

For Immediate Release
December 15, 2005

Contact: Commissioner Gene Short
903-813-4318 (office)
903-821-2688 (cell)

Austin, Texas.....Ten years in the making, a deal to construct a major north-south thoroughfare connecting the Grayson County Airport and Northern Grayson County to Highway 289 and North Dallas was passed by the Texas Transportation Commission today. Commission unanimously approved eighty-five million dollars (\$85 million) to assist Grayson County in building what Representative Larry Phillips calls "an economic bridge to the future."

Representative Phillips, County Judge Tim McGraw, County Commissioner Gene Short, and Grayson County Regional Mobility Authority Chairman Jerdy Gary addressed the Commission. After the vote, Ric Williamson, Commissioner of the Texas Transportation Commission congratulated the officials. "This is a great day for North Texas. Grayson County officials have worked long and hard to improve the transportation system in their area. Governor Perry and the Transportation Commission stand solidly behind Grayson County and will guarantee their success."

The deal is structured around the concept of pass-through financing authorized by the State Legislature in 2003. The action by the Transportation Commission guarantees the state funding necessary to make the highway a reality. Bobby Littlefield, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) District Engineer for the Paris District, which includes Grayson County, remarked, "I am happy to see this innovative approach applied to a project in my District. This partnership should serve as a model for local governments throughout the state."

Ten years ago, Commissioner Gene Short was just a faint voice in the wilderness calling for increased state funding for this important economic project," said County Judge Tim McGraw. "Today, Short's decade long work has paid off," he said.

Short was quick to point out that the success of this effort does not lie solely at his feet. Attention to SH 289 began under the leadership of former County Judge Horace Groff. Also, having Representative Larry Phillips as Vice-Chairman of the House Transportation Committee was of paramount significance. So too, said Short, was the strong leadership of County Judge Tim McGraw who has kept the project at the top of the county's priority list. "Judge McGraw understands the importance of our transportation network to attracting and keeping good jobs," Short said. "This \$85 million dollar project would simply have not occurred without the leadership of Judge McGraw, the support in Austin of Representative Phillips, and finally the collaboration with the board of the Grayson County Regional Mobility Authority.

Allowing for the development of the Grayson County Regional Airport was a key reason for pursuing this project. "A major problem in developing the airport has always been the fact that most of the vacant land is on the west side of the airport," according to Short. "Because of limited access to the west side, many major development prospects have found other venues more to their liking," he said. "With a direct shot to Highway 289, and ultimately the Dallas North Toll Road, the airport will undoubtedly become an economic engine for the people of Grayson County."

After the vote, RMA Board Chair, Jerdy Gary, praised the project. "This is a great beginning. This road sets the stage for future improvements to Grayson County's regional transportation system. The expansion of SH 289 allows the RMA to begin immediate planning with local officials for additional facilities to improve our mobility in the future."

Judge McGraw concluded, "This project would not have happened if the community had not united. Every group - Grayson County Commissioners Court, the RMA, the Sherman-Denison Metropolitan Planning Organization, chambers of commerce and small cities throughout the County are in support of this project. We are moving forward for our future."