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Chancellor John Sharp Announces $150 Million Research Campus and Education Center at Former Bryan Air Base

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — John Sharp, Chancellor of The Texas A&M University System, today unveiled plans to invest $150 million to create a new research and development campus to help companies move ideas from the laboratory to the marketplace while also offering a new path toward a college degree.

The campus, to be located at a revamped and renamed Riverside Campus, initially will include a cluster of seven new buildings and test beds to encourage the private sector to develop secure research facilities adjacent to the System’s site. The focus will include robotics, driverless and connected vehicles, advanced manufacturing, large-scale testing, as well as smart power grids and water systems.

An education center will offer 4-year degrees to students not admitted to Texas A&M University through affiliations with other universities in the Texas A&M System.

Students could start their college careers at the center and or transfer from community colleges to complete their college degrees. They could be accepted later at Texas A&M University or choose a degree program from another Texas A&M System university. Faculty members from other System schools would either travel to the new campus or teach courses online.

The education center also would be available for continuing education, short courses and other professional development programs.

Details of the proposed $38 million education center are still being formalized and must be approved by the Board of Regents and reviewed by state authorities.

“We must offer new, transformative business models whether we are moving our research from the laboratories into the marketplace, or helping more students to achieve a college education,” said Chancellor Sharp.

“It is a big idea and it is important that the Texas A&M University System nurture big ideas,” said Chancellor Sharp. “It is only through big ideas like this that Texas can achieve its goals for
higher education, as expressed by Commissioner Raymund Paredes, to have 60% of Texans, age 25 to 34, holding a degree or certificate by 2030 and to grant 550,000 degrees or certificates a year."

Today about 38 percent of Texans, age 25 to 34, have certificates or degrees and about 300,000 are awarded each year.

The site for the new campus is the former Bryan Air Base, a World War II facility that Texas A&M University acquired in 1962, and today is called the Riverside Campus. In September 2015, the 2,000-acre tract was transferred to The Texas A&M System and will be named RELLIS Campus, from an acronym for the Texas Aggies’ core values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity and selfless service.

The initial $150 million investment includes $25 million to demolish 32 old buildings, rebuild roads and update utilities. The base’s chapel and two hangars will be renovated in recognition of the site’s role of training pilots for World War II.

Chancellor Sharp estimated as many as 10,000 students eventually could be studying at the RELLIS Gateway Center, as the education center would be called.

“This will be a magnet for technology companies locating their research facilities to the Brazos Valley and for thousands of additional students to study here, contributing to the local economy,” Chancellor Sharp said. “It’s a great one-two punch for economic development.”

Chancellor Sharp said the Texas A&M System is talking to the System’s 11 universities, as well as Blinn College, the local community college, about how best to serve students.

“This will keep thousands of fine students in the Brazos Valley that might have left for other universities,” Chancellor Sharp said.

Texas A&M University President Michael K. Young praised the initiative.

“This is another great example of the system and the university moving forward in impactful ways that support and enhance our incredible teaching and research endeavors — and underscores that they are closely intertwined and work productively together,” President Young said.

“Companies that take advantage of these incredible opportunities to establish facilities at the revamped Riverside Campus will be exposed to our outstanding faculty and students’ creative energy, and the students would have the opportunity to experience cutting-edge research in the field,” President Young said. “We are extremely excited to be working with The Texas A&M System on this endeavor.”

M. Katherine Banks, Vice Chancellor and Dean of Engineering, said the facilities will be designed to fit the private sector’s needs, from creating prototypes to testing.
“It will bridge the ‘valley of death’ between product development and the marketplace,” Dr. Banks said.

She said all of the $150 million is committed, either from state appropriations or gifts from donors. Dr. Banks said consultants are surveying the site and the $25 million in upgrades should be completed by the end of 2017. Construction on the first building could begin as early as September of this year.

“This is not a pipe dream,” she said. “It is going to happen.”

“This investment could be a game-changer for the region,” said College Station Mayor Nancy Berry. “It will bring technology companies and major investment to our community as well as economic opportunity to our residents. We appreciate the Chancellor’s strategic vision and we look forward to assisting the A&M System with the implementation.”

Bryan Mayor Jason Bienski echoed those remarks: “We’re excited by the investment in our community by Chancellor Sharp and the Board of Regents. The city of Bryan is ready and willing to help make the old Bryan Air Base a true economic gem.”

The three primary tenants at the new campus are state agencies that are part of the Texas A&M System: The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI), the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES) and Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX).

Many of the researchers at the state agencies are also faculty members at Texas A&M University.

The initial $125 million in new construction for the RELLIS Campus includes:

- The $73 million Center for Infrastructure Renewal — authorized by the Texas Legislature — that will develop new methods and better materials for the nation’s ailing infrastructure and train the private sector in how to apply new techniques and materials.
- A $12 million Advanced Research in Transportation Technology Building for research, design and testing in the growing field of automated and connected vehicles.
- A $12 million Cyber-Physical Research and Development Center that will be dedicated to robotics, autonomous and connected vehicle technologies, and associated cyber-security facets.
- A $9 million centralized office and research facility that will be constructed for TEES.
- A $6 million Safety Process Center that will test and learn the safest methods to operate in large chemical operations.
- A $6 million Industrial Distribution Center that will investigate the best way to manufacture and distribute products.
- TEEX’s $7 million training facility, primarily for law enforcement.

For video and more information about RELLIS Campus, please go to
About The Texas A&M University System
The Texas A&M University System is one of the largest systems of higher education in the nation, with a budget of $4.2 billion. Through a statewide network of 11 universities, seven state agencies, two service units and a comprehensive health science center, the Texas A&M System educates more than 140,000 students and makes more than 22 million additional educational contacts through service and outreach programs each year. System-wide, externally funded research expenditures exceed $932 million and help drive the state’s economy.

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