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Texas A&M invests $150M in new RELLIS Campus with transportation research infrastructure upgrade

Investment is at the core of a new venture to transform transportation

The largest investment in the history of The Texas A&M University System’s Riverside Campus, now known as the RELLIS Campus, will dramatically expand engineering and educational resources at the 2,000-acre facility and will include key infrastructure for the development and testing of various connected and automated transportation technologies.

Texas A&M System Chancellor John Sharp announced the $150 million investment during his keynote address Monday at the Texas A&M Transportation Technology Conference at the Annenberg Presidential Conference Center.

“We believe now is the time to transform this prime property into a premiere campus dedicated to economic development and public-private partnerships,” Sharp noted, emphasizing that it will not only expand research facilities but also incorporate additional educational facilities. “Among its other advantages, this will help accelerate the deployment of transportation technology through advanced research and education, not to mention the huge economic development impact for the Brazos Valley.”

Creation of the new RELLIS Campus will be central to the Campus Transportation Technology Initiative, also announced Monday. The initiative is an undertaking of Texas A&M University, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI), and the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES) aimed at making Texas A&M a leader in the transformation of modern transportation. Leveraging the unique strengths of TTI, TEES and Texas A&M with the participation of leading private sector organizations, the initiative focuses on improving mobility, safety, connectivity and efficiency. The RELLIS Campus will also include the construction of a Center for Infrastructure Renewal, which will be equipped with the latest technology dedicated
to transportation pavements, structures and materials, in addition to other areas of infrastructure such as pipelines, water and power systems, and sensors.

“We are enthusiastic about creating a campus dedicated to moving research discoveries into the marketplace. Research conducted by TTI at this innovative campus will allow for implementation of transportation technology advancements faster and more efficiently,” noted Dr. M. Katherine Banks, Vice Chancellor and Dean of Engineering at Texas A&M and Director of TEES. “We believe we can offer the transportation industry and other public and private sector partners unique opportunities that no other university has to offer.”

“The Campus Transportation Technology Initiative creates a campus community test bed for organizations to evaluate their technologies among thousands of people and multiple transportation modes,” TTI Agency Director Dennis Christiansen said. “The level of expertise we can offer is unsurpassed. We believe this will result in safer, more effective solutions to the transportation challenges we face, not only on the campus but statewide and nationally. The RELLIS Campus will create numerous opportunities to develop public/private partnerships of mutual interest in the transportation arena.”

The initiative will welcome technology developers to demonstrate their applications, which could range from smartphone apps to fully autonomous vehicles. The primary goal is to more closely connect campus activities to various transportation options in ways that improve both safety and efficiency.

The Transportation Technology Conference, held on the Texas A&M campus May 1–3, brought together executives from nearly 100 private-sector companies and leaders from about 50 public institutions. State and national transportation leaders were among the speakers, as well as senior executives from companies such as General Motors, Hyundai, Toyota, IBM and Texas Instruments.

Improving mobility and safety grows increasingly difficult, as rapid growth places greater demands on transportation systems in cities throughout Texas, especially in the Texas Triangle, which encompasses Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin. According to
projections from the Hobby Center for the Study of Texas at Rice University, the population of this megaregion could swell by 6 million people from 2015 to 2030 — more than 30 percent.

That growth is apparent in Austin, whose mayor outlined that city’s efforts to secure a $50 million grant to invest in groundbreaking technologies to improve mobility, safety, and environmental conditions, and create opportunities for underserved communities. Austin is one of seven national finalists in the Smart Cities Challenge sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Mayor Steve Adler told participants at the opening session of the conference on May 1 that the solutions developed in Austin would be scalable and exportable to help cities across the U.S. facing similar mobility challenges. He also recognized TTI for its role in supporting the city’s efforts to secure the Smart Cities funding.

TTI develops solutions to the problems and challenges facing all modes of transportation. The Institute conducts about 600 projects annually, totaling about $60 million in research expenditures with more than 200 sponsors at all levels of government and the private sector. In the laboratory and the classroom, TTI researchers help prepare students for transportation careers.

Note: The RELLIS Campus is named from an acronym for the Texas Aggies’ core values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity and selfless service.

For more information: http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/ttc16/media-resources.php

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