

# HOT CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

WTS HOT Chapter Newsletter March 2026 | Volume 1

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## President's Letter



### Welcome to the first WTS Heart of Texas newsletter of 2026!

I'm really excited about what we have planned for this year.

We've already hosted multiple events and activities focused on learning, networking, community service, and so much more.

Be sure to check out our [website](#), our [LinkedIn page](#), and our [Instagram page](#). Please bookmark and follow us to stay up to date on all the events and activities the Chapter is hosting.

Our January Annual Business Meeting Luncheon reviewed what the Chapter accomplished in 2025, provided a sneak peek at 2026 events, and showcased our 2026 WTS Heart of Texas Chapter Honorary Member, Hays County Commissioner Dr. Michelle Gutierrez Cohen.

The February Luncheon featured Kristen Smith, Deputy Director of TxDOT's Civil Rights Division, who presented on changes affecting the Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) programs. In March, Nicholas Samuel (CAMPO) and Michelle Meaux (Travis County TNR) presented and led a discussion on the Central Texas Regional Safety Action Plans.

We are looking forward to our luncheon on April 15, 2026, which will feature a series of presentations highlighting efforts by CapMetro and CARTS to improve transit in the Central Texas region. Registration is open now. We will also host our May and June luncheons, focusing on the City of Austin Sidewalk, Bicycle, and Trail Program, as well as a one-year lookback on the July 2025 floods.



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In addition to professional programs, we've continued to emphasize community service and co-hosting events with other amazing organizations that share the WTS mission and vision. On March 12, the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter was one of eight organizations that participated in the Central Texas Food Bank Engineering Day of Service. Together, we helped provide nearly 12,000 meals for Central Texans in need. On February 17, we partnered with multiple organizations, including TSPE, SWE, CASITE, ASME, SHPE, ASHE, American Water Works Association, and ASCE - to volunteer at the Central Texas Food Bank.

In April, we will co-host a clothing swap with the local SWE and SHPE chapters and volunteer at the Girlstart Girls in STEM event. Volunteers are already confirmed. Please keep an eye out for more upcoming events, including the WTS & CasITE Bike-n-Brunch in May.

We will also be launching our mentoring program, which includes a mix of virtual and in-person monthly lunches, along with customized development focused on leadership and career growth. This is one of the many benefits of being a local Corporate Partner and Chapter member.

At the end of April, we will host our 22nd Annual Gala on April 25. The theme is the Emerald City Ball, and sponsorship opportunities and tickets are still available! During the evening, we will recognize the 2025 Chapter Award recipients and present several scholarships to deserving young women pursuing coursework in transportation-related fields. We look forward to celebrating the current and future leaders of transportation in Central Texas while raising funds for the Chapter's scholarship and TransportationYOU programs.

Lastly, we hope to see many of you at the annual WTS International Conference from May 5-7 in Los Angeles, California. Join transportation leaders from across North America for three days of insight, momentum, and meaningful connection at one of the industry's most anticipated events of the year. More information can be found here:

<https://wts2026.eventscribe.net/index.asp?launcher=1>

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or if you're interested in getting more involved with the Chapter.

Thanks,

Laura Friello, PE

President, WTS Heart of Texas Chapter



# FEBRUARY LUNCHEON

The WTS Heart of Texas Chapter hosted Kristen Smith, Deputy Director of TxDOT's Civil Rights Division, for a timely discussion on changes affecting the Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) programs. The DBE program, established in 1982 and reauthorized every six years, faces significant changes through an Interim Final Rule that removes race and gender as categorical factors, shifting to individualized evaluations of disadvantage. With approximately 5,458-7,000 active DBE certifications in Texas, all certified DBE firms must now be reevaluated for eligibility and recertified. Federal agencies have received advanced approval to potentially terminate the program, though no final ruling has been issued yet. The final rule was expected in March 2026 but is now expected later.

The HUB program, established in 1999, currently includes about 15,000 certified businesses and is administered by the Texas Comptroller's office. Recent changes have created challenges, including insufficient numbers of eligible firms to establish meaningful participation goals. An emergency rule previously decertified women-owned businesses while creating the VetHUB program for veterans. Changes to VetHUB certification are expected within 90 days, pending the Comptroller's final rule.

Current changes stem from executive orders requiring alignment between statute and program guidance, though underlying statutes remain unchanged. Litigation at both state and federal levels is anticipated, though state agencies like TxDOT are not directly responsible for initiating such legal challenges.

Despite these challenges, market constriction, and low fiscal year letting schedules, TxDOT's Civil Rights Division continues robust support through the DRIVE mentorship program (launched April 2021), direct outreach, conferences, and comprehensive free resources—more than any other state DOT provides. As the transportation industry navigates these significant regulatory changes, TxDOT's Civil Rights Division remains committed to supporting small businesses through this transition period.



# ENGINEERING DAY OF SERVICE

Our year of membership events began with inviting members to volunteer at the Central Texas Food Bank with other professional organizations on February 17th to celebrate community and service with other like-minded people in our industry. Organizations involved in the event included NSPE, Texas Society of Professional Engineers, SWE, CASITE, ASME, SHPE, ASHE, American Water works Association, and ASCE.

The Central Texas Food Bank (CTFB) is the leading hunger-relief nonprofit in Central Texas, working to provide immediate and equitable access to nutritious food for individuals across its 21-county service area. Through a combination of direct-service programs and a network of approximately 250 nonprofit community partners, CTFB supports over 610,000 food-insecure individuals annually.

The event began at the Central Texas Food Bank at 5:45 PM with volunteers gathering and learning about the different roles they could participate in for the evening. Some volunteers prepped bags, some inspected the food items, some bagged the food items, and some carried them to pallets. With safety information provided, roles assigned, and a mission for the evening of packing potatoes to feed families around Central Texas, the volunteering event was underway. With a great number of volunteers, our organization was able to sort and bag plentiful amounts of potatoes and provide numerous deserving families with the resources needed to put meals on the table.

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 role of service as an engineer.



# MEMBERSHIP HAPPY HOUR

To kickoff our year as a women-focused organization, our membership committee hosted a happy hour on March 11<sup>th</sup> to celebrate International Women's Day and bring the women of our organization together for community and camaraderie.

This happy hour was hosted at the Brewtorium, beginning at 6 PM, allowing members to come and go throughout the evening. We saw many new faces looking to get involved in the organization, as well as many familiar faces to reconnect with in the new year. This event was a great way to connect new and existing members.

Additionally, our membership committee had bins set up at this event where we were able to collect clothing items for the upcoming clothing donation and swap event with SHPE and SWE on April 1st at ACC Highland Campus.

We look forward to the rest of the year of membership events continuing to bring our members together, as well as connecting our members to other professional organizations, networking, and career development opportunities. Thanks to all who attended!



# MARCH LUNCHEON

The WTS HOT Chapter hosted Nicholas Samuel (CAMPO) and Michelle Meaux (Travis County TNR) for a discussion on Central Texas Regional Safety Action Plans. The conversation highlighted the importance of collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and proactive strategies to improve safety.

CAMPO's first Regional CSAP, adopted last year, brings together county-level plans into a unified framework based on the Safe System Approach. Using tools like High Injury Network mapping and crash analysis, the plan identifies high-risk corridors and intersections. It sets goals to reduce fatalities by 50% by 2035 and reach zero by 2050, supported by strategies such as enhanced signage, improved lighting, speed management, and safer facilities for vulnerable users. Early implementation efforts include Complete Streets policies, updated crash dashboards, and expanded safety audits.

Travis County's SS4A plan, adopted last June, focuses on unincorporated areas and was informed by extensive public input. Key focus areas include low-light crashes, occupant protection, pedestrian safety, and intersections. The plan also improves coordination across jurisdictions and positions the County to pursue additional funding.

Together, these efforts reflect a strong regional commitment to creating a safer transportation network for all users.



# UPCOMING APRIL LUNCHEON

**Date:**  
Wednesday, April 15, 2026

**Time:**  
11:30 am - 1:00 pm

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

[Click here to register!](#)

## CapMetro and CARTS Regional Transit Talks

Join us for a series of presentations discussing efforts by CapMetro and CARTS to improve transit in the Central Texas region.



**Julie Mazur**  
Manager, Regional  
Coordination Planning  
CapMetro



**Dan Platt**  
Communications  
Director  
CARTS



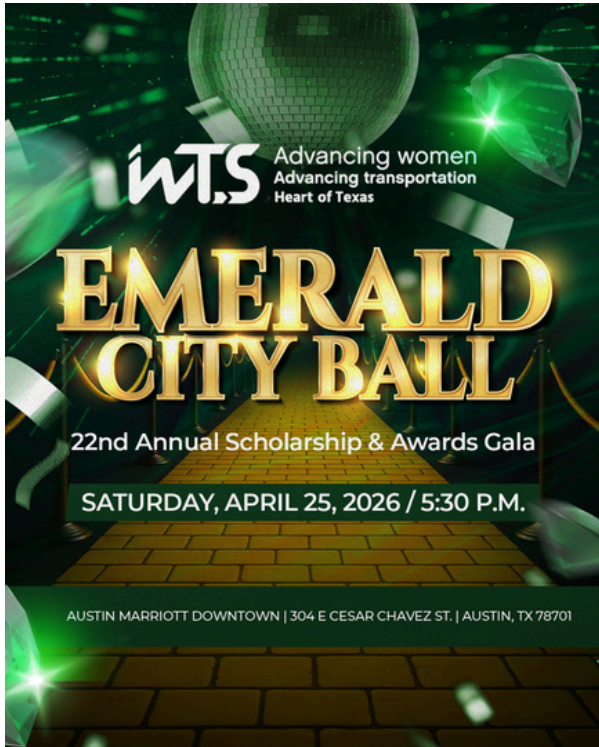
**Lawrence Deeter**  
Transit Planner  
CapMetro

# 2026 ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP & AWARDS GALA

The WTS HOT Chapter's 22nd Annual Scholarship and Awards Gala: **Emerald City Ball** will be a night of elegance, connection, and enchantment - and we would be honored to have you join us on April 25<sup>th</sup>. Whether you're joining to connect with fellow guests or simply bask in the glow of this year's successes, we can't wait to welcome you to a night where dreams sparkle in shades of green!

As we prepare for the gala, we invite you to partner with us as a sponsor. Your generosity is the magic behind the curtain, directly supporting scholarships and advancing women in transportation.

For any questions, please reach out to our Gala Wizards, Elena Ramon or Pooja Patel, at [gala@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:gala@wtshotchapter.org) or [galacc@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:galacc@wtshotchapter.org).



## 2026 Upcoming *events*

<b>Apr</b>	4/01	Clothing Swap/Donation Event at ACC Co-hosted with SWE and SHPE
	4/15	Monthly Luncheon: CapMetro Regional Transit Panel with Julie Mazur, Dana Platt, and Lawrence Deeter
	4/18	Girlstart's Girls in Stem Conference Volunteering
	4/25	22 <sup>nd</sup> Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala: Emerald City Ball Theme
<b>May</b>	5/13	Monthly Luncheon: City of Austin Sidewalk, Bicycle and Trail Program Update with Nathan Wilkes and John Eastman
	TBD	Lattes & Leadership
<b>Jun</b>	6/17	Monthly Luncheon: After the Flood - One Year Lookback with Judge Snell of Wilco and Others TBD
	TBD	Lattes & Leadership

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