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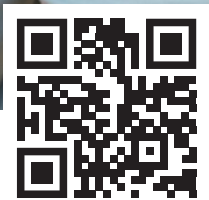
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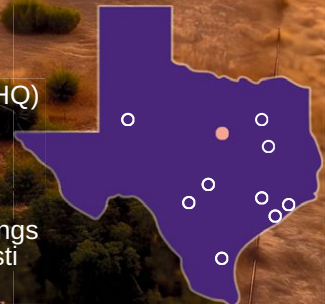
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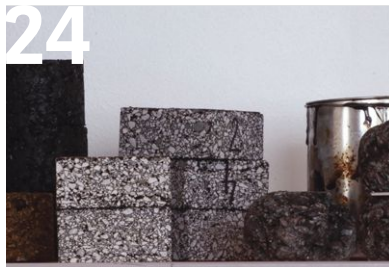
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Clifton Kay
A.L. Helmcamp
2026 TXAPA President

Outperform the Competition

It feels like just yesterday my term as TXAPA's president began, yet we are already in the third quarter of the year. It's amazing how time flies! Thus far, my time serving has been both rewarding and enjoyable. TXAPA members, staff, and our partners throughout the state have made the honor of leading the 2026 Board of Directors much smoother than I could have ever expected.

In this issue, I would like to explore another one of the four pillars—the 4Ps (Partnership, Planning, Participation, and Performance)—that guide my time as your president. This quarter, we'll touch on Performance.

We can implement all the marketing imaginable, have meetings upon meetings, and acquire every available certification. But if we don't provide a product that performs, we are failing our industry.

Alternate methods of construction are increasing, putting pressure on our industry. We must do everything in our power to provide high-quality pavements that outperform the competition. Doing it right takes more time and attention, but the end result will be worth it.

I encourage each and every one of you to stress that message to your teams. Whether you are a producer, placer, material supplier, and so on, we are all in this together. Our goal is to show that asphalt products are superior for many reasons; they are quiet, smooth, sustainable, and cost effective, and that's just the start.

I'd also like to highlight the recent Materials & Asphalt Technology Research Summit (MASTERS) held in San Marcos. Between phenomenal presentations and informative content, this event showcased how we as an industry can move the needle toward higher performing asphalt pavements. Thank you to the presenters and TXAPA staff who facilitated a day filled with knowledge and growth and to those that attended. Stay on the look-out for next year's meeting and be sure to sign up.

Thank you for all that you do to support our great organization. I hope to see you at the 51st Annual Meeting in September for a week of fun, awards, networking, learning, and most of all, our annual live auction, which benefits the TXAPA Scholarship Program, and the subsequent Scholarship Night Celebration. Don't forget to pack your checkbook! 🇹🇽

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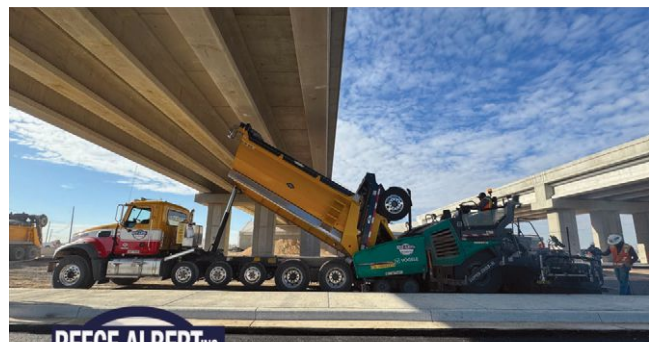
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Harold C. Mullen
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One Last Annual Meeting, A Lifetime of Memories

For more than 50 years, the Texas Asphalt Pavement Association Annual Meeting has been much more than a conference. Long before I had the privilege of serving as TXAPA's CEO, the visionary leaders of this association, working alongside our valued partners at TxDOT, recognized the importance of bringing the asphalt industry together. They understood that quality is not achieved in isolation. It is built through collaboration, shared knowledge, and a commitment to partnering for excellence.

Those principles remain just as important today as they were decades ago. They are the foundation of what continues to make the TXAPA Annual Meeting the can't-miss event of the year. Last year, we celebrated the 50th Annual Meeting, and thanks to our incredible members, exhibitors, sponsors, and industry partners, it was our biggest and best gathering yet. In Texas, we have a reputation for doing things bigger and better, and over the past half century, our Annual Meeting has certainly lived up to that standard.

This year's event holds special meaning for me because it will be my final Annual Meeting as CEO of TXAPA. As I reflect on the many years I've been a part of the gathering, I find myself thinking less about the agenda and more about the people. I've been fortunate to share countless meaningful conversations, celebrate milestones, tackle difficult challenges, explore new ideas, and help change lives through its activities. The memories I'll cherish most are not tied to a single event or presentation, they are all the relationships that have been built along the way.

Our Annual Meeting has always been about bringing people together. It is where networking leads to partnerships, partnerships build lasting

relationships, and those relationships create opportunities to share knowledge and develop solutions that strengthen our entire industry.

Each year, our member exhibitors showcase the latest innovations, products, and services helping to move our industry forward. Our technical sessions provide valuable insight into emerging opportunities, best practices, and the newest developments in asphalt pavement. Our Quality Asphalt Pavement Awards Program recognizes the outstanding people and projects that define excellence across Texas, while our joint luncheons honor industry leaders whose dedication has made a lasting impact.

Beyond the meeting rooms, our golf tournament and sporting clays tournament have become traditions that support one of our most rewarding missions: raising scholarship funds for the next generation of industry leaders. "Changing Lives" is not just a slogan for the TXAPA Scholarship Program, it is a direct reality. We have changed the lives of so many people over the years, and we continue to increase those numbers. The live and silent auctions held during the meeting continue to exceed expectations because of the incredible generosity of our members. And of course, the celebration concert following the auctions reminds us that building relationships is just as important as conducting business.

Yep, our Annual Meeting is awesome. As I prepare to attend my final one as CEO, I do so with tremendous gratitude. Thank you to every member, volunteer, sponsor, exhibitor, partner, and friend who has made these gatherings so meaningful over the years. Together, we have delivered an event that values people, collaboration, education, and relationships above all else. 🇹🇽

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The Road Ahead

Forces shaping Texas's asphalt industry

The Texas asphalt industry is entering one of the most dynamic periods in its history. Texas continues to lead the nation in population growth, economic expansion, and infrastructure investment—and this boom is reshaping how we design, build, and maintain the state's transportation network.

For TXAPA associate members, who provide the equipment, materials, technology, and services that keep our industry moving, success in the coming years will require more than delivering quality products and services. We must anticipate change, embrace innovation, and work together to solve increasingly complex challenges. As we approach 2027, here are six industry forces every TXAPA member should have on their radar.

1 Workforce shortages are becoming a generational problem.

Experienced operators, mechanics, technicians, drivers, and laboratory personnel continue to retire faster than they can be replaced. Recruiting and retaining skilled employees remains one of the most significant issues facing asphalt contractors, producers, and suppliers across Texas. The companies that succeed will invest in training, apprenticeships, internships, and partnerships with technical schools and universities.

Associate members also play an important role by providing technical training, equipment demonstrations, and ongoing support that help companies maximize the workforce they have while preparing for the next generation. Waiting for qualified employees to appear is no longer a strategy.

2 Competition is increasing across the construction industry.

Rising labor costs, equipment expenses, insurance premiums, transportation costs, fuel prices, and material costs continue to place pressure on profitability. At the same time, customers expect projects to be delivered safely, efficiently, and with consistent quality.

Companies that compete solely with price will find themselves at a disadvantage. Those that improve efficiency, maximize equipment uptime, streamline operations, and embrace technologies that increase productivity will be better positioned for long-term success. Many TXAPA associate members are helping contractors accomplish exactly that through innovative equipment, software, automation, and technical expertise.

3 AI infrastructure is booming.

Artificial intelligence is creating one of the largest construction opportunities Texas has seen in decades. Massive data centers are being planned and constructed across the state, creating demand for site development, access roads, parking facilities, utilities, drainage systems, and supporting transportation infrastructure. Every new facility represents opportunities for asphalt contractors, producers, and the many associate members who provide the products, services, and expertise needed before the first server ever comes online. For our industry, these projects represent far more than buildings—they are complete infrastructure ecosystems.

4 Texas's population continues to grow.

Texas is attracting businesses and new residents at an unprecedented pace. That growth translates into increased demand for highways, municipal streets, airports, industrial developments, subdivisions, utilities, and commercial construction. It also means ongoing rehabilitation and preservation of existing pavements to keep pace with more traffic. The long-term outlook for asphalt infrastructure in Texas remains exceptionally strong.

5 Sustainability is top of mind.

Sustainability has evolved from a regulatory discussion into a business opportunity. The asphalt industry continues to develop innovative solutions that improve pavement performance while reducing environmental impact. Warm-mix asphalt, recycled materials, improved plant efficiency, emissions-reduction technologies, and advancements in quality control all demonstrate the industry's commitment to continuous improvement. Many TXAPA associate members are leading these innovations, helping contractors deliver projects that are both high-performing and environmentally responsible.

6 Our voice is only as strong as our participation.

Transportation funding, environmental regulations, workforce development, and evolving specifications all directly impact the asphalt industry. TXAPA has long served as the collective voice of the industry, representing members while promoting the benefits of quality asphalt pavements across Texas.

That voice remains strong only when members stay engaged through committees, technical meetings, educational events, and legislative advocacy. The future of our industry depends on continued participation from every segment within membership.



We must anticipate change, embrace innovation, and work together to solve increasingly complex challenges.

The Road Ahead

TXAPA and the Texas asphalt industry have never been defined by obstacles. They have always been defined by the people willing to overcome them. The coming years will bring workforce challenges, evolving technology, changing markets, and increased competition. They will also create tremendous opportunities for companies that embrace innovation, invest in their people, and stay engaged with the industry.

One of the greatest advantages of TXAPA membership is access to a community of professionals committed to advancing asphalt in Texas. Through technical committees, educational programs, conferences, and year-round collaboration, members share ideas, solve challenges, and help strengthen the industry together. The future of Texas asphalt is bright—and the companies that choose to learn, innovate, and actively participate will be well positioned to help build it. 📍

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Some requirements have been refined, some test methods have evolved, and new approaches continue to be evaluated.

The Asphalt Rulebook Is Always Being Rewritten

If you've watched football long enough, you've probably heard someone say, "Back in my day, that would've been a legal hit."

Sports fans know the feeling. Rules change over time. Some changes are made to improve safety; others are made to improve fairness. Sometimes new technology provides information that wasn't available when the original rules were written. Regardless of the reason, the rulebook is never truly finished. It evolves alongside the game.

Asphalt specifications are no different.

Many people think of specifications as fixed documents that rarely change. Once a test method is adopted and a requirement is written, it can feel as though it will remain that way forever. In reality, specifications are constantly evolving as engineers gain a better understanding of material behavior, new testing technologies emerge, and agencies seek improved methods for ensuring pavement performance.

In Texas, few specifications illustrate this evolution better than Item 300: Asphalts, Oils, and Emulsions.

Over the last several years, the specification has undergone significant changes as TxDOT, the industry, and researchers have worked together to improve how asphalt binders are evaluated and certified. Some requirements have been refined, some test methods have evolved, and new approaches continue to be evaluated. To someone outside the industry, that might seem unusual. Why change a specification that has already been working?

The answer is simple: The goal of a specification is not to remain unchanged. The goal is to provide the best possible framework for ensuring material quality and pavement performance.

One of the challenges of specification development is that research often advances faster than

specifications. New test methods are continually being proposed, existing methods are refined, and engineers are constantly learning more about how asphalt binders behave in the field. The question is not whether a new test can measure something. It is whether that measurement is repeatable, practical, and meaningful enough to justify inclusion in a purchase specification.

That evaluation process can take years. Data must be collected, laboratories must compare results, and agencies and the greater industry must determine whether a proposed change actually improves confidence in pavement performance. Some test methods ultimately become standard practice. Others remain valuable research tools without ever becoming routine specification requirements.

The recent evolution of Item 300 provides an excellent example of this process. Several test methods have evolved, new procedures have been considered, and discussions continue regarding which tests provide the most meaningful information for ensuring pavement performance.

One of the primary venues for these discussions has been the Liquid Asphalt Working Group (LAWG). Through regular meetings and open communication, LAWG helps keep industry members informed as potential changes are evaluated and discussed. The group provides a forum where suppliers, TxDOT personnel, and other stakeholders can share data, discuss concerns, and better understand the practical implications of proposed revisions before they are incorporated into the specification.

Anyone who has participated in discussions surrounding recent Item 300 revisions has seen firsthand just how much effort goes into evaluating a single specification change. What may appear as a simple modification in a specification book is often the result of years of research, laboratory evaluations, field observations, and discussion among industry experts.

Of course, not every proposed change ultimately becomes part of a specification. Some tests show promise during research but prove difficult to implement consistently across multiple laboratories. Others may provide useful information but offer little practical benefit compared to existing methods. Some changes may improve performance prediction but create unintended challenges related to testing time,

equipment requirements, or certification timelines.

That balancing act is one of the most important responsibilities of specification development.

The goal is not simply to add more testing or to make specifications longer. It is to improve confidence that materials will perform as intended in the field

while maintaining a practical system that agencies and the industry can successfully implement.

Asphalt specifications have come a long way from the days when penetration, ductility, and viscosity were the primary tools used to characterize asphalt binders. Today's specifications incorporate sophisticated equipment and performance-related concepts that engineers from previous generations could hardly imagine.

Yet the underlying objective remains unchanged. We want reliable materials that contribute to durable, safe, and long-lasting pavements.

Just like the rulebook in sports, the specification book will continue to evolve. New research will emerge. New technologies will be developed. Existing methods will be refined and occasionally replaced altogether.

The important thing is that the process remains collaborative, transparent, and focused on improving pavement performance. The best specifications are not necessarily the newest ones or the most complicated ones. They are the ones that strike the right balance between science, practicality, and performance.

Most fans would agree that not every rule change in sports has been a home run. Some changes are immediately embraced. Others are debated for years. A few are eventually abandoned altogether. But the goal is always the same: to improve the game.

Asphalt specifications follow a remarkably similar path. New ideas are proposed, debated, tested, and sometimes revised before they earn a permanent place in the rulebook. The discussions can be lengthy, the evaluations exhaustive, and opinions don't always align. Yet that process is exactly what helps ensure that changes ultimately benefit the people who rely on our transportation system.

Because whether we're talking about football or asphalt, the best rule changes are the ones that make the game better. 🏈

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TXAPA Invests in East Texas and Wins



Over the past year, TXAPA has extended its statewide network through a growing team of regional directors focused on building direct, ongoing relationships with Tx-DOT districts, local agencies, and industry partners across the state.

For East Texas Regional Director Dennis Turner, based in the Houston area, that work has meant becoming a familiar presence in one of the state's largest and most complex markets.

Turner has taken over leadership of the quarterly working group with the Houston District's construction office—started last year by TXAPA Director of Special Projects Larry Peirce—which has grown into a quarterly training program. The first session drew over 50 attendees representing the district's design, construction, maintenance, and area offices.

Partners in Quality (PIQ) meetings have grown across the region, too. A joint Houston-Beaumont PIQ drew more than 100 attendees, followed by a joint PIQ with the Lufkin, Tyler, and Atlanta districts. The Yoakum and Bryan District PIQs are planned for this fall.

On the local agency side, Turner attended all four 2026 MAPS Conferences and presented at three of them, bringing technical guidance directly to the cities, counties, con-

sultants, and contractors who make up much of the region's paving market.

Leveraging the momentum from the MAPS Conferences, Turner has built a regular schedule of lunch-and-learns aimed at helping local agencies and consultants scope, specify, and monitor asphalt projects with more confidence. That outreach is changing the market's trajectory.

"Harris County, the City of Houston, and Houston METRO are collectively delivering one of the region's largest asphalt paving programs," Turner said.

He also points to fast-growing counties like Brazoria, Montgomery, and Waller, where thicker, appropriately designed asphalt sections are increasingly the standard for major thoroughfares.

Turner highlights speed of construction and ride quality as asphalt's clearest advantages in a market where long construction timelines take a real toll on commuters. Asphalt projects can stage construction without shutting down lanes for weeks at a time, finish sooner, and be repaired quickly if problems come up later.

TXAPA's East Texas presence has also grown through new partnerships, including a joint workshop with the Texas Council of Engineering Laboratories that drew some 150 attendees in Houston. Turner and Peirce will both present this fall at ASCE's CECON and at TACERA. TXAPA will also have booths at the APWA, Texas Municipal League, and County Judges and Commissioners conferences.

Turner's packed schedule since stepping into the role in January is a testament to how needed a regional presence is. That same momentum carries over into *Road Maps*, the podcast arm of the MAPS Program. Launched earlier this year, *Road Maps* has become a go-to resource, with Turner and Peirce turning specifications, mix types, and QC/QA best practices into conversations that are useful and easy to listen to. A run of new episodes is already lined up, covering project scoping, the responsible use of recycled asphalt pavement, and surface prep.

"It's been well received," Turner said. "It's really about being an advocate for our industry." 🗺️

Listen to Road Maps

Scan the QR code to tune into Road Maps, the official podcast arm of the MAPS Program, hosted by TXAPA's East Texas Regional Director Dennis Turner and Director of Special Projects Larry Peirce.



The Future Is in Your Hands

TXAPA members support the next generation of leaders at Scholarship Night

There is a lot in store for attendees of TXAPA's 51st Annual Meeting from September 14–17, but one event offers the chance to do good while having a whole lot of fun: Scholarship Night, which features a live auction and subsequent celebration.

Each year, TXAPA members bid on a variety of items with proceeds benefiting TXAPA's Scholarship Program, which removes financial barriers to education for the next generation of Texas asphalt leaders.

The Scholarship Program aids Texas students who have expressed interest in the asphalt and construction industries, whether through their college major (think construction management and civil engineering) or their summer or part-time employment. Through the scholarship, TXAPA encourages students to explore the world of asphalt pavement and helps to connect recipients to opportunities in the industry.

"It's slowly changing, but universities don't focus on asphalt in their engineering programs," said Emily Adams, TXAPA director of marketing. "This is a way to build awareness and help students expand their educational outlook. It's focused on growing our industry and giving these students the opportunity to follow their academic goals."

In 2025, TXAPA awarded 47 full scholarships, valued at \$10,000 per year, and eight partial scholarships. Full-time students are eligible to apply when they reach their sophomore year, receiving funds for up to three years. The impact is significant—\$30,000 is no small chunk of change when it comes to today's tuition costs.

TXAPA members come out in full force to support the program, which was established in 2002, and fundraising efforts have come a long way since then. In its first year, the auction raised some \$20,000. When Adams joined TXAPA in 2018, attendees raised more than \$300,000 thanks to a \$100,000 donation on the night of the auction.

The next year's president made it his goal to beat the 2018 auction's numbers, and he did. Almost every year since, TXAPA has exceeded the prior year's outcomes. In 2025, TXAPA raised \$1.1 million for the program, primarily through the auction, but also via the Association's annual golf tournament and donations made throughout the year.



"Any time you're participating in a TXAPA event, there's a pretty good chance proceeds are benefiting our scholarship program," Adams said.

When the auction closes, TXAPA encourages the audience to contribute more and matches dollar-for-dollar up to \$100,000.

This year's auction will be digital thanks to a donation from Ritchie Bros. Auctioneers. Bids and the names of those who make them will appear on a screen to further encourage some friendly competition. The technology will also allow TXAPA to instantly track how much the auction raises. The Scholarship Program is a 501(c)3, so winning bids are tax deductible.

Following the live auction, attendees will slip into their dancing shoes and celebrate the future of the industry with a performance by Shenandoah, the featured entertainment at the Scholarship Night Celebration. 📍

See You at Scholarship Night!

Wednesday, September 16

7:30–8:30 p.m.
Live Auction

9–10:30 p.m.
Scholarship Night
Celebration

Learn more about the TXAPA Scholarship Program and donate here.



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Ruts deeper than two inches have been observed at multiple highway intersections, including the one in Pecos.



ACCELERATE

- ✦ A project in Pecos shows high-performance-grade asphalt binders can withstand heavy, slow-moving traffic at intersections.
- ✦ On the Pecos project, thick-lift paving allowed crews to complete construction in just nine days.
- ✦ High-performance-grade asphalt solutions cost almost 60 percent less than concrete and offer longer service life and less maintenance.
- ✦ One year later, the intersection shows no signs of rutting.



Stop Rutting in Its Tracks

High-performance-grade asphalt could change the future of busy intersections

By Nick Fortuna

For many years, the main claim to fame for the West Texas city of Pecos was that it hosted the world's first public rodeo on July 4, 1883.

But now, the city of 13,000 residents in the Permian Basin is making headlines for a different reason—an innovative project showcasing how high-performance-grade (HPG) asphalt binders can solve the problem of rutting at busy intersections.

This successful project figures to garner plenty of attention during a presentation at TXAPA's 51st Annual Meeting in San Antonio from September 14–17. Clifton Kay, president of the TXAPA Board of Directors, whose company placed the HPG asphalt at that intersection, said he expects a full house for the event, with industry stakeholders eager to learn more.

“This project has been a home run and has really gotten people's attention,” said Kay, division manager for Buffalo, Tex.-based A.L. Helmcamp, Inc. “Attendees won't be sneaking off to play golf during this presentation; that's for sure.”

Kay will be speaking alongside Dr. Fujie Zhou, a senior research engineer at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute. With funding from the Texas Department of Transportation, Zhou's research team designed and evaluated the asphalt mixes and HPG binders used at the Pecos intersection, which sees heavy traffic from trucks serving oilfield operations.

Zhou said traditional asphalt mixes typically perform well under free-flowing traffic traveling at regular speeds. However, at intersections with slow-moving or standing traffic, the same pavement structure with the same materials routinely buckles under the weight of heavy trucks.

Ruts deeper than two inches have been observed at multiple highway intersections, including those designed with premium mixes such as stone-matrix asphalt, a gap-graded asphalt mix known

“

We needed a quick way to fix the problem of rutting at intersections, and using a durable, stiffer asphalt is a great solution.”

ISTGALLERY/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

for its durability, Zhou said. Extensive rutting is a major safety concern for motorists and pedestrians because the depressions can collect rainwater, leading to hydroplaning when tires lose contact with the pavement.

At Texas intersections with standing truck traffic, deep rutting has occurred within one or two years of construction, an issue that's exacerbated by long, hot summers, extreme weather conditions, and an increase in truck traffic.

Asphalt softens in extreme heat, and during the sultry Texas summer, pavement temperatures can exceed 140 degrees Fahrenheit, even when ambient temperatures are significantly lower. Under those conditions, asphalt binders lose stiffness, becoming more like a viscous material that can slowly displace under heavy loads.

Repairing rutting and shoving—another type of pavement distortion where traffic pushes the hot-mix asphalt layer toward the sides of the roadway—can cost millions of dollars and cause significant disruptions to motorists and local businesses. HPG asphalt offers an attractive solution, speeding up construction and making maintenance less frequent, Zhou said.

Zhou's research team developed the HPG asphalt mix design for the Pecos project by subjecting samples to a tougher version of the Hamburg Wheel Tracking Test. That test evaluates the rutting resistance and moisture susceptibility of asphalt mixes by submerging compacted specimens in a 50-degree Celsius water bath and subjecting them to 20,000 passes of a 158-pound loaded steel wheel.

To ensure that the HPG asphalt mix would be even more durable, Zhou's team increased the temperature of the water bath to 70 degrees Celsius, and the mixture aced the test, signaling that it was time for real-world asphalt placement.

A Streamlined Construction Process

The Pecos project involved placing HPG asphalt along a 0.21-mile stretch of U.S. 285 and a 0.25-mile section of Business Interstate 20-B in September 2025. The contractor divided the intersection into eight sections and completed the work in just nine days, with HPG asphalt allowing for full-depth placement of the hot-mix asphalt in one pass.

Kay said there were some raised eyebrows among A.L. Helmcamp's experienced equipment operators when told that they'd be placing hot-mix asphalt at a depth of six inches on U.S. 285 and seven inches on BI 20-B in a single pass. Hot-mix asphalt typically is placed in lifts of two to three inches to optimize compaction.

If lifts are significantly thicker, the bottom layer may not compact sufficiently before the top layer cools. Thick lifts also are more likely to contain air voids that can allow for water infiltration and shorten pavement life.

Through polymer modification, the research team was able to create a mix design with HPG binders that are stiff enough to hold up to stationary truck traffic but still soft enough to avoid cracking at cooler temperatures, Zhou said. Thick-lift paving—placing asphalt in a single layer that's significantly thicker than standard lifts—enabled the crew to complete the work faster, minimizing disruptions for the traveling public and businesses situated along the thoroughfare.

"If you did this with conventional liquid asphalt, it probably would take twice as long, and it still wouldn't stand up to truck traffic," Kay said. "You really need high-performance-graded binders at these intersections. We finally developed asphalt that will compete with concrete as far as rutting."

For construction crews, working with HPG asphalt requires only minor adjustments, Kay said. Since the product has a short shelf life, crews need to coordinate

closely with the hot-mix asphalt plant to ensure that they order precisely the right amount for each shift, he said. Since the HPG binders can quickly degrade if stored at high temperatures, crews might end up discarding leftover HPG asphalt at the end of the shift.

Secondly, crews need to begin compaction immediately after placement because the material will cool off faster than conventional liquid asphalt, Kay said. Those minor process adjustments are among the pointers offered to contractors in a tip-sheet produced by the Asphalt Pavement EXchange (APEX), a collaboration of TxDOT and TXAPA, Kay added.

"You have to schedule your liquid deliveries precisely, and your paving crew needs to get on it quickly," Kay said. "Those are really the only changes. For some of our operators, the process blew their minds because they had never laid that thick a lift of asphalt in their entire careers. It was really great to get in there and get out in such a short amount of time—just unreal."

A Quick Turnaround Time

One major benefit of using HPG asphalt is that roadways can be reopened to traffic as soon as the material has cooled, typically in just a few hours. Crews that perform work overnight or during off-peak hours can upgrade a busy roadway with minimal inconvenience to the traveling public, Kay said.

Had the construction crew used conventional concrete, which is common at high-traffic intersections, the project could have taken as long as 96 days, since each of the eight sections would have required about a week to cure, Kay said. Using fast-curing concrete could have reduced the timeline to about 72 days but would have added significantly to the project's total cost, he said.

Kay performed a detailed analysis of the intersection project and found that using HPG asphalt cost only about 58 percent as much as using rigid pavement.

“That doesn’t include the additional costs of project overhead due to additional time required to place concrete in lieu of asphalt,” he said.

One year after construction, the Pecos intersection shows no signs of rutting, illustrating the potential of HPG asphalt to become the preferred pavement solution for high-traffic intersections across Texas and the United States.

“We’ll have an employee go there every few months and lay down a straight edge, and he reports back that nothing has changed, and it looks great,” Kay said. “We’ve had zero rutting so far.”

Zhou said using highly modified binders like those in HPG asphalt costs more than conventional liquid asphalt, but if the surface holds up for 10 years, then maintenance costs will be greatly reduced. In addition, having to mill and repave major intersections every few

years due to rutting significantly inconveniences local communities, so the increased durability of HPG asphalt is a major benefit.

Intersections that don’t experience rutting are safer for the traveling public, especially in wet weather conditions, Zhou said. Likewise, motorists may notice a smoother, quieter ride on HPG asphalt since they’re no longer traveling

over concrete joints, which are responsible for the “ba-bump” sound commonly heard on concrete roadways.

“We needed a quick way to fix the problem of rutting at intersections, and using a durable, stiffer asphalt is a great solution,” Zhou said. “Surely, the experience and knowledge gained from the HPG asphalt intersection at Pecos will benefit other parts of Texas and beyond.” ➡

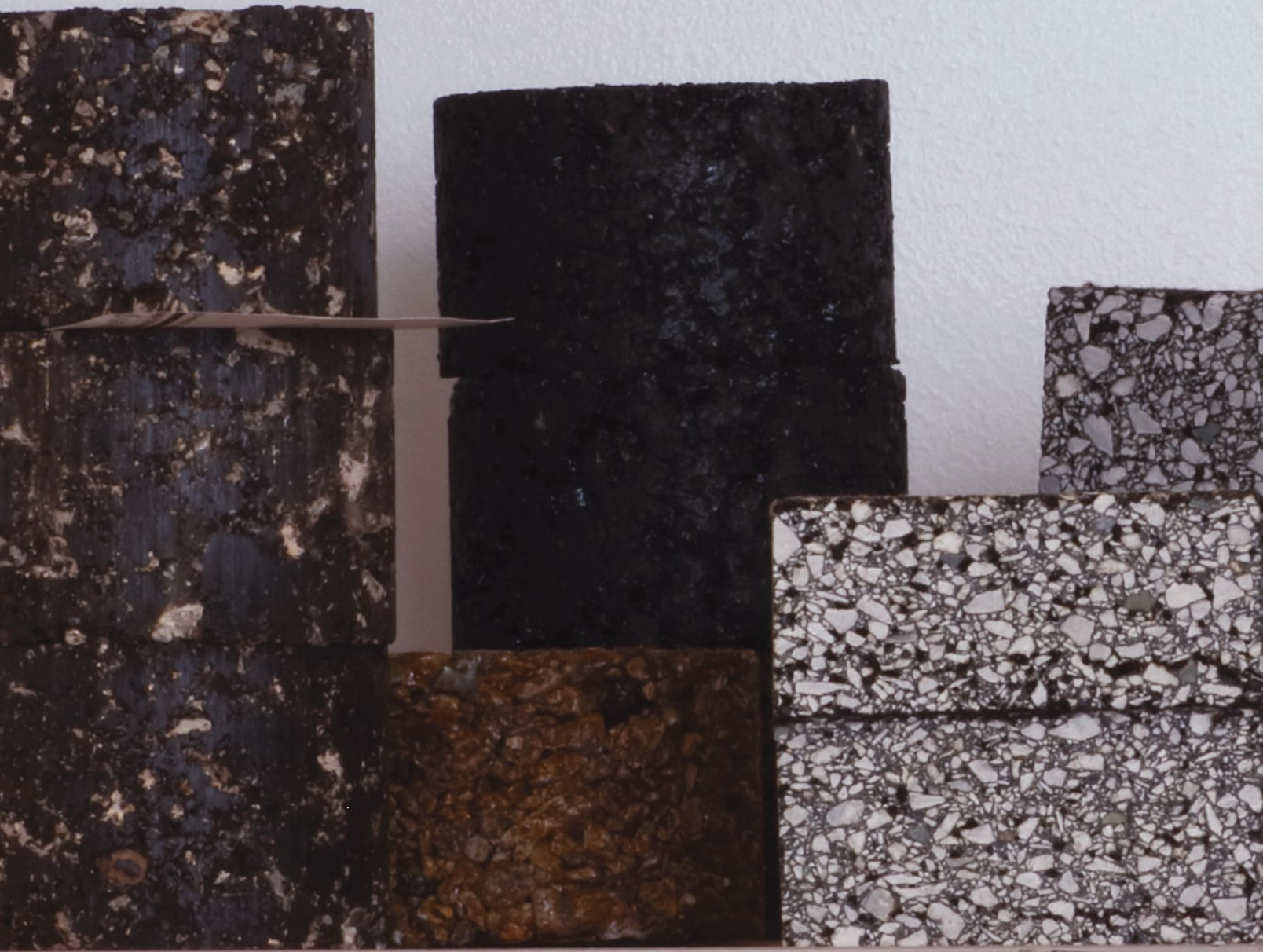


Learn More About Heavy Duty Intersections

At TXAPA’s 51st Annual Meeting, Clifton Kay of A.L. Helmcamp, Inc., and Dr. Fujie Zhou of the Texas A&M Transportation Institute will present on the Pecos project and Zhou’s research on the high-performance-grade binders used at the intersection.



We finally developed asphalt that will compete with concrete as far as rutting.”



ACCELERATE

- ✦ New testing methods check how pavement mixtures actually perform, not just their ingredients.
- ✦ Updated design software helps engineers tailor road plans to local traffic and conditions.
- ✦ Choosing the right materials means balancing near-term durability against damage years down the road.
- ✦ A new shared standard brings state-level quality control to the local roads Texans use daily.

Pavement That Performs

Engineering asphalt that aces the test

By Emily Adams

As the world has changed, so have the performance demands on our roadways.

Steel belted radial tires, which became standard in the mid-1970s, concentrated vehicle weight into a smaller contact patch. Allowable freight weights increased, and population growth brought more stop-and-go traffic and time spent idling at red lights.

Across the country, and in Texas specifically, that added strain surfaced as a sharp rise in rutting and stripping, which led directly to the creation of the Strategic Highway Research Program, or SHRP.

Part I of this series, published in the Summer 2026 issue of *Texas Asphalt*, looked at what SHRP and decades of follow-up work changed about the materials themselves. This second installment covers the engineering decisions built on top of them, starting with how mixture performance is measured, moving into how entire pavement structures are designed for the toughest jobs in the state, and ending with how that same standard of quality is reaching the local roads Texans drive on every day.

Much of that story starts with a shift away from something called volumetric

mix design, which checks the proportions of a mixture—how much binder, how much aggregate, and how much space is left for air, all expressed as a percentage of the whole. If those proportions fall within an approved range, the mixture passes, regardless of how it performs once it is built into a road.

Measuring Mixture Performance

The shift toward performance-based thinking for asphalt binder is now happening at the mixture level.

Volumetric design was never quite as simple as a fixed recipe. Dr. Amy Epps Martin, a professor at Texas A&M University who has led much of the state's Balanced Mix Design work, explained that even the older Marshall and Hveem systems, which TxDOT once used in a modified form, tried to balance two competing needs.

Engineers would add as much binder as a mixture could handle for good cracking resistance and durability, right up until a rutting test showed there was too much. When the Superpave system was born from SHRP research, an early attempt to build direct performance testing and distress prediction into mix design proved challenging for routine practice. So for decades, Texas and



The shift toward performance-based thinking for asphalt binder is now happening at the mixture level.

most other states have leaned on volumetric checks alone.

That approach has limits. A mixture can pass every volumetric check and still leave open questions about how it will perform in the field.

“These checks don’t consider the quality of the materials,” Epps Martin said. “Only the quantities.”

That gap matters more today because Texas mixtures increasingly include reclaimed asphalt pavement, known as RAP. Reusing that material is cost effective and sustainable, but RAP stockpiles vary widely in quality and consistency—a passing volumetric result does not guarantee a mixture with recycled material will resist cracking as it ages.

Balanced Mix Design adds direct mixture performance testing on top of the volumetric checks, verifying how well a mixture resists cracking and rutting before it reaches the road.

When a mixture passes volumetrics but fails that balanced performance check (often because it is carrying more RAP than the unique mixture components can support) engineers have a few tools available. They can adjust the aggregate gradation to make room for more binder, use a softer virgin binder to offset stiff, aged binder already present in the RAP, and more accurately account for how much of that old binder is still active rather than assuming all of it is available.

Texas has moved toward this deliberately. An early special specification piloted the approach on select test sections starting in 2019, and a newer special specification tied to the current TxDOT spec book now requires performance verification outright.

Most states doing this work follow an approach that combines volumetric checks with performance verification, defined under a shared American Association of State Highway and Transporta-

tion Officials (AASHTO) framework with four approaches. A newer national effort is organizing that framework into three tiers, letting states advance at their own pace for each type of pavement distress rather than moving in lockstep.

One unsolved challenge is RAP stockpile quality. Epps Martin was candid that the industry still lacks a simple, reliable way to test a RAP pile’s age and consistency before it goes into a mixture.

TxDOT recently issued new guidance for managing RAP stockpiles as one step toward closing that gap. The more confidently contractors can demonstrate consistent, well-managed stockpiles, the more comfortable agencies become specifying higher RAP contents.

There is also a newer wrinkle worth watching. As RAP use grows, some of what gets recycled today already contains previously recycled asphalt, a challenge the industry has started calling re-recycling.



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Epps Martin does not want engineers or contractors to see any of this as intimidating.

"You just need knowledge and education and to jump in and try it," she said. Texas is working toward a permanent specification that could allow mixtures with up to 35 percent RAP, provided performance is adequate based on laboratory testing. It's a shift she considers one of the clearest wins balanced mix designs offer the industry.

Engineering in Action

From the raw ingredients, the next logical step is ensuring that engineering plays out where the stakes are highest.

Some of the most demanding pavement conditions in Texas sit wherever heavy trucks concentrate: energy sector routes, border crossings, freight corridors, and intersections.

Chris Henry, deputy director of TxDOT's maintenance division, helped lead a new Heavy Duty Pavement Design Guide after portable weigh-in-motion sensors measuring actual truck weights and traffic volumes turned up loads far higher than anyone had assumed. The guide draws on the same principle behind perpetual pavement design: keeping strain at the bottom of the asphalt layer and the top of the subgrade low enough that the structure only needs resurfacing over time, never a full rebuild.

That design work now runs through FPS 23, the newest version of TxDOT's pave-

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ment design software. Ruben Carrasco, TxDOT's branch manager for pavement analysis and design, worked alongside Henry on the guide, and points to a real gap FPS 23 closes.

Older modeling leaned on standard assumptions that did not always reflect a given district's needs, producing thickness numbers that worked out mathematically but, in some cases, did not match specific conditions.

FPS 23 includes a companion check called TxME, short for Texas Mechanistic-Empirical, which models how a structure will perform based on materials, traffic, and local climatic conditions.

That same shift toward purpose-built design now reaches intersections, which carry traffic differently than a straight highway. Charles Gurganus, pavement management program manager at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute's materials and pavements division, explained that a highway sees traffic pass over quickly and repeatedly, while an intersection sees vehicles slow, sit, and accelerate again, often in the same spot for years.

That sustained load, combined with heat radiating down from idling vehicles, calls for its own design approach. TxDOT's working group on intersections is treating them as their own category, engineered on their own terms rather than as an afterthought to the surrounding roadway.

Designing for 15 Years from Now

This is also where the conversation circles back to a tension in materials design: resisting rutting today versus resisting cracking years down the road.

Darren Hazlett with the University of Texas Center for Transportation Research described binder selection as a bet against a range of future weather, not a single expected temperature.

"Climate is a distribution," he said, and choosing a binder grade means choosing how far out into that range an engineer is willing to be exposed. He compared it to building in a floodplain: design for the average condition, and a pavement sits in something like a two-year floodplain, fine most years and badly exposed in the ones that matter. Pushing the reliability higher starts to resemble a 50- or 100-year floodplain instead.

Miss too high on that range and the pavement leans toward rutting. Miss too low and it leans toward cracking as the binder ages and oxidizes over the years.

This is the sweet spot an engineer must find—a pavement that performs as intended today and that still maintains most of that performance after 15 years. It is part of why high polymer binders, often called HPG binders, are drawing interest on heavy duty projects. A more elastic, resilient binder protects against rutting now without giving up as much resistance to cracking later.

Bringing Consistency to Local Roads

That same standard of quality does not stop at the state highway system. It reaches the roads most Texans drive on every day.

Cities and counties maintain roughly 70 percent of Texas's centerline miles—more than TxDOT—yet local specifications vary from one city or county to the next. Many still reference a generic or modified TxDOT specification decades out of date.

That gap costs local agencies real value for their paving dollars and can make new hot mix construction a harder sell against stopgap strategies like seal coating, even when a properly built hot mix road is the better long-term investment.

TXAPA built Specification 341M, now standing for "Modified for Local Agencies," to close that gap. Unlike TxDOT's

single statewide standard, local agencies have historically had no shared benchmark, so local road quality across Texas varies.

Larry Peirce, TXAPA's lead voice on local agency issues, frames the value of unifying that in terms of certainty. A contractor working across several cities and counties in the same week may need to adjust to a different specification at every stop, raising the chance of a mismatched mix or a costly production error.

"Uncertainty equals risk, and risk equals cost," Peirce said. A single, modern standard also means producers can deliver a more consistent mix, and a workforce can operate the same way no matter where a job lands.

341M also gives local agencies a tested framework for using recycled material with confidence, building on the same stockpile guidance now shaping practice statewide.

A Resource Worth Knowing About

Alongside 341M, PAVExpress is a free, web-based pavement design program built for local agencies, engineers, and architects who need a reliable way to determine the required pavement thickness for a given roadway.

It builds technically sound structural designs based on widely accepted AASHTO standards—without requiring TxDOT's full design software or years of specialized experience. For a city or county engineer trying to right size a project, it is a practical way to put the same performance-based thinking behind BMD, FPS 23, and 341M to work on a local road. 📍

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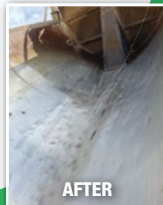
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- ★ The Asphalt Pavement EXchange is the nation's first collaborative asphalt knowledge exchange program.
- ★ Experts in the field turn ideas into practical, approachable educational materials.
- ★ In their first year, the Essentials Workshops reached nearly 500 asphalt professionals.
- ★ In APEX's second year, leaders hope to deepen industry collaboration and build upon its infrastructure.

One Year of APEX

The first-of-its-kind initiative closes knowledge gaps in Texas's asphalt industry

By Cathleen Draper

One year ago, a joint initiative between TxDOT and TXAPA came to fruition: the Asphalt Pavement EXchange.

Referred to as APEX, the program serves as a central hub for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and education across the Texas asphalt industry. It's got one objective in mind.

"The ultimate goal of this whole program is to build long-lasting, more durable asphalt pavements," said Jim Warren, APEX director.

To do that, APEX equips asphalt pavement professionals across the state with knowledge through educational materials, in-person and virtual workshops and events, an online resource library, and regular communications. It's the first program of its kind in the nation—but it certainly won't be the last.

APEX was created to address a gap in the asphalt industry. With 13,000 employees, TxDOT faces several unique challenges. First, a mid-level knowledge gap as retirement-age workers leave the force and younger generations enter the field, according to Warren. Second, the state of Texas itself, specifically its size and range of climates and geographies.

"We have a very different type of soil in Austin, for example, than they do in Lubbock, and that affects how you lay asphalt pavement," noted Keaton Hernandez, APEX's adult learning director. "We're not a state where the weather, the climate, the soil, anything is consistent."

Processes, materials, and more vary across the state and its districts. Through knowledge sharing, APEX aims to increase consistency and quality, whether you're laying pavement in Amarillo or Laredo.

And third, TxDOT's inherently siloed structure. Design, materials, construction, and maintenance—they might not interact with one another per se, but their roles are intimately related.

Take a construction crew. They could place the asphalt perfectly, but it could be the wrong type. "They might say, 'that's not my problem,'" Warren said. "It is everybody's problem, because now we've done a really good job of placing the asphalt, but it's the wrong mix for the area, or it's not thick enough, or any number of different things."

APEX's educational offerings address those silos, he continued, "all the way around materials design, construction, and maintenance—from the boots on



APEX was created to address a gap in the asphalt industry.

the ground up to the CEOs and the district engineers.”

Learning how to share across roles and cultures is “phenomenally complicated,” Warren said. But, he continued, “it’s worth the effort.”

Building the Foundation

Last summer, when APEX launched, the program had to start building its infrastructure from the ground up—from an office for Warren, Hernandez, and the APEX team, to photocopiers and desks, to the processes and foundations of what APEX would become.

In a collaborative effort, committees and Working Groups were formed to establish exactly what APEX hopes to achieve, how it will do so, and the processes in between. Today, some 180 experts from across the industry work together, developing materials and resources for asphalt professionals across the state.

“It’s a Texas-sized program,” Warren said.

The Asphalt Pavement Quality Initiative (APQI) Steering Committee, comprised of TxDOT and industry leaders, assigns ideas and concepts to the various Task Forces and Working Groups to pursue. Hernandez works hand in hand with those nine groups, each of which owns a specific asphalt topic, from materials and mix selection to construction and inspection.

She supports them, helping the groups to stay organized and prioritize educational needs. Then she provides a framework for developing knowledge-sharing materials. The framework, called MAP, asks three key questions: What is the message? Who is the audience? What educational product aligns with that audience and message?

“We are developing educational materials for those out in the field up through professional engineers with Ph.Ds,” Hernandez said. “All of those different

audiences have different needs in terms of learning and materials.”

Those materials include infographics, posters, how-to guides, and technical documents. Collaborating with the Working Groups to develop the products has been a huge accomplishment for APEX, she continued.

Once a product is complete, it is shared with the APEX community and sent to the District Asphalt Pavement Specialists, designated APEX representatives in TxDOT’s 25 districts. They serve as the conduit between design, materials, construction, and maintenance groups and distribute APEX’s resources among them.

APEX’s educational offerings—roughly 200 products—also live on the program’s new website, which went live in May on APEXTX.org. Its launch is one of APEX’s crowning achievements in its first year, connecting asphalt professionals not only with resources and materials, but also to TxDOT, research centers such as Texas A&M’s Transportation Institute, and organizations like TXAPA.

Professionals can also find episodes of *Everyday Asphalt*, a monthly podcast hosted by Warren that covers a range of topics that matter most to those in the field.

There is no shortage of accomplishments in the initiative’s first year, but the Essentials Workshops in particular stand out. These two-day, in-person summits cover the lifecycle of asphalt pavement—the foundations of materials, mix design, how to plan and design, construction, maintenance, and beyond—and the best practices within those areas.

Essentials Workshops are meant to be accessible to anyone and everyone in the industry, to “get everyone speaking the same language and on the same page across the state,” Hernandez said.

“At the end of the program, you’re going to understand number one, how all these things work together, and number

two, where your place is in this cycle,” Warren added.

APEX piloted the workshops back in December, and they’ve been a massive success, reaching nearly 500 people. This spring alone, APEX hosted six workshops across the state. Six more are to come this fall, and then another six in spring 2027.

Warren leads the workshops, and he strives to make them interactive and not, in his words, “death by PowerPoint.”

“Our whole premise of training people up to this point was to put them in a room for eight hours, turn the lights off, and turn on the projector,” Warren said.

Some people are visual learners, others are auditory, and some require hands-on experiences to grasp a concept. Warren believes most people are a blend of the three. In the Essentials Workshops, he incorporates videos, live demonstrations, and tactile learning. For example, he recently traveled to East Texas and brought samples of granite back to the APEX office in Buda to use in class.

“Everything around here is limestone, so people don’t know granite well,” he said. “They probably ought to, because they may work in that area.”

To assess their success, Warren and Hernandez look at engagement—are people attending and participating in the workshops? Following the workshops, attendees are asked to complete a survey, scoring the experience. That data shows that the workshops meet the learning objectives APEX set, and that those in attendance are getting something out of them—reviews rank in the “high fours” out of five, Warren said.

What Comes Next

The Essentials Workshops and APEX’s other resources meet two distinct objectives: ensuring workers across Texas follow the same best practices and breaking down asphalt’s complex concepts.



APEX Director Jim Warren brings a variety of materials used in asphalt across Texas to share at the Essentials Workshops.

“We want to make the complicated easy,” Warren said. When building the team for APEX, he purposely hired individuals with little to no experience in the asphalt industry. That ensures materials and resources explaining convoluted topics can be understood by all asphalt professionals, whether they’ve been in the industry for eight months or 18 years.

Through its structure, APEX has opened a line of communication, inviting a level of collaboration between stakeholders across asphalt that, until now, hasn’t had a platform.

“We were missing that opportunity to learn from each other and to share what we know, and together we’re going to be better,” Warren said. “We’ve missed that piece of the puzzle, and the more we dig into that, the more I realize how much.”

Asphalt professionals, especially those in Texas, want to give back, collaborate, and provide their expertise to educate the rest of the industry, Hernandez said. The importance of that collaboration cannot be overemphasized. If APEX only worked with one source or organization to build its offerings, it would be a disservice to the people using those resources.

“If we only got one perspective, it would not give us everything we needed to provide the best educational materials,” Hernandez said. “Having all of those perspectives is critical to provide the industry what they need in terms of education.”

In its second year, Hernandez and Warren plan to continue building out the program, adding more Essentials Workshops and developing more educational products, including kits filled with materials and other items to bring to workshops and educational sessions. APEX recently added a new Working Group covering flexible pavement inspection, which will explore all the layers of pavement, not just asphalt. More are sure to come.

“We have hundreds of topics we can develop,” Warren said. “As soon as we hit the finish line on one, it’s the starting line for something else.”

For asphalt professionals who haven’t yet engaged with APEX, Hernandez has one message: “we’re here.”

“We’re here to help improve the industry, help make their jobs easier. I don’t think anyone would hate hearing that,” she continued. “I think all of us would love to hear, ‘Hey, I want to try to help



Jim Warren leads a demonstration at an APEX Essentials Workshop.

make your job easier.’ Let us help you do your job better. Let us help increase that level of knowledge and consistency and quality across asphalt pavement in Texas.”

APEX’s door is open not just to those looking to learn, but to those hoping to give back by sharing their experiences, collaborating, and problem solving.

As APEX’s director, Warren hopes to develop the program’s infrastructure in the coming years so that one day he can pass the torch to a new leader. Teamwork is essential to achieve that, as is surrounding himself with experts with the same passion he has: a whole-hearted belief that asphalt is the answer to supporting the infrastructure and people of Texas.

“I feel super blessed to be a part of this,” he said. “In my whole career, I always wanted to do something like this. I never knew what it looked like. It’s way bigger than I thought, but the return on investment is going to be significant.” 📍



ACCELERATE

- ★ TxDOT's 15/50 rule requires strategic vehicle spacing in work zones, reducing "friendly fire" incidents.
- ★ The required distances between parked equipment were calculated to work along open desert roads and in urban centers.
- ★ Weekly incident reports and hands-on training build habits so 15/50 is automatic, not an afterthought.
- ★ Culture drives compliance—leaders coach rather than punish.

Closing the Distance

A simple spacing standard is keeping TxDOT crews out of harm's way

By Cathleen Draper

In 2011, TxDOT launched its Safety Mission Zero campaign, meant to eliminate preventable vehicle incidents, employee injuries, and most importantly, employee fatalities.

Those include backing incidents and striking fixed objects, which make the top of the list every year according to Robert Godina, former safety operations section director in the occupational safety division of TxDOT. To help eliminate vehicle-on-vehicle strikes and the possibility of backing over teammates, be it a TxDOT employee or contractor, TxDOT developed its 15/50 rule, a now-integral element of Internal Traffic Control Plans (ITCP) on the job.

"A review of vehicle incident trends revealed a need for targeted action, with efforts concentrated on improving how equipment is staged to reduce risk," Godina explained. "We noticed quite a few, what we call 'friendly fire,' incidents when we were not taking the time to think about departure upon arrival. We were not thinking about the hazards of parking too close together."



By creating space, blind spots are reduced, and it helps us reduce the need for possibly backing up to clear bumpers."

A job's ITCP coordinates the flow of vehicles, equipment, and workers within a work zone, and addressing equipment clustering was determined to be a key factor in preventing incidents and improving employee safety. The 15/50 rule requires that vehicles be parked 15 feet away from each other side to side, and 50 feet from the back bumper to the front bumper of the vehicle behind it.

"By creating space, blind spots are reduced, and it helps us reduce the need for possibly backing up to clear bumpers," Godina said.

Texas Asphalt spoke with Godina, who retired from TxDOT in July, to learn more about the rule, from how it's put into action on the job and the importance of culture in its implementation.

How did the committee tasked with creating this safety measure determine 15 feet and 50 feet as the safest distances?

Considering the amount of space that we have behind the cones—where the work is actually being done—we felt we had to be intentional about that decision. Out in West Texas, the terrain tends to be more flat and open, so the extra room lets us keep more distance between vehicles. In East Texas, where it's forest and the right of way is not as wide, we've got to be more careful on that spacing. We felt 15 feet side to side and 50 feet bumper to bumper was a good distance to help us eliminate risks in both situations.

How does 15/50 improve visibility and reduce blind spots?

Whenever we talk about improving visibility, space is our friend. When someone can intentionally increase the space around vehicles, that allows the operator to identify hazards around them, whether it's workers on foot, that piece



As a safety professional driving through, walking through, being in those work zones, it's obvious if the crew has accomplished 15/50 or part of it—or even tried.”

of equipment, or that fixed object, like a parked truck. As far as blind spots go, hazards comes in all shapes and forms. Some pieces of equipment inherently have worse blind spots than others, and to that effect, what we like to do is compensate by creating space, especially when we're staging that equipment. There are other advancements that folks use. There's nothing wrong with cameras, nothing wrong with proximity sensors or backup sensors, but those are tools, and we describe them as such. They don't—and weren't intended to—replace what's going on in between your ears.

What if there isn't enough space in a work zone to implement 15/50, and how can leaders address it?

There might be perfectly good reasons why 15/50 isn't working out, but you have to understand the operations first before making recommendations. Maybe the culprit is the shop vehicle, or maybe it's the vehicle that has the materials that we need right now beside us. Know the operation, ask questions, collaborate, and then you go into your coaching mode to remind workers of what could happen.

How do you help workers build an understanding of the importance of 15/50?

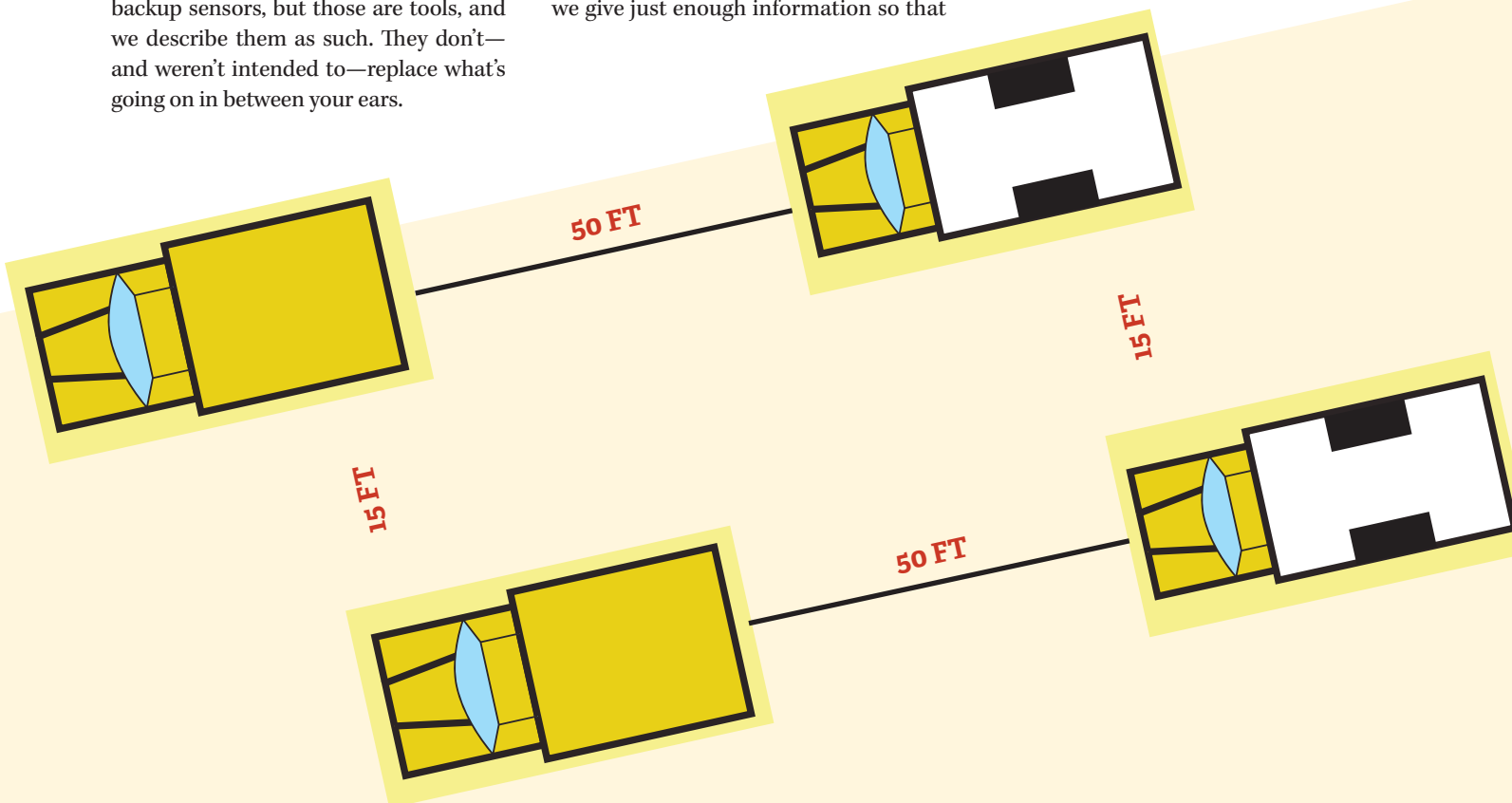
It's amazing what communication can do for a workforce. Information is power. We have 13,000-plus employees at TxDOT, and we publish an end-of-week report that informs them what happened in our work areas that week. It goes out every Friday.

We put information in their hands, and we give just enough information so that

they can learn from those incidents and injuries, especially if it's a backing incident or striking a fixed object, or worse yet, if an employee is caught in between equipment or backed over. These are real-life scenarios. The weekly report includes items that are happening with our contractors in our work zones as well, because even though they don't work for TxDOT, they're still our brothers and sisters. We're all in the same game together. At the same time, we ask our crews to think about and discuss ways to prevent these items that are happening.

How important is training to the implementation of 15/50?

The mind is an incredible tool. Over the years, we've realized it all boils down to building a habit. When addressing hazards, presenting graphs and trends to employees is one of the most effective approaches; their reaction makes it clear how impactful they are. When expectations are established and rein-



forced through consistent coaching and follow-through, the training component aligns naturally. TxDOT employees have also implemented 15/50 in their local yards.

We're setting the table of expectations through training and play of the day meetings so that when we do get boots on the ground, it's just automatic, it's a habit. Little by little we're getting better at it.

How does TxDOT enforce 15/50?

The follow-through piece is often more difficult because now workers are out there in the zone and things are happening fast, conditions are changing by the minute, and they might forget. It is very important to collaborate, to coach one another up, to give ideas about how to eliminate clustering. Some of those answers are simple, but you cannot get there until you take the time to talk, ask questions, and explain.

It's important to understand the operational sequence of the day. We may have five pieces of equipment available, but only three are required at the beginning of the shift, while the remaining two will not be used until the final stages. Those unused units can still create congestion in the work area. We encourage employees to consider this during the planning phase. If the sweeper will not be needed until later, it should be staged elsewhere to preserve space for vehicle movement.

As a safety professional driving through, walking through, being in those work zones, it's obvious if the crew has accomplished 15/50 or part of it—or even tried. Coaching and encouraging folks and thanking workers for following through on the process all contribute to the ongoing success. The approach isn't punitive; it's about reinforcing the right behaviors.

How important is an open line of communication to ensuring worker safety?

The biggest thing is when we talk about

saving lives. We hear a lot from our contractors and other folks across the nation where an employee might have been backed over or caught in between equipment. It's one of the items that we discuss, not only vehicle-on-vehicle incidents, but the possibility of backing over someone because we didn't do a good job of staging the equipment. Or catching an employee in between two pieces of metal, and the human body will always lose that battle.

We talk about those items and the likelihood of them occurring, but we also highlight the success when it doesn't happen at all. Our employees' number one goal is to make it home safe at the end of the day. We're borrowing them for the work shift, and we give them back to their families. We say, "They expect you to come home at the end of the shift, your kiddos expect you to walk through that door at the end of the day." It's up to us during that work shift to make sure we give them every opportunity to make that happen. Through these discussions, through the expectations, and through reporting incidents and injuries—and learning from those incidents and injuries—little by little, we're training the mind that we need to spread out a little bit.

What role does culture play in keeping 15/50 at the front of mind, especially for new employees?

Culture is, in my mind, all about what you are going to do when you see a hazard. We have a district engineer that says, "The standard you walk by is the standard you accept." That's your culture. It's as simple as if you see spilled water in the hallway and don't do anything about it. The one behind you might not see it and slip and fall. That's your culture—you walked right by it and didn't act on it.

Within our safety culture, we're always trying to make it about employee behavior. It's all about what happens in between the ears. We want to make sure that they know what the processes



We're open about our past safety performance and the challenges we faced before this safety transition, and we're equally clear about the vision we're working toward now."

are, the intent of them, the benefit, and what could happen if we fail. All of these condition the mind to accept the challenge and buy into the process so as new employees are hired, our safety culture is already established. When that new employee comes in, now he or she is going to be part of that success.

How can TxDOT instill the principles of 15/50 in non-TxDOT contractors and industry partners and help them incorporate it into their own safety programs?

It's all about the sharing of the information during pre-construction meetings, when the contractors and TxDOT get together to talk about the project, so that we can all get on the same page about mutual expectations.

Our industry partners and contractors often come in with successful safety programs. And workers and inspectors in TxDOT work zones are noticing what TxDOT does, and it's impressive when they start asking us questions. We're always happy to share the "upper story"—the best practices and the lessons learned. We're open about our past safety performance and the challenges we faced before this safety transition, and we're equally clear about the vision we're working toward now.

We're not perfect. We're going to learn from our shortcomings, and we're going to talk about it. We're going to be brutally honest about it, because at the end of the day we've got to get home safe. ➡



Building Better Binders

Bio-based binders show promise to extend pavement life and advance sustainability

By Lacey Asher, Westward Environmental, Inc.

The asphalt industry is increasingly focused on reducing emissions, improving air quality, increasing recyclability, and extending pavement life through new material technologies.

One approach being studied involves the use of bio-based binder additives in bitumen, particularly in high recycled asphalt material (RAM) mixes and applications that may benefit from warm mix processes.

Bio-binder technologies use renewable or waste-derived materials to modify, extend, or rejuvenate bitumen in the binder system. These materials may include bio-oils from used cooking oils, biomass waste, and other organic feedstock; they are derived through refining processes, such as pyrolysis, which decomposes organic materials by heating them in an environment without oxygen.

The resulting products can be incorporated into asphalt mixing processes to enhance pavement production, and they improve sustainability by reducing the industry's dependence on petroleum-derived additives.

Plus, many of the feedstocks used to make bio-binders absorbed atmospheric carbon dioxide during growth—incorporating them into asphalt binder may help retain a portion of the biogenic carbon found in a pavement system throughout its service life and subsequent milling or recycling.

Bio-binders will not eliminate the production of bitumen, nor will they serve as a replacement for petroleum-based products. Instead, current research generally indicates bio-oils are more valuable as extenders, modifiers, or rejuvenators.

Take reclaimed asphalt, which contains aged binder that has become stiff and brittle over time. For plants to use RAM technologies, they frequently add rejuvenators to restore some elasticity and durability to the mix. According to several studies, bio-oils show promise as rejuvenators, but binder performance varies depending on the bio-oil source, ratio in the bitumen, and recycled material content.

Turning Down the Heat

Beyond recyclability, bio-binders may also support warm mix asphalt (WMA) strategies. Conventional asphalt production

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That philosophy still drives every project today. Whether navigating regulatory challenges or delivering technical solutions for construction, mining, and industrial operations, Westward's team brings the same responsiveness and attention to detail that defined the company from day one. As we celebrate this milestone, we extend our sincere thanks to our employees, clients, and partners for 30 years of trust, collaboration, and shared success.

depends on high temperatures to properly blend the bitumen and aggregate into a durable pavement structure. That heating requires significant fuel and contributes to production-related emissions and costs.

The WMA process lowers these temperatures, and studies indicate that when combined with certain bio-binder formulations, adding bio-oils can reduce the rotational viscosity, which enhances mix workability at lower temperatures while simultaneously increasing flash and fire points, improving safety during production.

Looking Beyond the Lab

For manufacturers and state agencies, the central question is not whether bio-binders are sustainable, but whether they can prove valuable across the full life cycle of a pavement.

A credible life cycle assessment is needed to help answer the questions industry professionals are already asking: How much virgin bitumen would actually be displaced? How much carbon is "saved" during production and paving? What energy is required to collect, process, transport, and blend the biogenic material before it reaches the asphalt production stage?

These questions are especially relevant in Texas, where pavements must withstand extreme heat, freezing, heavy commercial and agricultural truck traffic, intense rainfall, and rapid development.

A lower carbon asphalt mix that fails early is not truly sustainable if it requires more frequent maintenance. The strongest opportunity for bio-binders is not as a cure, but rather as part of a system that incorporates bio-based extenders to reduce virgin binder demand and as rejuvenators to make recycled asphalt more durable; in warm mix technologies to lower production temperatures; and as polymer modification to protect long-term performance.

If supported by transparent testing and life cycle data, this approach could help the asphalt industry turn a familiar material into a more resilient, cost conscious, and lower carbon roadway solution. 🇺🇸

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Heidelberg lays sustainable asphalt at Eurotunnel, *The Construction Index*, May 2026

The Momentum of a **Movement**

Women of Asphalt Texas leaders empower members beyond the state's borders

By Cathleen Draper

Growing up, few women have been pointed toward the asphalt industry. There was no “roller operator” or “plant manager” Barbie doll. Paving and construction have long been seen as fields for boys.

Girls grow into women who have been steered into other careers. When they enter college or search for their first job, asphalt industry roles as materials scientists or quality control technicians or truck drivers are far from their radar.

That’s exactly what Women of Asphalt is hoping to change.

“A big part of Women of Asphalt is attracting talent in the industry,” said Brit-tyn Heisler, the national organization’s first full-time executive director. And once people enter the industry, Women of Asphalt’s purpose is to help them continue growing through mentorship, education, professional development, and community.

“Women of Asphalt was built on creating community and helping women feel like they belonged in this industry,” Heisler said. “Those connections will always be at the heart of who we are. As we’ve grown and listened to our national partners and members, we’ve recognized an opportunity to invest even more in leadership development, technical education, and workforce de-

velopment so our members can continue growing throughout their careers.”

The National Women of Asphalt x Astec Leadership Summit is one example of how the organization is investing in the future of the industry’s workforce. The two-day seminar, now entering its fourth year, provides professional development opportunities to women in the industry and offers a chance for them—whether they’re in the lab, the field, or the office—to learn from CEOs, presidents, and women leaders who have paved the path they now walk.

In its first two years, the event was intentionally capped at 50 attendees as Women of Asphalt and Astec built the program. For 2026, Astec expanded capacity to 100 participants. Every seat was filled.

“When Astec suggested expanding to 100 attendees, we knew it was ambitious,” Heisler said. “Seeing every seat filled this year was a testament to our members’ desire to learn, grow, and invest in their careers. It reinforced just how important opportunities like this are for our members.”

This year, the Women of Asphalt Texas branch offered a scholarship to attend the event, held at the Astec headquarters in Chattanooga, Tenn. It started as a way for the Texas branch to nurture its members while simultaneously supporting the organization’s national initiatives. Three Texas members were awarded the scholarship in 2026: Julia Santana of CRH



Jennifer Long, past chair, Women of Asphalt Texas, spoke on overcoming hardship and self-worth at the summit.

Americas Materials, Inc., Enjuli Garakani of Austin Bridge & Road, and Lisa Stott of Texas Materials.

“We are constantly looking for how we can give back to the members and also how we can bring more women into the industry and of course, become members of Women of Asphalt,” said Angie Hogan, the 2026 Women of Asphalt Texas chairwoman.

The program is a testament to the branch’s efforts to cultivate its membership, as is Hogan herself. For 22 years, she worked as an educator before embarking

on a new career at McCourt Equipment, Inc., in 2023. She immediately joined the Texas Women of Asphalt branch, and after just two meetings, she was asked to lead the Mentorship and Education Steering Committee.

“We were like, look, you might have just gotten here, but we’re going to make sure that you’re coming into this industry full force, and she’s been an exceptional leader,” said Jennifer Long, business operations manager at CSA Materials, Inc., and past chair of the Texas branch. “We knew that she would be.”

Long attended the 2026 leadership summit and shared her wisdom with attendees. The Texas branch is the largest chapter of Women of Asphalt, and the organization’s leaders asked for a Texas representative to speak at the event about the branch’s growth. A nine-year industry veteran and long-time advocate for spotlighting women presently working in asphalt, Long readily agreed. Then they asked her to speak on a different topic: self-worth.

“I have participated in several technical presentations, attended schools and college campuses, really any kind of educational program for students,” Long said. “We’ve led networking events, held seminars, hosted many leadership initiatives within our own branch. But as far as an open and vulnerable presentation on my own self-reflection... in front of people, I have never done anything like that before.”

The success stories of presidents, CEOs, board leaders, and others are inspiring to Long. “We all know the road to get there is tough. But to really emphasize and drill down into some of the harder obstacles that we’ve had to overcome in life—the unforeseen, the uncontrollable—it’s difficult to openly discuss times of struggle and hardship. Our lowest points are often our most character-defining moments, and those reflections are very real and emotional. Not everyone is comfortable being uncomfortable enough to have those conversations, but they are so important for our growth.”

Long stepped onto the stage and opened herself up to the audience. The reaction she received is one she underestimated. As the first speaker, her speech allowed others to tap into their own vulnerabilities.

“Everyone that stood on that stage dug a little bit deeper into the parts of themselves that they really struggle with,” Long said. “Not just setbacks in our careers, but times when we let ourselves down, when we didn’t feel our best and stopped prioritizing our personal health. Every speaker that followed allowed themselves to share, laugh, cry, and recognize the importance of mental health, self-care, and support. It was just so raw and real.”

It made her, and others, feel less alone. Long’s experiences especially resonated with younger women in attendance just starting to build their careers in the industry. One approached Jennifer after she left the stage.

“She came right up to me after the presentation, almost with tears in her eyes,



Texas branch members visited Astec’s headquarters at the National Women of Asphalt x Astec Leadership Summit.



We are constantly looking for how we can give back to the members and also how we can bring more women into the industry.”

and asked me how to handle a situation with someone who makes her question her self-worth.”

Since the summit, Long has spoken with her. Just one, small comment about a job not working out and having to transition into a new role opened the door for the woman to seek support.

“She knew exactly what I was talking about, and why. Building those relationships and feeling comfortable enough to try to help somebody out of a situation, too, you have no idea the power and influence that you have by doing that. It really was an emotional experience.”

Her speech laid the groundwork for open, heartfelt conversations about the importance of self-care, mental health, and knowing one’s own value. Workshops, activities, a plant tour, and networking unified attendees from all sides of the industry and across the country.

“I really think that everybody in this industry should experience it, because I’ve never been to anything in nine years that even came close to that event,” Long said. “It wasn’t all just sitting there crying, but at the same time, you feel so passionate and so strong, and you really see the strength that has come with people.”

Following the summit, Heisler has spoken with Astec and Women of Asphalt leaders who, across the board, remarked about the power of this year’s event and Long’s speech.



The three Women of Asphalt Texas scholarship recipients, from left to right: Julia Santana, Enjuli Garakani, and Lisa Stott.

“Her authenticity and leadership truly shone through,” Heisler said. “She was willing to share the challenges she’d faced and how those experiences shaped her into the leader, professional, and mother she is today. That vulnerability resonated with so many members.”

Bringing together 100 women in a male-dominated industry was special in and of itself, too. To see these women—from different states and different sectors—share experiences and build camaraderie and community meant more than Heisler could put into words.

Heisler, Hogan, and Long hope to continue to build on the momentum next year. At TXAPA’s 51st Annual Meeting, September 14–17, Hogan plans to share more about the scholarship.

“That is when we aim to capture the attention of team leaders and decision makers, so they can go back to their companies and [women team members] and say, ‘why don’t you apply for the scholarship?’” she said.

When the Texas branch launched five years ago, its founders never thought they would get to the point they are at now: the largest and most active chapter of Women of Asphalt.

“We wanted to be, and that was one of our goals from the beginning, but we just didn’t think we would get there so soon,” Long said.

“The Texas branch is outstanding,” Heisler said. “The leadership from the top down, from TXAPA to these leaders, everything that they do, it’s a testament to why they’re the most active branch. They walk the walk, and I just really appreciate the collaboration and partnership between National Women of Asphalt, Women of Asphalt Texas branch, and then TXAPA.

“The success of the scholarship, the success of the event, of national is only as strong as our community, and we’re very blessed that we have the community of Angie, Jennifer, [and other leaders.] We see it, we acknowledge it, and we’re so thankful for what they do.” 📍



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One hundred years ago, Route 66 was born.

Originally a hodge-podge of roads and trails across eight states, including Texas, it took more than a decade to establish, and it was realigned and repaved over the years. In its heyday, the historic highway served as a migration route for families impacted by the Dust Bowl and Great Depression seeking new opportunities out west; a passage for equipment, troops, and materials during World War II; and as the foundation of the great American road trip during the 1950s and 1960s.

Travelers endured dirt and gravel roads, and during heavy rains, mud trapped their cars, especially in places like Jericho Gap, a dreaded 18-mile stretch of black clay road where Model Ts sank up to their axles.

1926

In 1926, the U.S Bureau of Public Roads designated a 2,448-mile network of roads, through Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, as Route 66. The new highway connected small, rural towns with urban hubs across the Midwest and Southwest.

JERICO
HAP

Santa Monica

Route 66 spanned 178 miles of the Texas panhandle, from Shamrock to Glen Rio. Not a single mile of that stretch was paved when Route 66 was designated on November 11, 1926.

1927

In 1927, the first bricks were laid on Route 66 in an effort to improve driving conditions. Jericho Gap, however, remained treacherous.

1931

By 1931, Illinois, Kansas, and Missouri had paved their stretches of Route 66. The Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Project Administration, products of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, targeted Route 66 for infrastructure improvements between 1933 and 1938. The final unpaved section of Route 66 was completed in Oldham County, Tex., in 1938.

HISTORIC



ROUTE

Chicago

1985

In 1956, the Federal Aid Highway Act launched the national interstate system. Asphalt had become a more common paving material, used on Route 66's realignments and upgrades and the new Interstate Highway System. By 1970, much of Texas' portion of Route 66 was replaced by Interstate 40.

1956

Route 66 was officially decommissioned in 1985. Roughly 150 miles of the historic highway are still drivable in Texas, serving as frontage roads and business loops for the towns that I-40 now bypasses. It continues to capture the imagination of travelers around the world as a beacon of what America offers: freedom.

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TXAPA Golf Tournament
Hyatt Regency Hill Country
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San Antonio, TX

September 14–17, 2026

51st Annual Meeting
Hyatt Regency Hill
Country Resort and Spa
San Antonio, TX

Conferences

TXAPA is exhibiting at the following events.
Come by our booth and say hello!

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American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Civil Engineering Conference and Exhibition (CECON)
Hilliard Center
Corpus Christi, TX

October 5–8, 2026

104th Annual County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas Conference
Waco Convention Center
Waco, TX

October 12–14, 2026

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Short Course
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX

October 19–22, 2026

Texas Association of County Engineers and Roadway Administrators (TACERA)
Waco Convention
Center Waco, TX

TxDOT Letting Schedule

2026

Oct. 6–7
Nov. 3–4
Dec. 1–2

2027

Jan. 6–7
Feb. 2–3
March 3–4
April 6–7
May 5–6
June 1–2
July 1–2
Aug. 4–5
Sept. 1–2
Oct. 5–6
Nov. 2–3
Dec. 1–2

2028

Jan. 5–6
Feb. 2–3
March 7–8
April 5–6
May 3–4
June 1–2
July 6–7
Aug. 2–3
Sept. 6–7
Oct. 4–5
Nov. 1–2
Dec. 5–6

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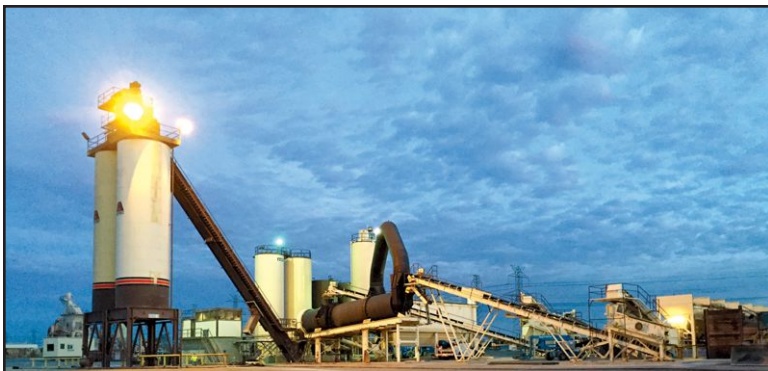
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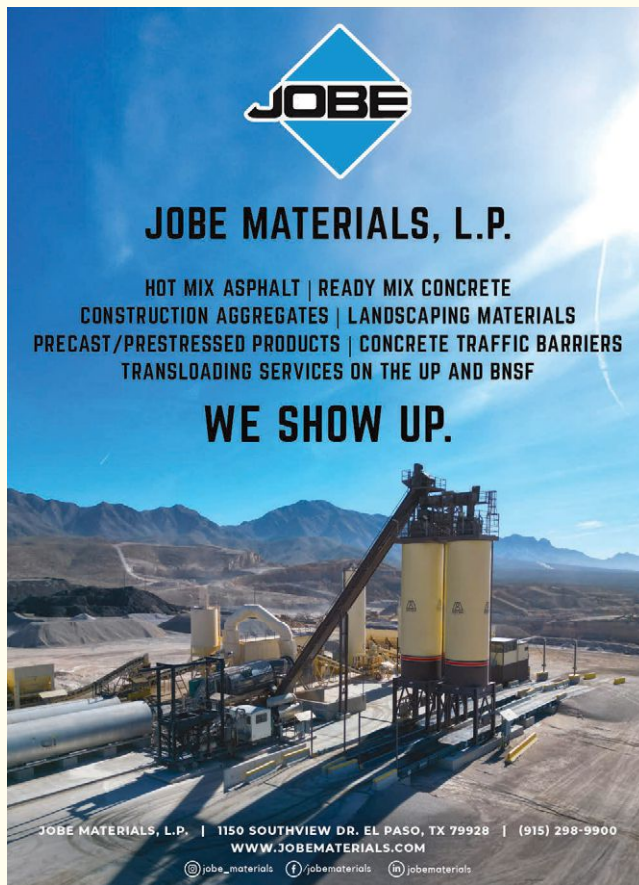
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