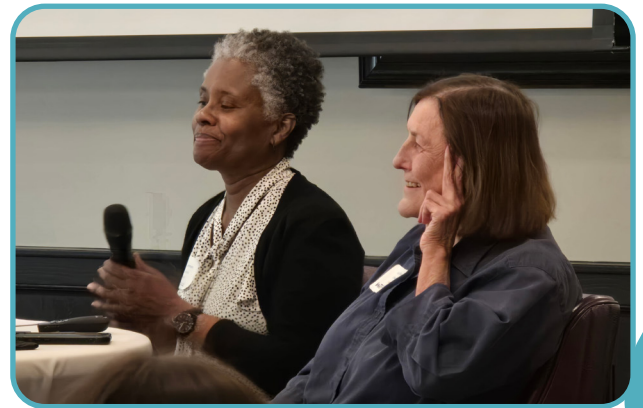
Thanks,

Laura Friello, PE
President, WTS Heart of Texas Chapter

April Luncheon

City of Austin Bridge Construction

April's luncheon program brought to the WTS Heart of Texas chapter a series of presentations on women-led bridge construction projects in the City of Austin, including the Red Bud Trail and Barton Springs Road bridges and the Longhorn Dam Multimodal Improvements Projects. Both speakers, Paulinda Lanham and Laurie Thering, represent the City of Austin's Capital Delivery Services Team. Each project addresses aging infrastructure, safety concerns, and the need for multimodal access.



The Barton Springs Road Bridge project, led by Paulinda, currently at 30% design, will widen the existing bridge from three to four lanes and add dedicated bike and pedestrian facilities. Construction is planned to be funded through bonds and grants, although some of the grant funding remains uncertain, and the project aims to start construction in 2027, with one lane of traffic maintained in each direction during work.

The Red Bud Trail Bridge reconstruction project, also led by Paulinda, addresses structural fatigue and improves safety by realigning sharp horizontal curves with a history of crashes, widening shoulders, and moving pedestrian and bicyclists to a separate shared-use path. The new design includes four bridge structures and improvements to parking, drainage, and utilities. A complex traffic control plan will yield a construction timeline of three to four years once underway.

The Longhorn Dam Multimodal Improvements Project, led by Laurie, is a cross-agency collaboration to implement a new "Wishbone Bridge" that will connect the Ann and Roy Butler Trail at Longhorn Shores on the south side of Lady Bird Lake, Canterbury St. on the north side, and the Holly Peninsula in Town Lake Metropolitan Park to the west. The project proposes widened trails, a new underpass, lighting, and public art, construction began in July 2024, with bridge beams and arch sections delivered by barge and lifted into place. Community-created mosaic tiles decorate the underpass, completed in April 2025, with full project opening expected by May 2025.

These projects highlight not only the City's investment in modern, multimodal infrastructure, but also the leadership of women delivering it. The luncheon was a fantastic opportunity to learn more about the City's ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure and improve community connectivity.



Corporate Sponsor Spotlight

Freese and Nichols Victoria Valdez, PE



Victoria Valdez, PE, joined Freese and Nichols in November 2024 and currently has 12 years of experience managing and designing a wide variety of transportation infrastructure projects across Texas. Her expertise spans roadway schematic and PS&E design, construction services, and engineering consulting for various state, city and county clients. In her current role, Victoria is helping lead projects for various municipal clients in Central Texas and TxDOT, in addition to mentoring up-and-coming engineers and designers in the Austin office.

As a native Austinite, Victoria has witnessed the major growth in Texas over the years and is committed to delivering innovative solutions that enhance safety, mobility, and community access.



May Luncheon

Red Line Trail Panel

The May WTS Heart of Texas Chapter luncheon featured a panel discussion on the Red Line Trail, a visionary urban trail project that aims to create a continuous, all-ages-and-abilities pathway alongside CapMetro's 32-mile Red Line commuter rail corridor. Speakers included Jordan McGee, Senior Planner at CapMetro; Tom Wald, Executive Director of the Red Line Parkway Initiative; and Ana Seivert, Project Manager with the City of Austin. Jordan kicked off the session by emphasizing the collaborative nature of the effort, with each panelist representing a unique perspective in advancing the shared goal of a safe, connected, and accessible trail system.



Jordan provided an overview of the Red Line Trail concept and study activities achieved to date. She highlighted challenges such as limited right-of-way, double-tracking needs, and environmental constraints, while also outlining progress in planning, design standards, and public outreach. Tom detailed the Red Line Parkway Initiative's role in engaging communities, shaping the vision, and securing funding and partnerships. Ana closed out the presentation with a detailed look at a priority segment extending from Braker Lane to the Northern Walnut Creek Trail.

Audience questions focused on topics like impacts to freight operations and future ownership and maintenance responsibilities for the trail, offering a glimpse into the many layers of coordination required for successful delivery.



Together, the speakers illustrated how public agencies and nonprofit partners are working together to transform the Red Line corridor into a vibrant, multimodal asset for Central Texas communities.

WTS HOT Fun Fact: Jordon is a previous WTS Scholarship winner.

June Luncheon

Electrification of Transportation Panel



The WTS Heart of Texas Chapter hosted another captivating luncheon in June, featuring a dynamic panel on the electrification of transportation. The discussion tackled pressing questions about the future of electric vehicles (EVs) and electrification of other modes of transportation in Central Texas, including buses, bicycles, and scooters, and the infrastructure needed to support them.



Michael Chamberlain opened the session dispelling myths surrounding EVs and emphasizing the critical role of

lithium batteries in the EV revolution. Michael explained the three different levels of charging types and associated speeds and noted that most Austin commuters wouldn't exceed the daily range provided by overnight charging using a standard 12V outlet. He also dispelled the myths that the Texas grid cannot handle the growing number of EVs (it can), and that no one is buying EVs (they are).

Next, Rob Borowski from CapMetro shared exciting plans to begin electrifying the agency's bus fleet. He shared plans for solar array canopies, including the largest, located on East 5th Street, that will support and charge up to 48 electric buses and generate twice its own energy demand. Rob

also discussed the potential of hydrogen-powered buses and proposed free e-bike charging stations to help bridge the "last mile" for commuters.

Cameron Freeberg concluded the panel with Austin Energy's (AE) ambitious goal of achieving net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. To reach this goal, the agency has established a comprehensive 5-Pillar Strategy that includes prioritizing EV readiness by integrating charging conduits during new construction; promoting accessible alternatives like electric bikes; electrifying public fleets and integrating EVs into rideshare and autonomous vehicle networks; ensuring communities understand the economic and environmental benefits of EVs; and strengthening the grid to support increased demand, especially during extreme weather.



Together, this inspiring panel is truly leading the charge in electrifying Austin transportation. The luncheon offered a valuable opportunity to learn about the innovations shaping the future of transportation in our city and beyond.

May Lattes & Leadership

Tracy Thompson, Esq., Austin Airport

On Friday, May 23rd, a group of about 20 WTS Heart of Texas Chapter members and friends gathered at Radio East for coffee and to hear from Tracy Thompson, who is the Chief Officer of Business and External Affairs at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS). Tracy has more than 30 years of experience in airport management, airline management, and airport/aviation/transportation consulting practices. She joined the AUS executive team in 2020. Tracy is also the WTS HOT Chapter's Honorary Member for 2025.

During her talk, Tracy provided the group with her insights on essential steps to career development for any professional. She recommended two books to the audience. The first book, ***The Broken Rung: When the Career Ladder Breaks for Women—and How They Can Succeed in Spite of It***, by Kweilin Ellingrud, Lareina Yee, and Maria del Mar Martinez, discusses the reality that more women than men are graduating with higher education and are therefore more educated when they enter the workforce. However, women lose that advantage when it comes to being promoted to management and higher levels of authority. The "broken rung" represents the challenge that women face in taking advantage of their education. The authors suggest that women focus on building their experience and convert that experience into greater earnings, taking a leaf from the men's playbook in career success. Tracy provided stories from her own career on how she took on areas of responsibility to build her experience capital and then leverage it into leadership

opportunities. She also relayed the real-world insight that she received from her father, who told her that, although she was smarter than her brother, she would have to work harder to get ahead and that her education alone would not be enough; she had to build experience and then make that experience count as much as her education.



The second book that Tracy recommended is ***I Could Do Anything If Only I Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It***, by Barbara Sher. This book provides guidance on helping people—at any age or stage in life—discover their life purpose and overcome blocks that have kept them from achieving their goals. Tracy quoted from the book and encouraged the audience to consider that you must "take action to get lucky" in life. This theme is a companion to the first book and encourages us as women to take action to create the luck that we want in life by spending time discovering what truly drives us and getting rid of the negativity that blocks our success.

Check out the chapter's Instagram page ([@wtshheartoftexas](https://www.instagram.com/wtshheartoftexas)) to see some video clips from this event. Thank you, Tracy Thompson, for an inspiring presentation!

Annual Bike & Brunch

This year's joint Bike and Brunch event, hosted by the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter and the Institute of Transportation Engineers Capital Area Section (CASITE), spotlighted the City of Round Rock Parks and Recreation Department's recently completed Heritage Trail West project. This trail segment is part of the larger regional Brushy Creek Trail initiative, which will eventually span Williamson County from Cedar Park to Hutto, creating a vital east-west connection.

The tour was led by Katie Baker, PLA, CPRP, Parks Development Manager for the City of Round Rock, who led the project through final design and construction. The group of approximately 20 attendees was evenly split between walkers and cyclists, making for an inclusive and engaging experience.

Starting at the trail's western end near Chisholm Trail and moving eastward to Mays Street, the tour followed the intended user experience of the trail. Along the way, Katie highlighted how the trail's design—through interpretive signage, materials, and layout—tells the story of Round Rock's rich history.

Katie also shared insights into the project's challenges, including the unexpected need to find a new contractor after the original one went out of business mid-project. She discussed the complexities of constructing the pedestrian bridge over Chisholm Trail and the spiral ramp near Mays Street, both of which required innovative engineering solutions.

After the tour, attendees gathered at Torchy's Tacos to enjoy breakfast tacos and connect over a shared appreciation for thoughtful trail design and community-focused infrastructure.



Bridge the Gap! Girlstart Girls in STEM Conference 2025

City of Austin Bridge Construction

WTS Heart of Texas was thrilled to participate in the 2025 Girlstart Austin Girls in STEM Conference, a unique event that empowers 4th–8th grade girls to explore the fun side of STEM careers through hands-on learning.

In our classroom, students took on the challenge of "Building Bridges", an interactive activity designed to introduce the fundamentals of structural engineering. Using only toothpicks and marshmallows, 214 girls across Central Texas worked together to design and construct their own bridges, learning about balance, load distribution, and the importance of strong foundations while having fun and getting creative.

WTS Heart of Texas was honored to be part of a diverse community of 98 presenters and co-presenters working together to make STEM accessible and exciting for young girls. With simple materials and big ideas, we're helping girls imagine a future where they lead the way in transportation and technology.

“Girls in STEM made me feel confident, determined, and motivated to achieve my goals.” – Girls in STEM participant

THANK YOU to all of our volunteers who made the event a success!



Summer Social

JOIN WTS HEART OF TEXAS FOR OUR SUMMER



ARTS & ALE SOCIAL



AUSTIN BEERWORKS -
 INDUSTRIAL TERRACE
 TUESDAY, JULY 22ND 6-9PM
 RSVP BY JULY 15TH

FOOD,
 DRINKS &
 ARTS
 PROVIDED

CONTACT POOJA PATEL, MEMBERSHIP CHAIR AT
MEMBERSHIP@WTSHOTCHAPTER.ORG FOR QUESTIONS

Honorary Member Spotlight



Tracy Thompson, Chief Business and External Affairs Officer, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport

Ms. Thompson is a licensed attorney in Texas and has more than 30 years of experience in airport management, airline management, and airport/aviation/transportation consulting practices. She joined the executive team at AUS in 2020.

Prior to her position at AUS, she held senior management and executive positions at American Airlines, Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, and Jacobs/LeighFisher Aviation Consultants.

She has broad experience and expertise in the overall airport business management programs for airports. These programs include strategic business, finance, development, and operating plans, aviation regulatory compliance, external stakeholder engagement, and negotiation of complex business initiatives.

She also has coordinated major airport capital development programs, new airport commercial revenue initiatives, and airport programs related to internal aviation best business practices.

Tracy earned B.B.A and J.D. degrees from Southern Methodist University, is a member of the State Bar of Texas, and is a Certified Member of the American Association of Airport Executives.

As a native Texan and a transplant from Dallas, she is proud to call Austin her “new hometown.”

CP/AP & Members Only Event

Save the Date



ARCHER
HOTEL

Date:
Thursday, August 28, 2025

Time:
5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Location:
Archer Hotel
3121 Palm Way
Austin, TX 78758

Registration opens soon.

Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala

The 21st Annual Transportation Scholarship and Awards Gala was held on April 26, 2025 at the Hyatt Regency Austin. We once again broke our attendance record by hosting 400+ members of the transportation industry to celebrate our seven scholarship and six chapter award winners. Thank you to all who joined us at the event and for the generosity of our sponsors and donors! Without you, we couldn't have raised over \$40,000 for next year's scholarship recipients.

Scholarship Recipients



Helene M Overly Memorial Scholarship
Mahmuda Sultana Mimi
Texas State University



Sharon D. Banks Memorial Undergraduate Scholarship
Zeresch Degni
Baylor University



Molitoris Leadership Scholarship
Aishwarya Sreenivasan
University of Texas at Austin



Bridgette Beato Leadership Legacy Scholarship
Isabelle Reynolds
University of Texas at Austin



Transportation YOU Scholarship
Serena Sharma
Champion High School



Friends of WTS Scholarship
Lauren Niclair
Westlake High School



Friends of WTS Scholarship
Olivia Higgins
McNeil High School

This year's Friends of WTS scholarships were sponsored by Garver and WSP.

Chapter Awards



Innovative Transportation Solutions Award
Christiana Astarita
Oak Hill Parkway Design-Build Project



Rosa Parks Diversity Leadership Award
RS&H
RS&H Employee Resource Groups



Honorable Ray LaHood Man of the Year Award
Bob Daigh
Senior Director of Infrastructure
Williamson County



Woman of the Year Award
Caroline Mays
TxDOT



Employer of the Year Award
Austin Transit Partnership



Member of the Year Award
Adeliza Ramirez
Volkert, Inc.
VP, WTS HOT Chapter

Photo Gallery

This year's photos were provided by Lucero Studio. To see more pictures from the event, visit the WTS HOT Chapter Photo Gallery [here](#).



Moonlight Masquerade

Gala Sponsors & Donors

Dinner Table Sponsors

- | | | |
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Attendee Gift

- » RK&K

Dessert

- » The Rios Group

Cocktail Hour

- » BGE

Entertainment

- » Austin Transit Partnership

Casino Table

- » Nancy Ledbetter & Associates
- » LJA

Heads or Tails Game

- » Isaak Advisory Group
- » Au+ Engineering

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- » Huitt Zollars

Photo Booth

- » Burns & McDonnell
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Program & AV

- » Garver
- » WSP

Thank
 You!

Upcoming July Lattes & Leadership

Date:

Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Time:

8:30 am - 9:30 am

Location:

Russell's Bakery & Genuine Joe Coffeehouse
2525 W Anderson Ln, Ste. 270
Austin, TX 78752



Speaker: Doise Miers

Lattes and Leadership is back this month with a free event that provides an opportunity to meet with a Central Texas woman leader in an informal setting. There is no pre-set format. Lattes and Leadership was developed to function as a round table with the goal of interacting in a relaxed environment and learning from the speaker about issues such as leadership, career goal setting, lessons learned along the way, navigating the transportation world, and life coaching type elements.

Join WTS in an intimate setting for an in-depth discussion with Doise Miers from CAMPO. Come early, have some coffee, and get inspired!



JOINT ADOPT A HIGHWAY CLEANUP

Saturday, July 19, 2025 @ 8:00 AM
 Sign-up: HSchluter@KFriese.com or
Pooja.Patel@Kimley-Horn.com



Begin: 30°28'59.27"N -97°46'5.23"W
 End: 30°30'8.68"N -97°46'37.10"W
 FM 734 (W. Parmer Ln.) near Brushy Creek 78717

A light breakfast will be provided!

2025 Upcoming

events

Jul	7/19	Joint Adopt a Highway Cleanup with ASHE Central Texas
	7/22	Summer Social: Arts & Ale at Austin Beerworks (food, drinks & crafts!)
	7/23	Lattes & Leadership with Doise Miers from CAMPO @ Russell’s Baker & Genuine Joe Coffeehouse
Aug	TBD	Lattes & Leadership with Sonya Hernandez from TxDOT @ Kick Butt Coffee
	8/28	CP/AP & Members Only Event: Archer Hotel
Sep	9/12	Summer Networking Event: Golfing Clinic at First Tee Greater Austin
	9/26	PDS Day at Maggiano’s
Oct	10/15	Monthly Luncheon
Nov	11/19	Monthly Luncheon
Dec	TBD	Winter Networking Event

2025 Corporate & Agency Partners

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2025 Corporate & Agency Partners cont.

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