

# HOT CHAPTER NEWSLETTER



WTS HOT Chapter Newsletter December 2025 | Volume 4

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## President's Letter



As we celebrate the close of 2025, I am incredibly proud of the energy, engagement, and impact of the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter. This quarter truly reflected the WTS mission—**advancing women in transportation through connection, leadership, and professional growth.**

Our fall luncheons featured inspiring conversations with industry leaders. In October, **Ghizlane Badawi, CEO of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport**, shared insights on the **ABIA Expansion and Development Program** and her leadership during a time of remarkable growth. In November, members gained valuable perspective on **TxDOT's Strategic Public Engagement Guidance**, highlighting inclusive, research-driven approaches that strengthen community connections across Texas.

In December, our members embraced the spirit of service at our **Travis County Brown Santa volunteer event**, followed by a festive happy hour that gave us the chance to reconnect and celebrate the year together. These moments—learning, giving back, and building relationships—are what make our chapter so special.

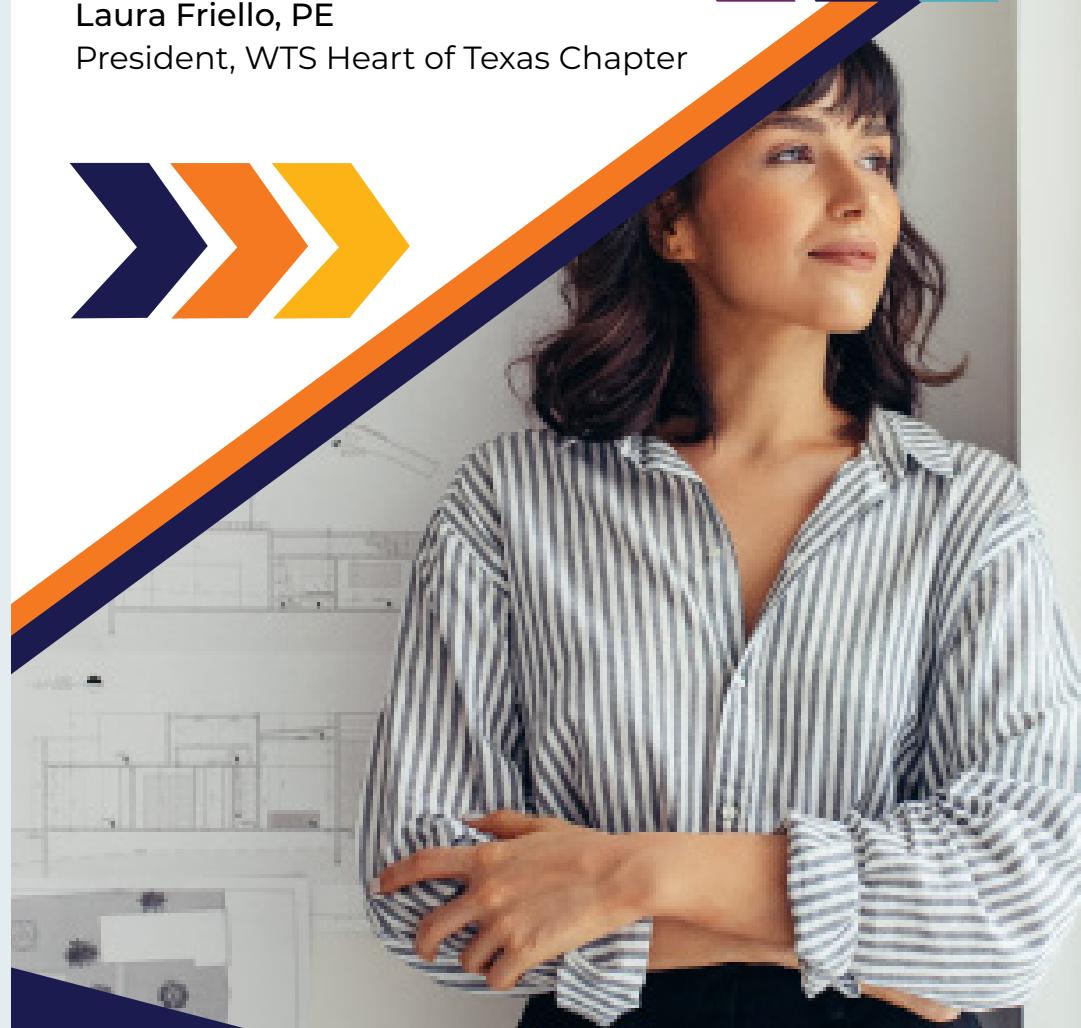
As we look ahead to 2026, we are excited to continue this momentum with engaging luncheons, meaningful service opportunities, and opportunities to connect. We are especially looking forward to celebrating our **2025 Chapter Award Winners** and **Scholarship Recipients** at our **Annual Gala at the end of April**. We also invite our partners to join us through the **2026 Corporate and Agency Partnership sponsorship call**, helping us expand our impact even further.

Thank you for being part of such a dynamic and supportive community. I look forward to an exciting year ahead with the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter.

Thanks,

  
Laura Friello, PE

President, WTS Heart of Texas Chapter



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# October Luncheon

**Ghizlane Badawi**

**Chief Executive Officer, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS)**



The WTS Heart of Texas Chapter hosted an engaging October luncheon featuring Ghizlane Badawi, Chief Executive Officer of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS). Ghizlane shared the story of AUS's remarkable growth and provided an in-depth update on the airport's future plans. When the airport opened in 1999, it was designed for 11 million passengers annually. **By 2019, after adding nine new gates, AUS was already serving 17.3 million travelers—well beyond its roadway capacity.** The pandemic briefly slowed operations, but recovery was swift: by 2022, AUS handled 21 million passengers, and last year that number climbed to 22 million. This rapid growth prompted a revision of the 2040 Master Plan to meet growing demand.

Badawi emphasized that **AUS is not only a gateway to Austin but also a major economic driver for Central Texas.** The airport is entirely self-sustaining, funded through airport revenues and federal grants rather than local tax dollars. A 2018 study estimated AUS's economic impact at \$7.8 billion, supporting more than 74,000 jobs—a figure expected to rise significantly as expansion projects progress. To keep pace with demand and enhance the passenger experience, AUS is investing in transformative infrastructure. Upcoming projects include **expanded queuing areas, new gathering spaces** with music stages and food trucks, and a **West Gate expansion** that will showcase local art and concessions. The Yellow Garage will **add 7,000 parking spaces** by 2027, and a new outbound baggage system will **increase capacity from 1,600 to 4,000 bags per hour.** Concourses M and B will **add 20 to 30 gates**, improving operational resiliency and expanding international service, while a redesigned Arrival and Departure Hall will streamline passenger flow and create a more efficient experience.

These improvements will position AUS as a **major hub serving 22 surrounding counties**, strengthening connectivity, boosting tourism, and attracting new businesses to the region. With an estimated \$5 billion investment and more than 13,000 contracting jobs anticipated, this expansion represents a significant opportunity for Central Texas. The luncheon offered an inside look at **how AUS is preparing for the future and how every decision is focused on creating an airport that reflects Austin's unique character while meeting the needs of our expanding region.**

# 2026 Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala

**Gala sponsorship opportunities are coming soon!**

The gala committee is looking for volunteers, specifically for organization of silent/live auction donations. To volunteer, contact Elena Ramon at [galacc@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:galacc@wtshotchapter.org).

To make an auction donation, email [galadonations@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:galadonations@wtshotchapter.org) or contact any gala committee member.

**SAVE THE DATE**



Advancing women  
Advancing transportation  
Heart of Texas

22nd Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala

**EMERALD CITY BALL**

*There's No Place Like the Gala*

**SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2026 / 5:30 P.M.**

AUSTIN MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN  
304 E CESAR CHAVEZ ST.  
AUSTIN, TX 78701

FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD TO A MAGICAL  
EVENING OF CELEBRATION AND RECOGNITION  
MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW

# November Luncheon

**Susan Howard, Director of Public Involvement, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)**

**Abby Tomlinson, West Region Strategic Communications Group Leader, AECOM**

At the November luncheon, Susan Howard, TxDOT's Director of Public Involvement, was joined by Abby Tomlinson to deliver an in-depth presentation **highlighting TxDOT's continual-improvement approach to public involvement and the tools, guidance and innovations that support it**. The speakers walked attendees through TxDOT's "origin story" for public involvement, which frames the department's commitment to early, continuous, transparent and accessible engagement. They introduced the statewide PI team's role in providing consistent strategies, best-practice guidance, templates, outreach materials, and hands-on support to districts. Core components of the **Strategic Public Engagement Guidance (SPEG)** were featured, including the community research template, seven-step PI process, engagement checklists and solutions to overcome common participation barriers.

The presentation also spotlighted TxDOT's growing library of resources for special populations, including **Spanish Communications and Guidance**, a new resource to support TxDOT in engaging with Limited English Proficiency Texans. They also showcased real-world, district-based success stories where community partner relationships, specific feedback descriptions, strong visual communication and closing-the-loop practices helped build trust and improve project outcomes. Attendees previewed elements of the Customer Innovation Plan, illustrating the department's forward-looking path toward a centralized **PI Hub on TxDOT.gov**, enhanced training offerings, new engagement success measurement tools, and potential applications of AI for accessibility, content development and quality control. Overall, the session demonstrated how **TxDOT is modernizing public involvement, strengthening statewide consistency, and creating a more informed, accessible, and community-responsive engagement program**.



## Brown Santa Event

Our year of membership events ended with a **two-part winter holiday event**: volunteering at the **Travis County Sheriff's Brown Santa program**, followed by a happy hour at **Lustre Pearl East**. Thanks to the collective efforts of all our volunteers, Brown Santa will provide Christmas gift boxes to around **2,000 families in need in the surrounding Austin area**.

The Travis County Sheriff's Brown Santa program is a non-profit organization sponsored by the Travis County Sheriff's Office. The program assists families and elderly citizens in Travis County with gifts and food during the holiday season, primarily those living outside the city limits of Austin. All of this is possible with donations and support from local merchants and community members. **This community event is supported by the community, for the community**.

The event began at the Travis County Sheriff's Brown Santa warehouse at 3:00 PM with volunteers armed with wrapping paper, tape, scissors, and holiday cheer.

To close out the event, the Chapter added an ornament with our WTS Heart of Texas Chapter logo to one of the trees at the warehouse photo space. With the significant number of volunteers, our organization was able to provide numerous deserving families and children in our community with the joy of receiving Christmas gifts this year!



# Annual Holiday Social

To celebrate the successful year, the upcoming holiday season, and the number of gifts wrapped, the fun continued with a **happy hour at Lustre Pearl**, providing an opportunity for our members to **gather, connect, and reflect** on the positive impact we had at the volunteering event and the year for our organization as a whole.

We extend our gratitude to the incredible turnout of volunteers who made this event a success. **Your impact on our community is greatly appreciated.** This event truly embodied the holiday spirit, demonstrating the power of coming together to support those in need. Let's continue to connect and create a positive impact in the coming year! Here's to many more successful membership events with WTS in the future! Happy holidays!



## Corporate Sponsor Highlight



### Frances Jordan AECOM



Frances Jordan is a distinguished strategic communicator at AECOM with 14 years of experience. At AECOM, she serves as a public involvement lead for major transportation projects across the West region, shaping outreach strategies that resonate with both urban and rural communities.

Frances currently serves as the Public Involvement Manager for Business Assistance on Austin Transit Partnership's Austin Light Rail Phase 1 program, a transformative \$7 billion effort to deliver the city's first light rail system.

Frances's leadership and contributions have been recognized through several recent honors. She earned her AECOM project manager certification this year and was awarded the 2025 Outstanding Leadership Award by the Austin chapter of the NAACP at the 60th Annual DeWitty/Overton Banquet. She also contributed to the City of Fort Worth's Moving One Million Master Transportation Plan, which received the Greater Dallas Planning Council's Trinity Urban Design Award—Dunnigan Community Engagement Honorable Mention. She additionally spoke alongside the Austin Transit Partnership and the MTA at the 54th National Meeting and Training Conference.

Prior to her current assignment, Frances played a key role in the Texas Department of Transportation initiatives. She served as Public Involvement Task Lead for the I35 Capital Express Central Project, where she managed communications and stakeholder engagement for a \$4.8 billion program during its environmental phase.

AECOM is a proud partner of WTS Texas. They stand alongside organizations that are dedicated to strengthening the transportation workforce, promoting professional development and shaping a more connected and resilient industry.

# Mentoring Program

**Marwa Ayad, Pri Tirumalaraju, and Lynn Isaak**, on behalf of the **WTS HOT Mentoring Committee**, are proud to celebrate another successful **2025 WTS HOT Mentoring Program**.

The program concluded with strong engagement from both mentors and mentees, featuring **11 mentor-mentee pairs**. It reinforced the value of meaningful professional connections and intentional career development. Participants consistently highlighted the program's positive impact on both personal and professional growth. One mentee shared, *"The program was a great experience, and I learned so much from my mentor and fellow mentees. The variety of topics was engaging and touched on various aspects of my career on a personal and professional level."*

Sessions focused on self-awareness and growth resonated deeply, with the **Impostor Syndrome** discussion frequently cited as a favorite. Mentors also reflected on the reciprocal nature of the experience, noting, *"It's been an honor to help guide her growth during such a pivotal time."*

Overall, enthusiasm for the program was clear, with many participants indicating they were highly likely to recommend participation.

The Mentoring Committee looks forward to building on this momentum with another successful **2026 WTS HOT Mentoring Program**, with **applications opening in February 2026**.



## Upcoming January Luncheon

**Date:**  
Wednesday, January 21, 2026  
**Time:**  
11:30 am - 1:00 pm  
**Location:**  
Maggiano's Little Italy  
10910 Domain Dr, Suite 100  
Austin, TX 78758

### Annual Business Meeting

Join us for the Annual Business Meeting on Wednesday, January 21, 2026!

We will provide a presentation on our Year in Review for 2025, as well as a look ahead to 2026.



**Join us for our Monthly Luncheon.**

# 2026 Upcoming

## events

**Jan** 1/21 Annual Business Meeting Luncheon

**Feb** 2/10 Monthly Luncheon

**Mar** 3/25 Monthly Luncheon

**Apr** 4/15 Monthly Luncheon  
4/25 22nd Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala:  
Emerald City Ball Theme

**May** 5/13 Monthly Luncheon  
TBD Lattes & Leadership

## 2025 Corporate & Agency Partners



Advancing women  
Advancing transportation  
Heart of Texas

### 2025 Corporate & Agency Partnership

#### PLATINUM



#### GOLD



TETRA TECH



# 2025 Corporate & Agency Partners cont.

## SILVER



Designed to Amaze,  
Engineered to Last®



## BRONZE



We listen. We solve.®

## DBE



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